

Older men living alone: a photo- elicitation study of their social worlds

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2012

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Abstract

The UK is an ageing society. Between 1971 and 2009, the proportion of the population aged 75 and over increased from 4.7% to 7.8% and is projected to rise to 11.7% by 2031. The growth rates in the 75 years and over group of the population differ by gender as life expectancy for men is increasing at a faster rate than for women. With a narrowing gap in life expectancy between men and women, the lived experiences of older men merit greater research attention. Furthermore, twice as many women as men live alone when older which makes older men who live alone a minority group. This may have led to the experiences and social worlds of this group of men remaining largely invisible, posing questions about what they are and how they may be appropriately investigated.

The thesis is an exploratory study of the everyday lives, social worlds and relationships of community-dwelling men, aged 75 and over, living alone. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as a framework, older men's lives were explored in context, both temporal and spatial, shedding light on the interaction of various systems which influence the experience of living alone later in life and the social interactions which are meaningful to individual men.

Methodological challenges to exploring more hidden relationships were overcome by involving the men as collaborators. Using collaborator-generated photographs, they were able to engage in the research and had some control over issues which were meaningful to them. In that way, stereotyping this group of men as problematic or lacking social relationships was avoided and it was possible to reveal the more hidden interactions of these older men. A purposive sample of sixteen men from Norfolk, UK, collaborated in the research. The men had entered solo living through many, varied routes.

Constructivist grounded theory analysis revealed this group of men to be competent, adaptive and resourceful within the home. They identified how they employed strategies to stay connected with others and valued many kinds of interactions, some rarely considered in previous research. Family relationships were important to the men who were part of families but mostly family did not provide daily social interactions and family members were at times intrusive.

Theoretical reflections and insight offered by these findings are used to argue that researchers have paid too little attention to all meaningful interactions in older men's lives. Conceptualising the space between intimates and strangers as a continuum may provide an alternative lens through which to understand older men's social interactions. Improved understanding of men's preferred social interactions can assist in the development of appropriate services for men.

Acknowledgements

This thesis has only been made possible by the enthusiastic collaboration of sixteen men. They have given so freely of their time, welcomed me into their homes and shared their many life experiences. I am so very grateful.

I would like to thank my supervisors Professor Ann McDonald and Dr Fiona Poland who have both, in their own distinctive ways, guided me through the PhD process. Their patience, advice and judgement have been invaluable throughout my journey.

Many thanks to my PhD colleagues, especially Hollie, Heather and Michela, for their friendship and unwavering support, as well as numerous long lunches.

Thank you to my friends who have waited patiently whilst I have been absorbed in another world. Particularly Jane D, Jane and Henry and Sarah. I am grateful for your patience. I also want to thank Tara who has listened, discussed and provided encouragement over many cups of coffee.

Two very special people were not able to see the end of my project and their deaths were a very low point on my journey. Thank you, Inge-Lise and Colin, for being there at the beginning.

I am indebted to my family for their untiring encouragement. My mother for her continuous nurturing which has made me what I am. George, Virginia and Albert for distracting me with their endless love, energy and humour and assisting me with their superior technical skills. David, I thank you for travelling beside me on my long journey. Your love provided an anchor without which I would have been lost.

Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to my father who sadly never lived to experience old age.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

'A man's age is something impressive, it sums up his life: maturity reached slowly and against many obstacles, illnesses cured, griefs and despairs overcome, and unconscious risks taken; maturity formed through so many desires, hopes, regrets, forgotten things, loves. A man's age represents a fine cargo of experiences and memories.'

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in Wartime Writings 1939-1944

This thesis offers an exploratory study of the everyday lives, social worlds and relationships of older men who live alone and the way experiences and behaviours are interpreted through interactions. It seems paradoxical that living alone during the earlier stages of the life course is viewed as 'exercising choice' but by the later stages of the life course, living alone is considered by policy makers as more of a problem situation. Assuming that living alone in later life is necessarily a negative experience appears too uncritically accepted. It is possible that maintaining an independent household is more of an indication of successful ageing, a current policy goal, and a manifestation of autonomy rather than indicating disengagement (Victor, 2005). However, there are also growing pressures on older people to remain independent, as encouraged by UK social policy. For men, in particular, the masculine trait of independence may already influence their help-seeking behaviour and further pressure to be independent may have negative implications for older men living alone (Smith, Braunack-Mayer, Wittert, & Warin, 2007). However, the situation of men living alone is rarely researched and so unlikely to be well-understood and its assumed problematic nature remains largely unchallenged. The thesis therefore seeks to examine individual men and their experiences within families and local communities as well as the influence of structural factors upon these experiences.

Britain is ageing. Between 1971 and 2009, the proportion of the population aged 75 and over increased from 4.7% to 7.8% and is projected to rise to 11.7% by 2031. The UK averages mask considerable variations across the UK. The median age of residents in individual local authority

areas varied from 27 years to 48 years, according to figures available from 1992 (Office for National Statistics, 2011), with consequent implications for local planning of service provision.

The growth rates in the 75 years and over group of the population differ by gender as life expectancy for men is increasing at a faster rate than for women. Thus, in 1971, 32% of residents aged 75 and over were men and that is predicted to rise to 44% in 2031 (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

Interest in older people and ageing has, therefore, increased in recent years. There has also been a heightened interest in men, in particular problematic men, absent fathers and fatherhood (C. Lewis & O'Brien, 1987; O'Brien & Shemilt, 2003). Families are changing and being redefined due to increased life expectancy, changing gender roles, decreasing family size, family breakdown and evolving patterns of work (Wilton & Davey, 2006) but there has not been much explicit interest in the role of older men within families.

Interest in the social worlds of older people has also increased as this sector of the population continues to grow (Victor, Scambler, & Bond, 2009) but advances in the understanding of the lives of older people mostly refer to women or genderless older people (Arber, Davidson, & Ginn, 2003b; Arber & Ginn, 1993; Thompson, 1994b). There are some notable exceptions, such as the ESRC Growing Older Programme (Dean, 2003), Kosberg and Kaye's (1997) edited book *Elderly men: special problems and professional challenges*, *Older Men's Lives* edited by Thompson (1994b) and *By Himself: the older man's experience of widowhood* by van den Hoonaard (2010), all of which recognise that ageing is a gendered experience and therefore men are as worthy of study as women in later life (Russell, 2007). It is also important to acknowledge that as well as differences between men and women, there are differences within groups of men and women (Arber, Davidson, & Ginn, 2003a).

Men's social relationships have often been viewed as deficient, problematic and predominantly work based, potentially leading to a lack of meaningful relationships in later life. Cancian (1987, p.74) has suggested that 'men's behaviour is measured with a feminine ruler' when it comes to relationships because the majority of research has explored the quantity and quality of women's social relationships in later life. Viewing older men's social relationships from a female perspective cannot adequately explore the kind of relationships that older men value and enjoy, but the assumption that men have inferior, and not just different, relationships has gone largely unchallenged.

Hearn (1995) has argued that the older a man becomes, the weaker he becomes both physically and socially. Whereas that may always have been the case, this state of decline would only have been endured for a short period in the past. Connell (2005) maintains that masculinities are differentiated and stand against one another in relations of power, establishing a hegemony of masculinity. With increased life expectancy, men have a much longer period in a state of potential threat to hegemonic masculinity. Old age can, therefore, become a difficult time for men to negotiate but little is known about strategies used to negotiate possible tensions between masculinities and dependency in later life.

With a narrowing gap in life expectancy between men and women, the lived experiences of older men merit greater research attention (Arber, Davidson, et al., 2003a; Soule, Babb, Evandrou, Balchin, & Zealey, 2005). In particular, the gendered experiences of men, due to their early socialisation, may influence social networks in later life, if living alone. The work place, as a public sphere, has been defined as an accepted place for the articulation of masculine friendship, as opposed to the private and domestic sphere which is the accepted place for female bonding (D. Chambers, 2006). This pattern of friendship formed earlier in life is likely to continue to have an influence on the meaning of friendship later in life (Arber, Davidson, et al., 2003a) as social network strategies of men are hard to separate from their socially constructed roles (Fennell & Davidson, 2003). Failure to consider the diversity across historical time, social structure and within gender, has led to global differences being presented in the literature: women have 'good' expressive friendships and men have 'inferior' instrumental friendships (Cancian, 1987; Nardi, 1992). Using such an expressive-instrumental distinction, women are considered more adept at forming social and friendship ties than men. Men are considered more likely to form 'task oriented' ties or friendships (D. Scott, 1996, p.233), a type of friendship which may be harder to maintain or initiate when older and frailer.

Furthermore, older men's relationships, if viewed solely as 'task-oriented', may be overlooked, misinterpreted and even under-supported. There may be relationships which are important to men but not 'conventional' in the sense that researchers have not usually counted them as important, particularly in studies of social support networks. One example would be acquaintances. Morgan (2009) has suggested that people we meet every day, people who are not friends but neither are they strangers, can become part of our social network. For older men who live alone, acquaintances may offer significant contributions to their lives in terms of continuity and familiarity within a neighbourhood, or even farther afield, although such

relationships remain unexplored by researchers. This thesis adds to the knowledge of the meaning of such peripheral relationships for older men.

A notable change in contemporary Britain is the increase in one-person households and that is an additional focus of this thesis. There were more than seven million people living alone in the UK in 2004, nearly four times as many as in 1961, with a particular increase in solo living amongst younger cohorts (Office for National Statistics, 2005a). Significantly, between the ages of 25 and 44, men are twice as likely as women to be living alone (Wasoff, Jamieson, & Smith, 2005). As this cohort of men age and emerge into what are predominantly women's spaces, it will become increasingly important to gain knowledge about the social worlds of older men in order to adapt services currently aimed at the larger number of older women living alone (Davidson 2004).

Some men may always have lived alone whereas others may only have experienced living alone for a short period of time, having spent most of their lives cohabiting in couple relationships or with relatives. Living alone is often viewed as undesirable in later life rather than an individual choice by an older person. Tensions exists as 'ageing in place' is seen as desirable in economic and policy terms but as problematic within family studies, as older people living alone in later life are often linked to the breakdown of the extended family network, predominance of the nuclear type family and consequent abandonment of older people (E. Burgess, 1960). There is a lack of empirical support for the idea that older people live alone because they have been abandoned but there is some evidence to the contrary (Shanas, 1979; Shanas et al., 1968). That is, older people often prefer to live independently, either with a spouse or alone (Shanas, 1980; Troll, 1971).

This study of social relationships in later life becomes particularly significant in a climate of economic austerity as attempts to reduce the social care bill for an ageing population are taking place. Social relationships are necessary, not only for companionship, feelings of wellbeing and self-worth, but also for access to informal support at all stages of the life course, including later life. Hence, potential access to social relationships and the ability to maintain or initiate such relationships is an important area of study when considered as an antecedent to social support. However, looking purely at supportive relationships in later life neglects the preventive work which may be done before support is needed, by facilitating the maintenance of social relationships for older people through relevant social policies. The types of relationships which

are meaningful to an individual are likely to vary with gender, as discussed above, as well as other individual characteristics and it is important to recognise that there are social, cultural and individual aspects to understanding, not just relationships, but the social worlds and experiences of older men living alone. Furthermore, there must be a consideration of time, as well as space, when considering relationships in later life. Men occupy systems beyond the family system and their experiences of social engagement need to be understood in context. The context (or environment) will have an influence on opportunities or barriers. In other words, it is necessary to view possibilities for forming relationships across all of the systems proposed in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintains that individuals need to be considered in the context of their environments in order to understand their development and behaviour and therefore offers a useful framework for exploring the context of the lives and relationships of older men living alone. A diagram of his ecological model (Figure 1) helps in explaining the ecological systems theory.

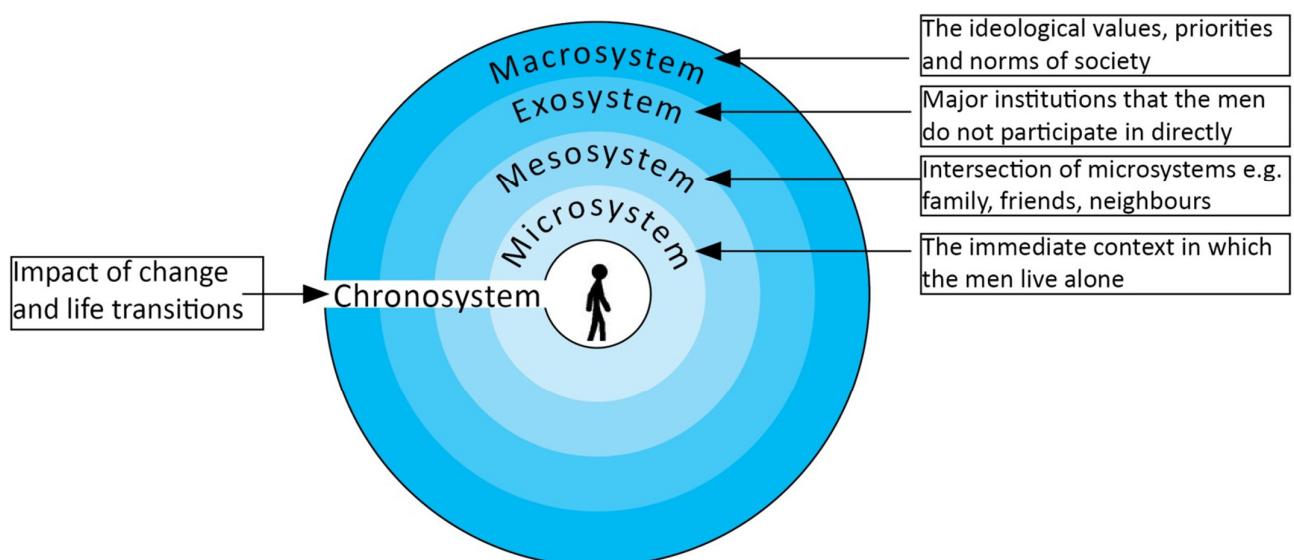


Figure 1. Visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model

Bronfenbrenner conceptualised development in terms of a hierarchy of systems at four levels but he also allowed for a consideration of the passage of time within his model. Each set of

structures is nested within the next, starting with the broadest level of influence, the macrosystem. The macrosystem encompasses the values and priorities of the society within which the individual lives and can be viewed as the 'societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture' (Bronfenbrenner, 1988, p.39). Moving inwards, the next system, the exosystem, comprises major institutions of society in which the individual does not directly participate but in which events occur that influence the individual. The most proximal systems that an individual is part of are the Microsystems and the interaction of Microsystems is called the mesosystem. Finally, the model is not static but acknowledges the importance of time for ordering not just chronological age but life events, too, and their historical period and context. Bronfenbrenner (1986) referred to that as the chronosystem, which views the influence on an individual's development of changes and continuities in the environment (context) in which that individual is living. He suggested that the simplest forms of chronosystems focus on life transitions, for example, retirement or widowhood.

In relation to the current study, the macrosystem provides a distal context in which men grow older through cultural values, laws and government policy which shape the ideology of ageing. Outside influences of adult children's partners, for example, or larger social systems which the men do not function directly in, exert an exosystem influence on the experience of living alone as an older man. The most immediate influences on older men are likely to be family, friends and neighbourhood, i.e. interpersonal relationships, which are considered within the Microsystems in the ecological systems theory. As explained above, Microsystems interact and the combined effects of interpersonal relationships are considered within the mesosystem. Hence, the theory can highlight individual men's experiences of living alone as older men within social relationships and local communities as well as the influences of broader structural factors on those experiences.

However, ecological systems theory also takes into account previous life experiences and life transitions. This thesis considers life transitions as a potential influence on social relationships and the experience of living alone in later life. Significant transitions may be the loss of a spouse and a change from being in a couple-relationship to living alone. Other men may have experienced transitions earlier in their lives, such as divorce or the death of someone close to them. Bronfenbrenner (1986) acknowledges that transitions occur throughout the life course; some will be normative and others non-normative but such events are cumulative in their effect on an individual's development. There is, therefore, consistent with ecological systems theory, a

need to look at previous life experiences, or the life course (Elder, 1974), in order to understand the present lives of older men and their relationship needs.

Yet another important aspect of Bronfenbrenner's model is the acknowledgement that it is not possible to view external factors which affect behaviour purely objectively. The way an individual interprets the environment will in turn have an effect on the way that individual interacts with the environment. Thus, environments which appear to be objectively similar will be perceived differently by individuals but may also be perceived differently, depending on the stage in the life course (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Experiential qualities, or subjective feelings, emerge in infancy and proceed into old age and are characterised by continuity and change:

They can relate to self or to others, and especially to family, friends, and other close associates. They can also apply to the activities in which one engages: for example those that one most or least likes to do. But the most distinctive feature of such experiential qualities is that they are "emotionally and motivationally loaded", encompassing both love and hate, joy and sorrow, curiosity and boredom, desire and revulsion, often with both polarities existing at the same time but usually in differing degrees (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p.5)

Subjective experience and meanings are therefore an important aspect of development, as well as the context in which those experiences take place and are likely to influence the way different men experience growing older and living alone in later life, including their experiences of social relationships.

In order to explore the process of becoming single and living alone in later life, as well as the subjective meanings attached to that experience, a participatory, qualitative methodology was considered appropriate. Documenting social relationships, in terms of quantity (both number of relationships and number of interactions) or quality (useful and meaningful), was less important than the types of relationships (friends, family, neighbours, acquaintances etc.) which necessitated talking to older men about current, as well as previous relationships, giving men the freedom to discuss relationships across all of the systems within Bronfenbrenner's model. The use of a participatory visual method was expected to give the men that freedom and some control in conceptualising, through photography, both their daily lives and the social relationships which were meaningful to them. The photographs generated by the men were

used in subsequent interviews to elicit rich verbal data. The resulting data were analysed using a grounded theory method.

Throughout the thesis, the terms social world and social relationships will appear frequently. It is therefore important, from the start, to set out the meanings of the terms used here.

Unruh's (1983) definition of social worlds offers an encompassing view of social worlds which may help make all social networks visible:

A social world is an extremely large, highly permeable, amorphous and spatially transcendent form of social organisation wherein actors are linked cognitively through shared perspectives arising out of common channels of communication (p.14).

This definition can be seen to contrast with the phenomenological sense of the term often used by social researchers, as Unruh here considers social worlds to be concrete and function outside the minds of individuals. Social worlds can encompass meaningful tasks that the men participate in but which do not necessarily include relationships.

'Social relationships' is used here to refer to all meaningful social interactions, whether enduring or passing relationships. The intention is that the definitions should be inclusive and fluid. Interactions may be virtual or symbolic, as well as face-to-face. I will therefore consider relationships with deceased individuals, on-line relationships, as well as brief encounters with acquaintances in the street. There is no specified type or length of interaction as long as a particular interaction is seen to have some subjective meaning.

Thesis aims

The paucity of research specifically about the lives and relationships of older men living alone necessarily meant that any study of the topic at this stage would need to be exploratory. It also meant that the men participating in the study had to be closely involved in the research process and, therefore, formulating questions for the research was challenging if preconceived ideas and theories with little relevance to their lives were to be avoided.

The aim of the current study, then, was to conduct detailed, empirical research into the day-to-day lives of older men living alone while also taking into account their previous life experiences

to provide insight and knowledge about their needs and desires regarding social relationships. The ways in which men aged 75 and over managed and interpreted their experiences of daily life, especially the social activities and networks in which they participated, would need to be explored.

The age cut-off was chosen to allow most men some time in retirement and therefore the potential for work-based relationships to have ended. A particular research focus was on the kind of relationships the men wanted, and where they looked for new social connections, at a time in their lives when they may often have experienced losses in their peer networks. In summary, there were two main aims:

- To engage older men in research in terms of setting the agenda, giving them some control over the research process and avoiding stereotyping this group of men as problematic and deficit in terms of social relationships.
- To understand the social worlds of older men who live alone in terms of social relations and social engagement. I will not be seeking to quantify the extent or intensity of relationships but seek to gain some indication of the types of relationships that these older men sustain and value through the co-construction of rich data which can convey meanings and experiences of the topic.

The aims were explore through the following research questions:

- How do older men experience living alone?
- What role does social interaction play in older men's lives?

Thesis outline

The thesis is organised into eleven chapters. Chapters Two to Five review the literature considered relevant to an exploration of older men living alone and aim to put the current study in context of what is already known, as well as expose gaps in our knowledge of older men's daily lives and experiences of social relationships. Information about older people comes from different sources, including medicine, sociology, psychology, geography, social work and many

others (Tinker, 1997). I have drawn on research from various disciplines where it has been considered useful to the topic in hand in order to enable greater understanding.

The underlying framework is that of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Hence, starting from a broad perspective (the macrosystem), Chapter Two examines social policy in an ageing society. Experiences of growing old and living alone as an older man will be shaped by the wider political and economic climate as well as the ideology of old age. Gerontological theories and social policies, which are considered to impact older men's ability to engage socially and participate in society through relationships with others, are explored. The chapter exposes the absence of older people within family policies and the consequences for intergenerational relationships.

Interaction between the individual and society is explored in Chapter Three, through a discussion of social capital, social networks and social support which may be considered the mesosystem (sum of the microsystems). The chapter offers definitions of social capital and considers the concept of social capital as a source of social support but also as an outcome of social relationships. An examination of types, sources of variation and changes in social networks is provided with a consideration of access to social networks when living alone in later life and consequent access to informal support if needed.

Moving towards the centre of the diagram (Figure 1), I explore living alone, loneliness and social isolation in Chapter Four. The subjective meaning of living alone is a fundamental part of this study and Chapter Four attempts to make sense of the complex, conceptual connections between living alone, loneliness and social isolation by examining each phrase in turn. Living alone is often problematised by policy-makers who assume that living alone leads to loneliness and, more significantly for social care budgets, to social isolation and exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). Living alone is considered here to be purely a descriptive term and does not indicate time actually spent alone. Length of time lived alone, that is, putting the experience in a temporal context of an individual's life (chronosystem), is considered as essential for understanding the said experience or, for some men, the life transition. Loneliness and social isolation are discussed as distinct experiences but also as interrelated phenomena.

The final literature review chapter examines psychosocial development and wellbeing in later life, including the psychological benefits of social relationships. By taking a life course perspective, Chapter Five may be considered as an examination of the interplay of microsystems

and the chronosystem; the individual and the context for development. The theories of Erikson and Jung are approaches particularly relevant to development in later life and are therefore explored. The chapter also explores identity as a relational concept and attachment relationships as providing fulfilment of the need for human intimacy but a type of relationship which may be missing after bereavement. In relation to bereavement, resilience and the ability to cope with losses in later life are considered.

Chapter Six describes the study methodology, the design and ethical considerations. The participatory nature of the research and the logistics of using informant-generated photographs are discussed. Chapter Seven introduces the findings and the men through pen-pictures. Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten present the findings through the themes of 'Men at home', 'Men out and about' and 'Men in families'.

Chapter Eleven discusses what has been found, considers the limitations of the study, further research, implications for policy and practice and draws final conclusions.

Chapter 2

Social policy in an ageing society

Introduction

The first chapter of the literature review has a focus on the wider context in which older men experience ageing and represents the macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model. The life chances of older men who live alone will be influenced by individual differences and the immediate social and physical environment but also by the wider political and economic climate. Trends in social policy will therefore have an influence on social capital and networks available to older men, be it through transport or housing policies or structures that either impede or encourage social integration. A brief introduction to the changing demographics of the UK population which challenge policy-makers in relation to the ageing population are identified and related to the theoretical frameworks which often influence policy-makers' responses to those challenges. Some policies are more or less discriminatory than others. Challenges to grand theories, such as the political economy perspective, are examined. Social policies which influence transport and housing are discussed as they are considered central to the topic of social relationships and the ability to participate in the wider society, including participation with different generations. Finally, the absence of older people within family policies is considered for its significance within this study.

The welfare state

Social policy changes and priorities need to be examined in relation to the demographic changes that may have prompted policy development and may present opportunities, as well as challenges, for government policy (Windle & Porter, 2008). The UK, along with the rest of Europe, has recently faced several related social issues, including slow economic growth and changes in the age-structure of the population, which has led to welfare reforms in response to reduction in spending available and increased demand (Ogg, 2005). The Council of Europe (1994, cited in Ogg, 2005) in the 1990s, recommended that member states develop policies to prevent the social exclusion of older people at a time when social protection was shrinking. Furthermore, the state, as well as voluntary organisations, the local community and the family,

should aim to integrate older people socially. Ogg (2005), from a European policy perspective, therefore suggests that in order to compare effective policies across European countries, it is necessary to look at welfare regimes as 'how older people interact with their families, friends, the local community and wider political processes reflect a country's social institutions' (p. 71).

While welfare regimes do not exist as single, pure cases (Esping-Andersen, 2006), some ideal typologies are found helpful for understanding older people's interactions with society. The UK is often classified as a largely 'liberal welfare' regime. A liberal welfare regime places emphasis on the combined roles of the state, the family and also free markets (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Social security benefits are usually means-tested and generally modest, with the market considered the main arena for the distribution of resources (Walker & Naegele, 2009). The emergence of neo-liberal policies and the dismantling of public provision of social and health services has led to an emphasis on individual rather than collective responsibility as well as to the primacy of paid employment so that individuals may provide for their families (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Gee, 2002). For older people, who are no longer in paid employment and do not have a private pension, the financial support is expected to be minimal under a liberal welfare regime. Population ageing is said, by the UK government (Cracknell, 2010), to have influenced the cost of welfare support to such an extent that the current regime is no longer sustainable and is in need of reform since, although life expectancy has increased, *healthy* life expectancy has not increased as fast, which has resulted in greater demand on public services (Cracknell, 2010; Gee, 2002). However, the need for reform is based on demographic projections of numbers of older people in the future with certain underlying assumptions about mortality, net migration and fertility and it is not known whether mortality may increase rather than decrease due to increasing obesity levels, say, and policies may also influence the projected net migration. Population projections, then, may provide a framework for policy-makers for future planning although they must be viewed as merely projections, based on uncertain assumptions about future demographic behaviour (Cracknell, 2010). The following section will review current population statistics as well as projected population changes.

Demographics of the UK population

The UK is one of the oldest countries in the world, in demographic terms, i.e. with the highest proportion of older people in the population (Walker & Naegle, 2009). Two factors drive the ageing of the population. One is the decline in birth rate to below replacement rate and the second is an increase in life expectancy (Office for National Statistics, 2009). By 2051, more than a quarter of the UK population is projected to be over 65 and in 2007, people over state pension age outnumbered children for the first time (Office for National Statistics, 2006a). Between 1971 and 2009, the proportion of the population aged 75 and over increased from 4.7% to 7.8%. The growth rates in the 75 years and over group of the population differ by gender, as life expectancy for men is increasing at a faster rate than for women. Thus, in 1971, 32% of residents aged 75 and over were men and that is predicted to rise to 44% in 2031 (Office for National Statistics, 2011). This huge success will continue to have implications for society as a quarter of the children born today are expected to live to 100 years old (Office for National Statistics, 2006a) and represent challenges in terms of public policy and distribution of resources (M. Robertson & Wilkinson, 2010).

The detailed composition of each generation of older people is distinctive and depends on individual and behavioural factors (gender, family formation) as well as historical factors (Borowski & Hugo, 1997). The unique circumstances that prevailed as a cohort passed through their life stages will have an effect on that particular cohort (Bengtson, Cutler, Mangen, & Marshall, 1985). Hence, the cohort of men, currently seen as 'older', will have experienced their childhood after World War I. They will have lived through World War II and the increased pressure to become parents in the aftermath, the introduction of the welfare state and other significant events. It is clear, from social analysis, that older people today are very different from older people in the past and future cohorts of older people will be different again (Riley, 1985). Riley (1987) gives the example of male retirement: in 1900 a twenty-year-old man was unlikely to look ahead to retirement at all whereas today a man can expect to spend almost a quarter of his adult lifetime in retirement due to long-term social changes and increased life expectancy. Any policy will, therefore, need to reflect the aspirations, needs and diversity of older people, taking into account the differences between cohorts in order to meet their particular needs (Daly, 2009).

In relation to Australian ageing and social policy, Borowski and Hugo (1997) have suggested that demography of ageing should be concerned with the impact of demographic change on intergenerational relationships and allocation of resources. In other words, it may be worth considering the implications of an ageing population for both young and old (Hagestad, 2008a). The Norwegian sociologist Hagestad (2008b, p.114), has called the lack of attention to interdependence and interconnections across age groups, when discussing demographic changes, 'generational myopia'. She also suggests, based on cross-national studies, that despite the recognition that an ageing population entails a feminisation of the adult population, there is a lack of discussion of the potential significance of the change in gender balance both across and within generations (Hagestad, 2008a). We do not know much about the relationships that men have as they grow older in a feminised world, with peers, family or acquaintances, or the meaningful relationships of men who are not embedded in intergenerational chains, such as childless men.

Some theoretical frameworks of ageing

In the UK, there is a focus by policy-makers on promoting quality of life in old age, particularly relating to social inclusion and social engagement (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006). Different theories and philosophies of ageing offer different interpretations of the consequences of social policy for older people and, at the same time, different models of ageing influence policy makers (Powell, 2001). Major theoretical approaches which have influenced social gerontology are functionalism, Marxism, feminism and postmodernism (Powell, 2001). Theories mirror the norms of the time and place where they were developed. For example, both disengagement and activity theories assumed a certain type of behaviour on the part of the individual as well as of society, reflecting the dominant views which assumed social consensus on what was appropriate at the time. Disengagement and activity theory, as two influential theories, are discussed below.

Disengaging in later life

A prominent social theory which dominated social gerontology in the 1950s was that of disengagement (Cumming & Henry, 1961). Disengagement theory views people as universally

less involved in society and with reduced social roles as they grow older, although there is little evidence that older people take the initiative to disengage. Instead, there is some evidence that older people dislike loss of roles and relationships (Friis, Townsend, & Shanas, 1968). Proponents of disengagement theory see successful ageing as entailing individuals' desire and acceptance of their own withdrawal from active social involvement (Fry, 1992), with the assumption that all people reach a high plateau of involvement in mid-life followed by a gradual fall in later life (Friis, et al., 1968).

Disengagement theory has been criticised as condoning a policy of indifference towards older people which has had a profound negative practical impact on services for older people (Victor, 2005). For instance, it has led to services for the elderly becoming separate from mainstream services in the UK and such separation, suggests Victor (2005), may be spatial as well as conceptual. For example, in some cases health services for older people are located away from main hospital sites. The notion of disengagement has often been used by care professionals to 'rationalise their often-negative stereotypes' (Victor, 2005, p.22). It has therefore been argued that disengagement theory has been used to justify the erection of barriers between older people and other social groups, and also used to express ageist attitudes by both professionals and older people themselves.

The theory has also been criticised because of its deterministic outlook. If all older people are viewed as disengaging from society, there is no need to formulate policies to include them. However, Hochschild (1975) has suggested that it is probably not ageing *per se* that determines disengagement but a combination of many factors which are associated with ageing, as well as the nature of society. Such factors are likely to include poor health, widowhood and living arrangements, as well as the status of older people at a given time and place. Disengagement theory, then, can be viewed as

a historical artefact of 1950s sociocultural norms, when older adults were more likely to feel discarded or abandoned by a society full of negative public attitudes and lacking in social policy for older adults (Perzynski, 2006, p.321).

As the numbers of older people in the population increase, more attention is being paid to this group and it is possible that attitudes towards them will change as living into very old age becomes a more common phenomenon. With social policy changes which reduce the money spent on support for older people, disengagement may not be an option for older people. They

will need to rely more on informal support in later life and such support will only come from family, if available, or close relationships with others. Efforts will be required to initiate or sustain relationships and such efforts will be expected to be shared between state, family and the individual under a liberal welfare regime (Powell & Edwards, 2002). In other words, older men will need to take responsibility for access to support and family will be required to provide some of that support, with the state providing an enabling role through policies. Staying active and productive rather than disengaging, ties in much better with contemporary UK and European Government policy (Department of Health, 2005), as discussed below.

Ageing actively

In contrast to disengagement theory, activity theory has an emphasis on preserving attitudes and activities of middle age (Havighurst, 1961, 2009). Middle age is viewed as a model of desirable social and personal development and older people are encouraged to strive for the continuation of activities relating to that period of life. Moody (1993, p.34) has argued that,

[b]y insisting on the productivity of the old, we put the last stage of life at the same level as the other stages. This transposition implicitly sets up a kind of competition or struggle (who can be the most productive?) which the old are doomed to lose as frailty increases.

Thus, activity theorist may place unrealistic expectations on older people themselves to maintain the levels of activity generally associated with middle age. However, it is important to recognise that levels of activity vary between individuals and some individuals may not have been particularly active or involved during mid-life.

A more contemporary concept of ageing actively emerged in the 1990s, influenced by the World Health Organisation's interest in the connection between activity and health (Walker, 2002). Although their life stage will entail losses of certain roles (e.g. work due to retirement), in this theory an older individual is assumed to attempt to compensate for those losses by finding other roles (e.g. volunteering or club membership). In that way, successful ageing is seen, by policy-makers, to be achieved through maintaining roles and relationships (Powell, 2006; Victor, 2005). This theory is again prescriptive and does not consider individual differences, that is, the possibility that some older people may not be able to remain active and it therefore appears to devalue the lives of such individuals. It takes the underlying assumption that there exists equal

opportunities to achieve active engagement in life: safe neighbourhoods for socialising, resources for engaging in activities etc. (Tulle-Winton, 2000). Paradoxically, in an attempt to counteract stereotypes, older people are portrayed as active and healthy which in turn exacerbates those same stereotypes (Holstein & Minkler, 2007).

Active ageing has been taken up by policy-makers keen to encourage independence and self-help into old age as of means of improving individual well-being and reducing the health and social care bill (Department of Health, 2005), but active ageing is also part of the active citizen discourse. Powell and Edwards (2002) have suggested that by encouraging older people to be active citizens, older people become the solution to the perceived problem of an ageing population, rather than the cause. Citizenship comes with responsibilities, and all individuals are seen as having a moral duty to be active in society, which has implications for the way older people experience the world and are perceived within society:

Citizenship involves identities, norms, and practices, it is unlikely to be either easily abandoned or easily taken up. The civil, legal, political and social rights of citizenship are embedded in social relationships and everyday activities (Powell & Edwards, 2002, p.2).

Therefore, responsibilities are placed on citizens with a shift away from the rights of the citizen.

Critical gerontologists have argued that presenting active and productive older people as ageing successfully may lead to inactive and non-productive ageing being viewed a failure on behalf of the older person (Minkler & Holstein, 2008), deeming them unable to carry out their duties as valued citizens (Powell & Edwards, 2002). Nonetheless, Government's enthusiasm for encouraging older people to remain active participants in society is clearly expressed in *Opportunity Age*:

Our vision is of a society where later life is as active and fulfilling as the earlier years, with older people participating in their families and communities. [...] Being older or being a pensioner must not be equated with dependence. We want to build a society that focuses on what individuals can do, instead of making assumptions about capacity based on age (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005, p.xvi).

The report continues to emphasise that '[t]he primary responsibility for keeping active and participating in communities lies with older people themselves' (p. xvi) although there is some acknowledgement of potential barriers to participation. In summary, older people are expected

to remain active and contribute to society and communities through civic engagement in order to be seen to age successfully. The state will, in return, ensure that potential barriers to engagement are reduced.

In their discussion of policy developments and shift in ideologies of ageing, Biggs, Phillipson, Money and Leach (2006) demonstrate, using statements from the World Assemblies on Ageing, the sea change that has occurred in views of the nature of old age from a 'gentle view of ageing, with an emphasis on reflection, wisdom, a sense of summing up and benign disengagement' to older people as taking a lead in their betterment through active participation (2006, p.241). This is reflected in the participation of older people in forums where they can voice their needs and expectations (see later in this chapter) and the increase in participatory research so that increasingly scarce state provisions can be better tailored to suit the needs of older people (Carter & Beresford, 2000; Postle, Wright, & Beresford, 2005).

Ageing successfully

The above theories are essentially two, albeit contrasting, theories of successful ageing. Disengagement theory views successful ageing as the desire and acceptance of the process of disengagement from active life, whereas activity theory stresses the maintenance of activities and attitudes of middle age as successful ageing (Havighurst, 1961). In an attempt to focus on positive aspects of ageing, and drawing on the results of a large interdisciplinary research study, successful ageing has been defined by Rowe and Kahn (1998) as the ability to maintain three behaviours or characteristics:

- The avoidance of disease
- Maintaining high mental and physical functioning
- Active engagement with life

Successful ageing can therefore be viewed as a complex process which involves personal, social and environmental factors. Rowe and Kahn (1998) also suggest that there is a hierarchical ordering of the three components: the absence of disease makes it easier to maintain cognitive and physical functioning, which then makes it easier to be engaged with life. The first two components are more individual characteristics although there is an established link between

low socioeconomic status and health, i.e. structural causes of poverty can influence health and therefore avoidance of disease may be easier to achieve for the better off in society (Marmot, 2004). Therefore, successful ageing may be a prerogative of wealthier or more privileged older people. The next section will discuss discrimination against older people as a barrier to successful ageing as part of an analysis of structural-social-individual approaches to ageing.

Age discrimination and ageism

One barrier to engagement, particularly for the younger-old, is age discrimination in relation to a range of social goods, including retirement. However, for some older people, issues of discrimination in social and health care are also pertinent as resources to be allocated to a growing, older population become increasingly scarce. Robert Butler introduced the word ageism in anticipation that it would have the same impact as the terms racism and sexism in describing irrational prejudice (Butler, 2005). Age discrimination is inherent in our society and embedded in many areas (Butler, 2005; Neuberger, 2009). Therefore, it is 'more than images, words, actions or attitudes' (Butler, 2005, p.86). There are many definitions of ageism (Bytheway, 2005) but one definition links well with the suggestion that older people, particularly older men, become invisible (Thompson, 1994a) and insignificant to society. Comfort suggests that:

Ageism is the notion that people cease to be people, cease to be the same people or become people of a distinct and inferior kind, by virtue of having lived a specified number of years (Comfort, 1977, p.35).

The internalising of ageism, along with other common social stereotypes such as gender, begins in childhood. Ageing self-stereotypes are an extension of ageing stereotypes, a reflection of the exposure to wider social attitudes towards older people throughout the life span (Levy, 2003). Such stereotyping influences older people's views of other older people as well as of themselves and have been found to influence psychosocial wellbeing and physical health (Levy & Banaji, 2004; Slater, 1995). It can lead to older people behaving in ways that are 'expected' of them according to those prevalent stereotypes and such expectancy-confirming behaviour leads to self-fulfilling prophecies (Slater, 1995). Views of older men, framed within a 'problem' discourse, often construct men as 'dependent', 'deteriorating' or 'unhealthy' (Phillipson, 1998). Never-

married men may be subject to further stereotypes such as 'lonely loser' or 'swinger' (Ward, 1979). Thus, older men become bearers of a negative identity as they are ascribed with particular characteristics which then become internalised, leading to self-stereotyping.

Separating age into categories can create stereotypes of the oldest category as being 'different' to other categories as demonstrated by the promotion of the third age as distinct from the fourth age (Laslett, 1996). The third age is seen as a time of consumerism – the young-old – whereas the fourth age is a time of decline, dependence and decrepitude – the old-old or oldest-old (Laslett, 1996). Although it is important for policy-makers and researchers to recognise the diversity within the ageing population and the potential differences, particularly in health, of a 65 year old man compared to a 95 year old man, the distinction between the third and fourth age carries with it serious consequences for the older group, as by 'elevating the third by the comparison is only done by treading down the fourth' (Young & Schuller, 1991, p.181). It seems that there are always groups which can be considered as 'other', a group that somehow an individual cannot imagine being part of despite the inevitability of growing older and therefore of joining that group, unless we die first (Allport, 1986; Neuberger, 2009). Whether that influences the social worlds which older men are prepared to join is not clear.

One way to reduce stereotyping may be to expose various groups to each other. By mixing with other generations and people of all ages, it may be possible to reduce the negative attitudes towards older people (Abrams, Eller, & Bryant, 2006). Building on the work on prejudice (Allport, 1986), Woodward (1991) described how attitudes towards older people differed when young students were able to see them as individuals, for example, their own grandparents. Grandparents were generally described with sympathetic understanding compared to unknown older people where the sole focus was simply on age and the stereotypical consequences of old age. Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005) have suggested that the social separation of young and old is the root of ageism. They put forward the thesis that possible linking mechanisms between ageism on a micro level and segregation on a macro level is the meso level of social networks. On the intermediate, meso, level of social networks 'there are factors that perpetuate the cycle as well as possible mechanisms for breaking it' (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005, p.344). Opportunities to mix with and understand lives lived at all ages could influence attitudes towards older people but also attitudes towards the young. Such intergenerational relationships will be discussed further at the end of this chapter.

Critical challenges to grand theories

Unease with 'grand narratives' such as productive, active or successful ageing has been expressed by critical scholars (e.g. Estes, Biggs, & Phillipson, 2003; Holstein, 2006; Martinson, 2006; Martinson & Minkler, 2006; Minkler & Fadem, 2002). For example, although there is evidence that volunteering is beneficial to some older people (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003), and the idea of increasing role options available in later life may be in some cases desirable (Minkler & Holstein, 2008), these are by no means likely to be widely applicable or desired. The suggestion that only certain activities are deemed worthy, with regards to civic engagement, is worrying. From a critical perspective, Martinson (2006) argues that if it is 'common sense' that civic engagement is beneficial for older people as well as society, then it will be necessary to explore why that is and who decided that it is true. She questions the assumptions that are being made about older people and what might happen to older people who 'shirk' productive activities and are either not able or do not desire civic engagement in later life.

A recent study, using a national sample of Israeli retirees, explored the association between older people's participation in activities and wellbeing. By dividing activities into solitary, informal and formal categories, as postulated by activity theory, the authors found that the quality of social ties mattered more than activity *per se* as predictors of wellbeing in old age (Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2006). Therefore, it may be that remaining socially engaged with others is more desirable than remaining productive or active in old age. 'Activity', then, should consist of all the meaningful pursuits that contribute to an individual's wellbeing (Walker, 2002), which makes it important to distinguish between productive (economic) activities and meaningful activities, with the latter likely to be achieved through social relations with others.

Older men who live alone may not wish to be actively engaged but such lack of engagement may reduce their social capital, access to information and ultimately access to support if needed. However, older men may be engaged in ways not obvious or visible to others. The meanings and definitions of productive, active, successful ageing and civic engagement are therefore problematic and contested.

The MacArthur Foundation Study of Successful Ageing which was undertaken between 1985 and 1994 in the US (Rowe & Kahn, 1998), found that only two percent of older people living in private households did not engage in some form of productive activity if activities such as

housework, informal caregiving, home maintenance and volunteering were taken into account (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). However, civic engagement is most often operationalised in terms of volunteering and does not include voting, say, or activities such as caregiving (Martinson & Minkler, 2006). The models of active, productive and successful ageing were developed as a move to counter the negative images of ageing as a time of dependency and a drain on public resources (Herzog & Morgan, 1992; Martinson, 2006). However, in an attempt at alternative and more positive scenarios, 'proponents of the active, successful and productive ageing models have shaped cultural norms of ageing that are limited, exclusive and even oppressive' (Martinson, 2006, p.61).

Being 'civically engaged' and 'productive' in later life can help fulfil some of the functions that welfare states would otherwise be obliged to meet. In times of population ageing and economic crisis, where there is a need to cut service provisions, the idea of civic engagement (also 'Big Society') is attractive. Relying on volunteers, that is, relying on private rather than public solutions, means that there is not equal access to services. Minkler and Holstein (2008, p.202) argue that '[v]oluntarism is wonderful as a wrap-around to core public services, but it is charity, not justice, and so cannot be relied upon'. This may be a concern for older people with the latest vision from the Coalition Government: The Big Society. In his Big Society speech, the UK Prime Minister David Cameron, explained the idea of Big Society as follows:

The Big Society is about a huge culture change...where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace...don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face ...but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities (Cameron, Feb 2011).

Although the idea is not wholly new¹, the increased emphasis on community action, personal responsibility and empowering citizens to meet those responsibilities, is a change from much earlier welfare rhetoric (M. Robertson & Wilkinson, 2010). Many older people may not feel powerful enough to help themselves or their communities and will instead require assistance in their daily lives. The government expects individuals and communities to look after their own but there will inevitably be variations in the likelihood of involvement and volunteering. It is

¹ Robertson and Wilkinson (2010) suggest that the role of citizens and communities in delivering services has been ongoing as set out, for example, in Opportunity Age Department for Work and Pensions. (2005). *Opportunity Age*. London: HMSO..

particularly likely that the most deprived communities will have the least number of people with the time and energy to volunteer or engage with the local community. It is expected that by reducing public welfare provision, charities and other voluntary organisations will step in to replace the losses. However, that belief is based on the 'crowding out' or 'substitution' hypothesis (Alcock, 2010). The theory postulates that comprehensive social and welfare programmes 'crowd out' more informal caring relationships and social networks, and is based on classical family sociology where the welfare state and the family substitute each other (Parsons, 1943). In other words, the more generous the welfare state, the less forthcoming family and informal support will be. The reverse would happen in the Big Society; minimal state intervention should increase informal support. However, there is little evidence for 'crowding out' and much to refute the theory (Alcock, 2010). Therefore, there is a critical contradiction within the Big Society philosophy as the evidence does not suggest that informal care will step in to substitute for diminishing state welfare provision (Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Roemer, & Von Kondratowitz, 2005). The issue of 'crowding out' and 'crowding in' is discussed further at the end of this chapter in relation to intergenerational relationships but it is worth emphasising the possible consequences for older men living alone, particularly older men who do not have any family or men with family living some distance away. For those older men, relying on voluntary organisations requires information about such organisations, which in turn requires communication and interaction with others. Older men living alone, who are not in contact with social care services, may find themselves without voluntary support as well as lacking more formal support.

The political economy perspective

The problem of unequal access and opportunities to achieve active engagement in life is addressed more critically by the political economy perspective (Estes, 1979; Phillipson, 1982; Walker, 1981). From this perspective, the 'problems' of ageing are viewed as structural rather than individual. In other words, dependency is manufactured socially. Peter Townsend's (1981) seminal paper on the social construction of dependency in old age forms the basis of the political economy perspective. Townsend (1981) suggested that scholars should be investigating not just the way older people adjust to retirement but how and why society restricts life chances and opportunities for older people. Instead of looking to individuals for the cause of

difficulties in old age, social scientists should explore structural or societal explanations. For example, if older people are forced to retire and become dependent on the state for economic survival, the cause is structural rather than due to the actions of an individual and is by no means inevitable. The political economy perspective, therefore, does not consider the experiences of ageing in isolation from other societal factors (Holstein & Minkler, 2007). Furthermore, the life chances of individuals are considered from a life course perspective as previous life experiences are seen to shape the experience of ageing. It is a perspective that contrasts with the biomedical model of ageing as a time of inevitable loss and decline (Victor, 2005). Age is seen instead as a social construct and the social policies that shape the experience of old age are the product of socio-political, economic and cultural forces throughout the life course (Victor, 2005). Older men may be constrained by the social construction of age and social discourse of ageing. For example, all older people are assumed to want to use their free bus passes later in the day than the rest of the population and older people are also assumed to want to live in houses that are so small that they cannot entertain or pursue hobbies in their own homes.

I consider the importance of transport and housing policies below as they are likely to have an impact on the social networks of older men living alone. Poor mobility due to lack of suitable transport may increase vulnerability to isolation, especially for men living in rural locations, who lack family support and experience declining health (Sutton & Hill, 2010). Housing, both in terms of where older people live and with whom, may also influence their ability and opportunities to engage socially.

Social policy and later life

In contemporary Britain, some social policies may influence the lives of older people and make assumptions about the lives and relationships of older men and women. In particular, there is an emphasis on the elimination of age discrimination, the involvement of older people in policy issues, social inclusion, independence and active ageing (Carter & Beresford, 2000; Postle, et al., 2005). The general sentiment regarding older people is set out in the document *A Sure Start to Later Life* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006, p.54):

Social relationships are critical to ensuring active, vibrant communities locally and nationally. Older people are as diverse a group as the general population and everyone has a right to be able to contribute and have a role. Too often this does not happen, and older people are seen as dependent. Moving towards independence is an important first step, but our aim should be to promote “interdependence” where old and young contribute equally.

Changing social values, migration and economic pressures have all contributed to a reconsideration of the foundations of the welfare states within Europe and further afield (Scharf, 2010). Recent budgetary pressure means that cuts in services are inevitable for all people but some commentators have expressed concern that cuts may affect older citizens disproportionately (Berry & Sinclair, 2010). The recent Coalition Government Spending Review explains that ‘[p]articular focus has been given to reducing welfare costs and wasteful spending’ (Chancellor of the Exchequer, 2010, p.5). However, some welfare benefits for older people have been preserved which include Cold Weather Payments, free eye tests and prescriptions and, importantly for participating in society and engaging with other people, concessionary bus travel, ‘ensuring that older people can maintain greater freedom and independence’ (p. 28). The importance of supportive transport policies for social inclusion is therefore examined next.

Transport for independence and access to social interactions

Car ownership declines with increasing age (Gilhooly, 2006; Office for National Statistics, 2001) and although older men are more likely to have access to a car than older women, all older people are more likely to report difficulties with access to local amenities than the rest of the population (Daly, 2009). However, the pattern is likely to change as younger cohorts of women hold a driving licence in increasing numbers (Office for National Statistics, 2001). In a study of quality of life and transport, car ownership and access to transport were associated with higher perceived quality of life, regardless of wealth, with the relationship between quality of life and driving being stronger for men (Gilhooly, 2006) which suggests that men may experience a double-deprivation of access to relationships if they are not able to drive. Qualitative research exploring the changing needs of people aged 65-84, found that driving habits can change in a short period if an older person has a bad driving experience (e.g. getting lost or difficulties with eyesight). This could lead to giving up driving or reducing the number of journeys (Sutton & Hill,

2010). The reduction or elimination of car use, therefore, needs to be replaced by other forms of transport such as buses or the reliance on lifts from others in the social network. For older men living alone asking for help with transport, and in that way displaying dependency, may be difficult. It also requires a network that contains drivers which is likely to be men rather than women and younger rather than older people.

The ability to get out and travel to visit friends and family can be greatly enhanced by free bus travel. Free off-peak travel anywhere in England for people aged over 60 promotes social inclusion. Uptake in Norwich, Norfolk in the 60 plus age group is high at nearly 73%². Even for older people who are able to afford to run a car and still feel physically able to drive, bus journeys for both business (shopping, appointments etc.) and pleasure (days out, visiting people and places) are likely to be a valuable pastime. The loss of some local services, such as post offices, also puts more pressure on people to travel (Sutton & Hill, 2010). Furthermore, bus journeys can be sociable occasions, especially when journeys are taken at the same time every week as faces on the bus become familiar with greetings and pleasantries exchanged (Morgan, 2009). In that way, the ability to take bus journeys may increase the boundaries of older men's social worlds and has the potential to increase their social engagement.

To sum up, transport, both private and public, is important for maintaining a good quality of life in old age. It allows for continued engagement in the community as well as essential outings to hospitals and other services. The availability of a free bus pass allows not only for travel but for socialisation on journeys with acquaintances, thereby offering opportunities to extend the boundaries of older people's social networks. Policies that support access to, and affordability of, transport for older people, are therefore essential for social engagement, particularly for older people who live alone and have to leave the house to enjoy face-to-face interaction with others. Older men living alone, who are not in a couple relationship, have been found to entertain less in their homes than older women and seem to prefer visiting others which puts them at a particular disadvantage and at increased risk of isolation when transport is not readily available (Arber, Price, Davidson, & Perren, 2003; Davidson, Daly, & Arber, 2003a).

² Figures supplied by Transportation, Norfolk City Council. Average national uptake is also 73% with rural areas showing lower uptake (56%) compared to urban areas (72%) Department for Transport. (2009). *Transport Statistics Bulletin*. London: DfT..

Housing choices in later life

Transport policies, therefore, can extend the boundaries of social networks but other policies may have the opposite effect. To demonstrate this housing policies, as they relate to older people, will be reviewed next. *Where* older people live, and the types of accommodation available to them, has an influence on their ability to connect with others, as do the actual living arrangements i.e. the *who with* (Peace & Johnson, 1998). Significant numbers of people aged 75 and over live alone in their own homes³; many more than live in residential/nursing care homes. In Great Britain, 61% of women and 34% of men aged 75 and over live alone (Office for National Statistics, 2007). Around five percent of people aged 65 and over live in residential/nursing care homes and a further five percent live in sheltered housing (Dalley, 2002). Sixty-three percent of people aged 85 and over live in owner-occupied households. Older people who live in their own homes do not always have accommodation suitable to their needs or access to local amenities, especially if transport is not available (McCarthy, 2010). The General Household Survey 2007 (Office for National Statistics, 2007) found that in two thirds of the oldest households (the reference person was aged 85 and over) there was easy or fairly easy access to a shop, supermarket or post office as well as a doctor. This contrasts with more than 90% of households where the reference person was aged between 50 and 64.

The Government supports independent living and 'staying put' for older people as it is a cost-effective strategy, intended to keep older people out of expensive residential care homes (Department of Health, 2010; McCarthy, 2010). In doing so, the policy discourse with regard to living in residential care homes is that of 'last resort'. Older people will also be aware of media coverage of neglect and abuse in care homes which further reinforces the idea of residential care as undesirable (for example Williams, 2010) and 'staying put' as the best option⁴.

If an older person is no longer able to stay in his or her home, other forms of housing are available which will still provide independent living but usually within a group setting. Indeed, it can be viewed as desirable, in an age of housing shortages, that older people move out of their

³ Dally (2002, p.11) suggests that conventional terminology 'own home' assumed to mean 'not in a communal establishment' does not adequately consider older people's own perceptions about their place of residence but I use the terminology in the conventional sense here.

⁴ A recent inquiry into older people and human rights in home care Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2011). *Close to home: An inquiry into older people and human rights in home care*. http://issuu.com/equalityhumanrights/docs/home_care_report/115 has also received coverage in the media Martin, D. (2011, 2 November 2011). *Cruelty of the carers: Damning report into home help for the elderly finds neglect so appalling some wanted to die*. *Daily Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2064957/Elderly-people-abused-carers-Neglect-bad-pensioners-wanted-die.html>.

larger family homes, be they council tenants or owner-occupiers, so that families can be housed in larger homes (Best, 2010). Thus, it has been suggested that older people are a key driver in local housing markets. If they remain in their homes, they often invest in adaptations and home improvements but if they move, they release under-occupied housing stock which families buy and often improve (Croucher, 2006; McCarthy, 2010). In 2008, approximately ten per cent of people aged 65 and over lived in alternative housing, such as residential care homes, sheltered and extra care housing (Evans, 2009). Below I discuss an alternative housing option available to older people in the UK, if they are no longer able to stay in their own homes. There are, of course, many options available including retirement villages and residential care homes but here the focus is on sheltered housing.

Sheltered housing and housing with care

Sheltered housing, also known as supported housing, is usually a cluster of 20-40 flats with a (sometimes 'floating') scheme manager. It is often viewed as a bridge between full independent living and residential care (E. M. Field, Walker, & Orrell, 2002). The self-contained flats or bungalows are alarmed and there are usually communal areas such as shared lounge, garden and laundry. Extra care sheltered housing provides, in addition to the above, 24-hour onsite care and a shared dining room where prepared meals are available (Evans, 2009). Sheltered housing and housing with care, to rent or buy, is 'sold' as being more suitable for older people due to the social setting that may reduce loneliness and the available social care, potentially enabling independent living for longer (Best, 2010). However, research has revealed that it is not always the case that specialist housing for the elderly supports social interaction. For example, a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Callaghan, Netten, & Darton, 2009), suggested that in order to successfully integrate the residents the following issues need to be considered:

- Communal facilities and a *diverse* range of organised activities should be available to help residents interact
- Ownership of the residents' social lives should be encouraged by involving residents in running the social activities
- Adequate staff time and resources are crucial in order to support social activities

As men are a minority in the 75 and over age group, it may be that diversity of social activities is of particular importance so that they may find interests that appeal to them as men, although it is not clear what that diversity entails.

Older people living in rural areas, may find that housing choices are more limited than in urban settings and one report has referred to older rural people as 'invisible' (McCarthy, 2010). Extra Care housing is rarely available in rural communities as it is essentially a large scale urban solution. Furthermore, with the Government's strategy of independence and ageing in place, developers are less likely to consider micro-schemes in rural localities, especially as housing needs to be integrated with other services, particularly transport, which are often absent in rural locations (McCarthy, 2010).

Thus, sheltered housing models have positive and inclusive, as well as negative and exclusive, aspects to them depending on the older individual. This is a reminder of the diversity within the population of older people and the impossibility of one size fitting all.

Older people in families and the welfare state

Despite the majority of older people being part of families, family policies do not include policies for older people; they are segregated and usually only included in policies relating to care. Twenty-five years ago, Robertson, Tice and Loeb (1985, p.219) argued that:

[t]he failure to stress generational interdependence as significant in family policy discussions is inconsistent with demographic trends as reported in the literature.

Families have become ever more diverse as increasing numbers of people cohabit and divorce rates have increased leading to second marriages and blended families. There has also been a sharp rise in the number of people living in single-person households, particularly men aged 25 - 44 (Wasoff, et al., 2005). The fertility rate has decreased so that older people will have fewer children to depend on in old age (Office for National Statistics, 2006b). The life course can thus be viewed as more fluid and there is no longer the strong ordering of the past (P. Chambers, Allan, Phillipson, & Ray, 2009): education extends into adulthood, serial monogamy means that new families are started at later stages of the life course and the third age often represents a time of life for consumerism and travel (Laslett, 1996). As family forms change in terms of

organisation and structure, the greater diversity and individual freedom also allows for close friends to be included as kin. Family structures can to some degree be shaped by economic and social policies but, of course, there is always a time delay between changes in behaviour of a population and the recognition that political action may be required (Gonyea, 2005). The way in which such changes influence family relationships for older men is not yet clear.

Morgan (1996) initially discussed 'family practices' in an attempt to portray the changes in families and the accompanying experiences. He suggests that the term reflects the fluidity of families, a blurring of the boundaries between family and non-family (Morgan, 2011). Furthermore, he highlights the gendered and generational aspects of family practices. It is likely that men will practise family differently to women (R. Lewis, 1986) and also likely that different generations practise different kinds of family. Family practices, or family behaviours, are established over a long period of time and are generally characterised by continuity; they carry with them a history which shapes current and future interactions (P. Chambers, et al., 2009). Finch and Mason (1993) stress the importance of process in family ties. Thus, relationships require interactions and commitments to develop over time. For older people, the relationships and commitments that have developed over many years between children, siblings or other relatives will influence the support available as they become increasingly frailer and more dependent as well as the support that they, in turn, will give to family members, often in the form of financial transfers (Künemund, 2008).

Intergenerational relationships

An earlier section of this chapter discussed age discrimination and ageism on a societal level. Age segregation at the macro level, and age homogeneity at the individual level of social networks, is clear to see. Institutional and spatial segregation result in a restricted age range in the available pool of potential network members (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). Interaction with younger members tends to be within family settings, for example, contact with grandchildren and great-grandchildren (Uhlenberg, 1996). For older childless people, contact with nieces and nephews can provide interaction with younger generations but for some, even that source of intergenerational contact may not be available.

Solidarity, conflict and ambivalent ties

Intergenerational relationships can be defined in terms of solidarity and conflict (Bengtson, 2001; Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002) as well as ambivalence (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). It has been suggested that solidarity is the normative state and the first stage. After solidarity comes conflict and from the intersection of solidarity and conflict comes ambivalence. However, the concepts are not competing approaches to family relationships, rather, they are complimentary (Bengtson, et al., 2002). The order is not really important; the acknowledgement of variations within intergenerational relationships is significant, though, as it allows different lenses through which to explore family relationships and alerts researchers to the complexities of those relationships (Bengtson, et al., 2002).

Intergenerational relationships may represent a stability at a time when families are becoming more dynamic and changing but social policies have a part to play in making intergenerational ties more or less viable (Saraceno, 2008). Here, the influence of government financial support for older people is of particular interest and will be discussed further using the crowding-out (and crowding-in) hypothesis as a framework.

Social policies, the state, the family and the crowding out hypothesis

The relationship between adequate welfare support for the elderly and the consequent reduction in reliance on family for support has been termed the 'crowding-out' hypothesis. The idea rests on the state crowding out the family and their obligations to their elderly family members by providing support and because of this, intergenerational solidarity is eroded as it does not make any difference who provides the resources (Künemund, 2008; Künemund & Rein, 1999). Another concept, 'crowding-in', has been used in economic literature (Reil-Held, 2006) when considering financial transfers to and from elderly people. Reil-Held (2006) found, in a German study, that private transfer was influenced by public transfer. When the elderly have enough money, there is less need to provide them with private transfers and the support given to the elderly may in turn support the younger generations through gifts (Künemund & Rein, 1999). The quality of intergenerational relationships within the family may as a consequence improve and result in increased solidarity, not decreased solidarity as suggested by the

crowding-out hypothesis. Currently, there is some support for the crowding-in hypothesis although more research is required (Knijn, 2004; Kohli, 1999; Lund, 2002; Motel-Klingebiel, et al., 2005).

It is important to consider the interaction between the state and the family across diverse family types (Künemund, 2008). As indicated above, the extent of intergenerational transfer is likely to be influenced by the established family behaviour (Kohli & Künemund, 2003). In a study on childless older men, Koropeckyj-Cox (2003) found that the men would deliberately use financial transfers to nieces and nephews as a way of buying future care and support, acknowledging that they were outside the boundaries of more conventional care obligations such as the parent-child bond and therefore would find it harder to call on them as informal or unpaid carers.

This chapter has discussed ways that social policies influence the lived lives and relationships of older people. Policies are also influenced by changing family forms and demographics as well as available research. The theoretical frameworks that often underpin policy-making, such as disengagement and activity theories, have been evaluated and found to be too general, with a strong focus on individual failings, leading to stereotyping and discrimination. Consideration has been given to the influence of transport and housing policies on social connectedness in later life and finally, intergenerational relationships and transfers have been discussed. Overall, it is clear that social policies have a big role to play in the promotion and maintenance of social networks, the types of networks available as well as the composition of those networks, particularly through housing and transport policies. However, there is also a paradox: policies for older people on the one hand promote independence as paramount to successful ageing but that same independence, as a hegemonic masculine trait, may be damaging to the well-being of older men living alone in later life as they strive for independence above all else. We know little about the way older men manage that tension and the effect the ideology of independence and autonomy has on initiating and sustaining their social relationships. Nor do we know if the current housing policies and transport options available to older men are effective in providing the social opportunities that older men want or find meaningful.

The following chapter will examine social relationships in more detail, starting with a review of the social capital concept as a resource for support in later life but also as a consequence of social relationships. Social networks and variations and changes in networks are discussed. Social support which often results from relationships with others and types of support which

might be available and useful to older men is explored. Finally, types of social relationships, including relationships with kin, friends and acquaintances, are examined.

Chapter 3

Social capital, social networks and social support

Introduction

The introduction suggested that social relationships may be a necessary precursor for support in later life in a neo-liberal welfare regime. Social relationships are initiated and maintained through access to others and relationships with others enable individuals to build social capital which may in turn be used to acquire informal support in later life. The variable availability of social interaction, as well as support, may be particularly significant for older men who live alone and the route to living alone may influence the social integration of older men. For example, older men who have always lived alone are likely to have adapted to the situation and developed social networks throughout the life course. However, older men who have been bereaved in later life may find that their social networks are limited, having relied on a spouse for companionship for many years. Initiating new social relationships as a single man, when one's peers are mainly single women or couples, may not be easy although there may be some kinds of relationships which are less problematic to initiate and maintain, including more peripheral relationships which may demand less on-going emotional investment.

The chapter will, therefore, consider the concept of social capital as a source of social support. That is to say, social support is an outcome of social capital but influenced by social relationships, formal and informal, as well as personal characteristics, including age and gender. Social capital has been variably defined by scholars and there is some controversy as to the range of phenomena which should be included in the concept (Halpern, 2005). If social capital is taken to be constituted by the everyday networks, customs and social connections people have, then it is also necessary to go on to consider how social networks, and possible changes in networks over time, may contribute to building and accessing social capital and support (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987). To this end, an examination of types and sources of variations and changes in social networks follows. Social networks will be considered as a resource for various types of support. In this way, social support is also viewed as an outcome of social capital; an asset of the individual (Bourdieu, 1986). Social support can be provided by formal organisations and services but also informally by family and friends. With increased demands on formal

services due to the longevity of the population, informal support by family and the community is being encouraged by the government, as discussed in the previous chapter (Social Exclusion Unit, 2006). However, informal support may not be available to all older people, especially older people who live alone in later life, unless they manage to maintain some social connectedness or are able to draw on previously accrued social capital. Finally, this chapter concludes with a review of some types of relationships which can make up an individual's social worlds.

Social capital

The roots of the social capital concept can be found in the sociology of Émile Durkheim, particularly in his work *Suicide* (Durkheim, 1951). In *Suicide*, Durkheim demonstrated that suicide rates increased when ties between the individual and the state eroded and the individual subsequently became detached from social ties (Turner, 2003). Since then, the notion of social capital has been used to explore and explain how social support can act as a buffer against negative life events such as bereavement (e.g. Berkman & Syme, 1979). Some critics argue, however, that an emphasis on social cohesion places responsibility on communities for their mortality and morbidity rates, rather than considering political change as a major determinant (Muntaner & Lynch, 1999).

An interesting point, explored by Durkheim (1951), is the rate of suicide in the military. Suicide rates in the military were reported in official statistics as being much higher than civilian rates and Durkheim (1951, p.228) interpreted the cause as 'excessive regulation'. This notion of excessive regulation, stemming from strong social integration, will be discussed further when considering the supportive network typologies developed by Wenger (1984) later in this chapter. It may be that excessive regulation and control by family and informal carers is detrimental to social embeddedness in old age.

The more recent interest in social capital owes much to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1986) viewed social capital as one of three fundamental species of capital: economic, cultural and social. He considered social capital as an individual resource which can be accessed through participation in social networks and can ultimately be used to obtain various kinds of information and assistance. Individuals can develop social capital during a life-time by making choices about who they associate with. There may be constraints regarding opportunities to associate with others. These constraints can be related to health and mobility, neighbourhood

(safety, access), social class (poverty and access to resources), ethnicity, gender or age (Gray, 2008). Older people who live alone and have poor health with limited mobility may be less likely to get the opportunity to associate with others. They may find it difficult to accumulate social capital but may be able to draw on previously accrued social capital, depending on their earlier life experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the present in the context of the past (Connidis, 2010), in order to shed light on the dynamic nature of social relationships and the ability and opportunities to accrue social capital at different stages of the life course (Victor, et al., 2009).

In the English speaking world, James Coleman's work on social capital has been particularly influential (Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000). Coleman (1988) saw social capital as a way of understanding inequality, particularly in relation to educational achievement. He defined social capital as 'a particular kind of resource available to an actor' (J. Coleman, 1988, p.98). Furthermore, social capital can 'make possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible' (J. Coleman, 1988, p.98). He further elaborated that a given form of social capital may be useful in facilitating certain actions but useless for others. The clear link between social capital and access to resources, established by Coleman (1988), went beyond the previous circularity of the concept: people in power remained powerful because of their contacts with powerful people (Schuller, et al., 2000). He refined the concept further with reference to 'social relations that constitute a form of social capital that provides information that facilitates action' (J. Coleman, 1988, p.104) and therefore highlighted one essential component of social capital: social relationships. Bourdieu (1986) had tended to use social capital to emphasise the ways in which the powerful in society used their social networks to reproduce power but Coleman (1988) extended the concept to examine the social relationships of the non-powerful.

Putnam (2000) expands on the work of Coleman. He considers social capital mainly as a public good, although he does acknowledge that social capital can also be a private good. He explains this in terms of the public good that service clubs (e.g. Rotary Clubs) do when they raise scholarships for poorer students, whilst at the same time providing friendships and business connections for its members. However, civic participation may be the result of friendships (private good) rather than the source of it (Warde & Tampubolon, 2002). In cases of barriers to participation, and where social support is needed to overcome those barriers, social capital depends on a collective effort which is shaped by prevailing values and social norms. There is,

thus, an interdependence between individual and collective resources (Gray, 2008). This is an interesting issue in relation to communities and neighbourhoods and will have an effect on the social capital (and social relationships) available to older men living alone. It is likely that men who live in sheltered housing, say, may be able to draw on collective efforts of many older people, compared to men who live in communities where they might feel unsafe or isolated. Urban or rural location may also influence access to social participation. For example, remoteness (living in isolated dwellings), lack of transport and unreliable broadband access to the Internet have been found to limit social participation for rural inhabitants (Atkin, 2003).

Field (2008, p.1) sums up the central thesis of social capital in the words 'relationships matter'. By connecting with other people, and keeping connections going over time, it is possible for people to work together and achieve things which may not be possible to achieve as an individual. Social capital can be viewed as an ecological concept. People are embedded in the social world at many levels. For example, we are part of a family, a neighbourhood, workplace, professional associations or maybe clubs, such as sport or interest-based groups, or even political parties (Halpern, 2005). If individuals are only part of a small number of social worlds, it becomes harder to connect with others and achieve things at a more collective level.

Social capital, neighbourhood and community

The key conditions for social capital are considered to be community networks and trust, civic engagement and reciprocity but it is important to remember that communities differ and participation in social activities may result in engaging in unhealthy or antisocial behaviours (Kushner & Sterk, 2005). It is possible that, in some cases, reciprocity and trust will create inequalities, allowing some people to gain from social capital while others have reduced access to resources.

Neighbourhood

Neighbourhood is a spatial construction and involves concepts of proximity and neighbourliness (Barry, 1994). It is possible to belong to several communities, as discussed below, but most individuals will only belong to one neighbourhood, unless they have more than one residence.

Thus, neighbourhood may be defined as 'a geographic area within which people feel physically (if not always socially) close to each other' (Barry, 1994, p.19). Some neighbourhoods can be well-defined, for example, a sheltered housing complex or retirement community. Others may have more fluid boundaries. The term retirement community indicates that a neighbourhood has to be a community. However, a community is not always a neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood is experienced differently by different individuals depending on activity and connections. For older people, neighbourhood may be an important place for socialising as they tend to have less ability to move beyond their immediate locality and therefore may be less integrated into the larger society if they are no longer working. Maintaining neighbourhood ties can then be one way of accumulating social capital through reciprocity. The neighbourhood is part of an ecological system; neighbourhood is located within other systems and also contains within it smaller systems (Chaskin, 1997).

Community

Although at times used seemingly interchangeably, neighbourhood and community have different meanings. Community is much broader than neighbourhood and similar, in many ways, to the term social world, as used in this thesis (Crow & Allan, 1994; Unruh, 1983). Community implies 'some combination of shared beliefs, circumstances, priorities, relationships, or concerns' (Chaskin, 1997, p.522). Therefore, community is not necessarily rooted in place. For example, there are virtual communities or communities of interest. Local communities are, of course, place-based and indicate some sort of connection: social, functional, cultural or circumstantial connections. Chaskin (1997) suggests that social connections should be viewed in terms of networks with friends, kin and acquaintances. Functional connections are those brought about through consumption and production, cultural connections are those made through shared religion or ethnicity and circumstantial connections are shared economic status or lifestyle. Older men may feel part of many different communities or social worlds, both locally and further afield. However, if individuals are not able to participate in communities, either locally due to unsafe neighbourhood or poor mobility, or other communities, due to lack of access to technology or transport, then social capital cannot exist as it is not being produced (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000).

An illustration of this is Klinenberg's (2002) study on the effects of a heat wave in Chicago in 1995. He found that elderly men constituted 80% of the unclaimed bodies in the mortuaries during the heat wave. Most of those elderly men had lived in crime-prone areas of the city. They had been fearful of going out and had therefore become socially isolated and excluded. Klinenberg (2002) concluded that the increasing spatial and social segregation of the population in the city had left the men with low social capital which in turn contributed to their vulnerability, isolation and eventual demise. Such a scenario is just as likely in the UK if older men are not able to accumulate social capital. The kind of relationships that facilitate access to information and support may not be available to older people who live alone and suffer from decreased mobility; for them, social participation may be difficult or impossible.

Types of social capital

Social capital has been broken down into different sub-types, namely bonding, bridging and linking (Halpern, 2005). Each type of social capital can serve to fulfil different needs and some types may be more desirable for older men. I briefly discuss each sub-type of social capital and their implications for older men.

Bonding social capital

Bonding social capital is inward looking and tends to reinforce homogenous groups; this could be a group of pensioners who meet for support. Bonding social capital is, therefore, good for solidarity and reciprocity. However, by creating strong in-group loyalty, out-group resentment can also be created (Putnam, 2000). This can lead to stereotyping of older people as a 'burden' and may also serve to exclude certain groups of older people such as gay and lesbian older people or older men. Men who attend groups that are geared towards the majority of older women feel uncomfortable and excluded in such a group situation and have been found reluctant to engage socially in such settings, reducing their opportunities for bonding capital (Davidson, Daly, & Arber, 2003b).

Bridging social capital

Bridging social capital is outward looking and includes a wider range of people from diverse social groups, for example, distant friends, associates and colleagues (Putnam, 2000). Granovetter (1973) had previously suggested a similar idea about types of social capital but defined them in terms of ties which could be considered either strong or weak. Weak ties correspond to bridging in that they enable people to get information, jobs and opportunities. Strong ties, such as those with close family and friends, are likely to be more supportive and play a greater role in emotional well-being and bonding social capital (Halpern, 2005). With increasing age, older never-married men may find that they depend on friendships for social support. However, peers will also be older and the numbers available are likely to decline. It may be more useful for older men to develop bridging social capital by having contact with younger people who are more likely to outlive them (Gray, 2008). Intergenerational contact is likely to be necessary to increase the chances of meeting and befriending younger people and can take place within the extended family (e.g. contact with grandchildren and their friends) or in organisations which are open to all age groups (e.g. Ex-service Men's Clubs). It is not a case of either or, rather, 'many groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others' (Putnam, 2000: 23) and both bridging and bonding can have positive social effects.

Linking social capital

Linking is a third sub-type of social capital and refers to the vertical relations that can help individuals to gain access to formal institutions for social and economic development (Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne, & Solomos, 2007; Woolcock, 1998). This could be a useful form of capital for older people who may increasingly need knowledge of available services in their area. It can also be used to give older people a voice and a say in the way services for older people are organised, providing a collective link to formal institutions, as has been the intention with local Older People's Forums in the UK. However, little is known about older men's interest in participating in such organisations or their ability to access them. Indeed, one piece of research on participation in Older People's Forums in England suggests that older people who engage with the forums tend to be fitter and have more social and cultural capital. Thus, older people who get involved and attempt to influence policy and services, may have their legitimacy

questioned as they represent the voices of an atypical minority (Barnes, Harrison, & Murray, 2012). Furthermore, older people who participate in forums will increase their social capital although they may be a group of older people who least need to do so. For older men, living alone, all three kinds of social capital discussed above will be important for access to information, integration and support.

Criticisms of the social capital concept

There has been some criticism of the social capital concept. Woolcock (2001) suggests that the popularity and the policy influence of the concept of social capital has given rise to a backlash and the term has become the latest buzz word. He fears that repeated too many times it can appear to be 'all things to all people' (Woolcock, 2001, p.74). Furthermore, it has been argued that the concept neglects considerations of power, gender, culture and ethnicity (Davies, 2001 cited in R. Harper, 2001; Woolcock, 2001). It may be that our understanding of the social capital phenomenon will be severely limited if, for example, gender is neglected when considering the creation and distribution of social capital (Sapiro, 2006). Men's and women's lives are structured differently and they are likely to have access to different types and amounts of financial and social resources. Family relationships have long been regarded as mainly managed by women and is an expected social behaviour (Finch & Mason, 1993) which suggests that 'gender should be a crucial element in the overall creation and use of social capital' (Sapiro, 2006, p.153).

Halpern (2005, p.22) argues that, in practice, social capital may only be a 'semi-public' or 'club' good and it may exist in forms which are considered bad or pathological (e.g. the Mafia). He also suggests that the negative side is often underplayed and social capital is generally given a positive spin. For older men, social capital will only be 'good' if instrumental and affective goals of ageing and social integration are served (Asquith, 2009). Edwards and Foley (1998) call attention to the fact that not all people have equal access to social capital nor is it equally valuable as a resource to facilitate collective or, indeed, individual actions. For older people, some kinds of social capital may be outside their reach. For example, bridging and linking social capital and, as a resource, bonding social capital may be the most useful when it comes to receiving social support. Therefore, viewing social capital with an emphasis on social networks and as a personal asset rather than a public good (Bourdieu, 1986; B. Edwards & Foley, 1998) reinforces the notion of uneven access to social capital. Inequalities of social location can be

along lines of gender, age, social class or even geography. Hence, Edwards and Foley (1998) consider that it is not enough to describe the size and density of people's networks but it is necessary to look at the resources that a network can connect a person to. An assessment of resources in a personal network can indicate the social support available to an individual although it does not tell us about the quality of that support or the relationship itself.

Another criticism of social capital is that of measurement. As the above has demonstrated, the concept is at the very least a slippery one with several definitions of social capital and therefore difficulties in consensus about measurement of the concept. It necessarily involves identification of observable variables which can then be used as proxies for social capital (Islam, Merlo, Kawachi, Lindström, & Gerdtham, 2006). Conceptualising social capital as 'the array of social contacts that give access to social, emotional and practical support' (Gray, 2008, p.6) is most useful for the purposes of this exploration of older men who live alone, with the available support viewed as the result of all network ties. In other words, both core relationships and peripheral ties may contribute to the accumulation of different types of social capital and are worthy of examination.

Finally, as mentioned above, close communities or associations may not always be 'healthy', particularly for outsiders, but in the case of older people it may not even be healthy for the insiders. Wenger (1984) evaluated the risks associated with five different types of networks common to older people. The five network types and their predictors of social isolation are as follows⁵:

1. **The local family dependent** support network – close local family ties with few friends and neighbours – predicts **high levels of isolation** outside the family network.
2. **The locally integrated** support network – close relationships with family, friends and neighbours. Often actively involved in the community and long-term residence in area – predicts **low levels of isolation**.
3. **The local self-contained** support network – arms-length relationship with one relative and reliance on neighbours. Childlessness is common – predicts **high levels of isolation** but well tolerated.

⁵ From Wenger, Davies, Shahtahmasebi and Scott Wenger, G., Davies, R., Shahtahmasebi, S., & Scott, A. (1996). Social isolation and loneliness in old age: review and model refinement. *Ageing and Society*, 16(3), 333-358. and Wenger (1997)

4. **The wider community focused** support network – absence of local kin is typical but involvement with community and active relationships with distant relatives – predicts **low levels of isolation**.
5. **The private restricted** support network – absence of local kin other than spouse. Little contact with neighbours and low level of community involvement – predicts **high levels of isolation** which may be well tolerated.

Wenger found that one of the *least* protective networks was the local family dependent support network. The family dependent support network was characterised by a primary focus on local family ties with few peripheral friends or neighbours i.e. producing little or no bridging and linking social capital which could potentially be provided by access to information and more peripheral relationships. Peripheral relationships are considered to be relationships outside the core relationships of close family and friends, for example, acquaintances met in a club. In the family dependent network, the older person would often live with, or close by, an adult child (Wenger, 1989). Although there can be high bonding social capital in such cases, the older person may find that there are restrictions on freedom. A family member, usually a daughter, can take over the organisation of an older person's life, leaving her or him feeling like a burden and often with low morale and feelings of loneliness (Wenger, 1997). In the case of older people, then, they may be excluded from resources with the exclusion controlled by their network members, in this case, the family.

Although there is some criticism of the strong emphasis given by policy-makers and practitioners on the positive consequences of social capital, the important issue for individuals is to look at the context of social connections. The social capital concept is imbedded in wider understandings regarding the nature of society and families. As Edwards (2004) suggests, from a feminist perspective, it does not and cannot exist outside of particular understandings of the nature of families and communities. The next section will, therefore, look at social networks.

Social networks

Social networks, both formal and informal, are thus essential components of social capital if social capital is the result of collective and negotiated ties and relationships, as discussed above (Edwards, 2004; Cattell, 2001). The concept of social networks as individuals and groups of

people, the form of whose connections to each other can help structure and therefore organise relational consequences, can provide a framework suitable to the study of social support in old age. Indeed, it is often indicated that the only reason for studying the social relationships of older people is to identify possible support available rather than the study of relationships for their own sake (Victor, et al., 2009). As well as studying social relationships in order to assess the support that may be mobilised, social relationships have also been of interest as an explanatory concept for understanding quality of life (Bowling, 2005). However, an important factor for managing to live alone in later life is likely to be the ability to successfully organise social relationships which can provide support (Ogg, 2003) but having close meaningful relationships with others is also important for feelings of well-being.

Clark (2007) suggests that the term 'social networks' has come to be used in two ways, either dynamic or static. The formal usage, which views networks as dynamic structures, refers to the number of people a person is in touch with and the extent to which these different people also know each other. Another use simply refers to the number of people that a person knows and does not consider the connection between those people. Such a use suggests a static concept rather than the dynamic, changing nature of social networks throughout the life course. Social networks can offer one type of resource, throughout the life course, for emotional and instrumental support. The characteristics of an individual's network can, therefore, give an indication of the support that they may enable (Ajrouch, Blandon, & Antonucci, 2005). Slater (1995, p.97) has suggested that the current generation of older people may have 'clear but very different expectations about with whom it is appropriate to share one's troubles'. Such a view may make it more difficult to engage in newer, perhaps more emotionally-supportive, relationships. Arber and Ginn (1991) found that men, in particular, felt unable to talk about confidences to anyone outside the family and would only confide in their spouse. Men who have been bereaved and are not able to make new social connections, will therefore not have the confiding relationship that they have become used to and it is not clear who they turn to, if anyone. Women, on the other hand, included best friends as someone they would confide in, although they suggested that it would depend on the kind of personal problem (Arber & Ginn, 1991).

The composition of social networks are said to be changing under the conditions of late modernity. Ogg (2003, p.57) suggests that a social network approach is particularly useful in this era as it does not assume that 'the network is composed uniquely of normative relations within

the family'. In other words, relationships with step-children and ex-in-laws, for example, as well as many more peripheral and virtual relationships, can also be included in the composition of networks.

Critiques of social network measures

Formal social network analysis is a quantitative method used for visualising and measuring networks (Heath, Fuller, & Johnston, 2009; J. Scott, 2000). With its emphasis on mapping and quantifying networks, social relations are simplified into numerical data. This may be seen as focusing almost entirely on external features of relationships. Criticisms have been made of social network measures which focus on purely numerical data rather than on change, context and process of social networks.

For many social science researchers, the insider view of the ways individuals construct, maintain and reproduce social relationships is the crux of their research aims, rather than giving prime importance to the actual number of links or density of social networks. Qualitative approaches may be more suited to considering the dynamic nature of complex social networks and the variability within such networks. To study both the structure and the process of social networks, Edwards (2010), therefore, suggests mixing methods in social network analysis. She argues that software developments and user-friendly computer programmes may have unduly marginalised qualitative network analysis. Qualitative approaches can distinctively offer the awareness of change, context and process while social network analysis can measure and map certain aspects of social relationships in a precise and systematic fashion (Edwards, 2010). The main criticism of the use of formal social network analysis is, therefore, when it is treated as a stand-alone method in social science research as this cannot provide information about meanings and experiences of changing social relationships. It may be less to do with the number of social relationships older men engage in but their type and the recognition of the dynamic nature of social relations over the life course is necessary. However, issues pertaining to the meaning, variability, accessibility, reproduction and construction of social relationships in later life are rarely explored.

Variations and changes in social networks

If social networks help pattern the social relationships that surround an individual and with whom people have some form of connection, individuals will be influenced by such networks but they can also influence those networks. The characteristics of a network can therefore go some way towards explaining the social behaviour of the people involved in a network. People do not function in isolation from relationships, be they good or bad, and the density of a social network is likely to influence access to social capital and social support.

Burt (2001) suggests that a diffuse, large network will be more helpful in the case of solving a problem compared to a small, dense and family based network. A diffuse and larger network can, therefore, potentially provide opportunities for contact and engagement with many people who can offer advice and information. A smaller, denser network is more likely to provide more intimate support but can potentially exclude older people from relevant information and subsequent interactions. This point was demonstrated with Wenger's five network types above.

Social networks are embedded in the larger social and cultural milieu and they are conditioned by forces such as political economy, gender roles and social stratification (Zunzunegui, Alvarado, Del Ser, & Otero, 2003). People negotiate their actions in the context of larger relational networks such as family, friendships and the rest of society (Duck, 2007). Previous research has found differences between the networks of men and women. These differences have been explained by gender roles. Women tend to be carers of children and form supportive networks involving other mothers. Men, as breadwinners, are thought to be restricted in the ability to form close relationships as the work-place is often a competitive environment and rarely conducive to providing supportive relationships (Ogg, 2003). In later life, if living alone, those gender differences may become significant.

Disengagement theory was introduced in the previous chapter, in relation to social policies. The theory hypothesises a decline in the social interactions among ageing adults, a withdrawal initiated by the ageing individual or by other people in the system (Cumming & Henry, 1961). The theory does not take into account individual differences and other researchers have found that people, who were non-participant at earlier ages, were generally non-participant when they got older. Likewise, people who tended to participate when younger, remained engaged as they aged (Videbeck & Knox, 1965), suggesting a continuity in the level of engagement. Individual differences, therefore, play a part in the relationships an older person has or aspires

to have. Types, quality and quantity of relationships will, then, be influenced by psychological as well as social factors (Fingerman, 2009). The judgement that disengagement is desirable for older people, as expressed by Cumming and Henry (1961), has also been disputed. Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin (1996) empirically demonstrated that older people who are actively engaged in their social worlds, are generally happier and express greater life satisfaction. They suggested, from the basis of the research, that it could be due to differences in personality.

In contrast to disengagement theorists, activity theorists hold social and physical obstacles responsible for declines in social interaction in old age (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953). Activity theory has been criticised for a link with consumerist ideology; the idea of 'busy bodies' and productivity has been compared to the work ethic (Katz, 2000). For both theories, there is an assumption that changes in social engagement is a phenomenon of later life whereas developmental literature suggests a gradual change over the life span (Carstensen, 1992).

An alternative theory, proposed by psychologist Laura Carstensen (1992), is the socio-emotional selectivity theory. Carstensen views the reduced rates of interaction as the results of continuous selection during the life span. She argues that people 'strategically and adaptively cultivate their social networks to maximize social and emotional gains and minimize social and emotional risks' (Carstensen, 1992, p.331). The suggestion is that social interaction can come at a cost and individuals have to make discriminating choices in order to gain the most from social relationships. Interaction with family and close friends over many years can increase emotional closeness whereas interaction with new social partners may require so much energy expenditure that the gains are not worth it. An extensive network with weak ties, which is essential for information when young, may therefore be gradually replaced with a more valuable network of significant others, unless close relationships are not available, in which case older people may seek more peripheral relationships. Fredrickson and Carstensen (1990) tested this hypothesis and found that people generally categorised social partners along three dimensions: information potential, potential for future contact and affective rewards. Whereas adolescents placed greatest emphasis on the first two categories, older people placed greatest emphasis on affective rewards. The same study also suggested that feelings of emotional closeness were not necessarily related to rates of contact. This runs counter to disengagement theory where disengagement was inferred from reduced rates of contact (Carstensen, 1992). It also contradicts stereotypical ideas of older people, including older men, not valuing emotional content in their lives.

Duck (2007) suggests that relationships have a history therefore a life course approach is helpful when studying personal relationships. They are influenced by many things including age and gender. Past events, interactions and behaviour shape relationships and expectations (Finch, 2007; Finch & Mason, 1993; H. White, 1992) and relationships are variable and personal (Phillipson, Bernard, Phillips, & Ogg, 2001). It is perhaps useful to apply an intersectionality perspective. Intersectionality raises awareness of 'the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations' (McCall, 2008, p.49). That is to say, it is useful to look at many facets of an individual's life and intersecting identities that may influence social networks such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age or gender. Intersections may therefore create both advantage and disadvantage as in the case of White, older men who may be advantaged by their colour and gender but disadvantaged by their age (Shields, 2008). The complex interplay between power relations can create qualitatively different experiences for different individuals and it may be too simplistic to assume that adding one subordinate position to another will produce a double jeopardy for all older men (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001).

Social networks, therefore, need to be viewed as a dynamic concept, changing over the life course and demonstrating much diversity between older people, according to previous experiences and opportunities. Social relationships are, however, necessary for mobilising informal support in later life which highlights the importance of gaining knowledge of older men's social relationships which may eventually provide support if required. The structure of social networks influences the availability and kind of social support (Granovetter, 1973) and the topic of social support is discussed below.

Social support

This section will discuss social support from an evolutionary perspective, types of support and reciprocity in supportive relationships. The term social support is often included in the umbrella term 'social relationships' which also includes 'social ties', 'social networks', 'social activity' and 'social connectedness', to name just a few. Bowling (1991, p.69) defines social support 'as the interactive process in which emotional, instrumental or financial aid is obtained from one's social network'. Furthermore, it 'proceeds from a consideration of its source, such as who provides it, the function it serves for people...and the intimacy characteristics of the relationship' (p.69). Support networks of older people have been found to be as large as those

of younger people in a study of married men and women aged 50-95 (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987). However, frequency of contact with network members was reduced in the older group and women were found to have larger networks than men. Women received support from multiple sources whereas men relied almost exclusively on their spouses, supporting earlier work (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Lowenthal & Haven, 1968). These findings have implications for older men living alone, especially men who have been married and have had the opportunity to rely on a spouse for support.

Townsend (1957), in his study of elderly people living in the East End of London, noted that the capacity to reciprocate is necessary to enable and justify on-going flows of help from others. There is also much evidence that strong, supportive social networks are generally beneficial to health (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Therefore, although being older and in poor health increases the need for social support networks, it also makes it harder for older people to reciprocate. Older people may therefore have to rely on the solidarity of others and such solidarity is often found within families (Gray, 2008).

From an evolutionary perspective, there are theoretical reasons why giving support may be beneficial (although this also applies to receiving support). For example, kin-selection theory, when altruism is demonstrated towards close kin (Hamilton, 1964), and reciprocal altruism, when kin-selection can be ruled out as support is given to someone who is not closely related (Trivers, 1971). Kin-selection theory suggests that helping kin will enable the genes that relations have in common to be spread but that cannot apply to completely unrelated individuals as in the case of reciprocal altruism. Trivers (1971) has argued that by helping a non-kin individual, the beneficiary may return the favour to the altruist at a later date and there will be a net benefit for both individuals involved. However, that can only work when the individuals have some regular contact with each other and that in turn suggests that social support is most likely to come from family, friends and regular acquaintances. For older people, it would therefore seem likely that social networks will include a larger number of kin, close friends and neighbours who can be relied upon for support although other individuals, with whom the men have frequent and regular contact, could also provide potential avenues for support but they remain largely unexplored.

Types of social support

The concept of social support has attracted much interest since interpersonal relationships are increasingly implicated in well-being and health (Kessler, Price, & Wortman, 1985). The protective effects of social support was demonstrated by Brown and Harris (1978) in their study of urban women who experienced significant life stress. They demonstrated that the presence of an intimate, confiding relationship protected the women from depression. This is a significant finding in relation to this study. Men, in general, are likely to class their spouse or partner as their main confidant (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Lowenthal & Haven, 1968). The loss of an intimate partner can, therefore, have a significant impact on the lives of older men who live alone. Research on widows has backed this up with findings that women adjust better than men to that particular stressful life event (M. Stroebe & Stroebe, 1983). Several common beliefs also exist about older widowers including their inability to take care of themselves and the wish to marry again (Moore & Stratton, 2003). However, such beliefs homogenises older men and views gender as the only factor in the process of adjusting to living alone in old age.

Just as measurements of social capital and social networks have been subject to debate, the nature, meaning and measurement of social support is also being debated. Several components of social support have been identified concerning structural aspects (e.g. living alone or with others), emotional aspects (e.g. expression of positive affect), instrumental aspects (e.g. provision of material aid) and informational aspects (e.g. provision of information about activities) (S. Cohen, 2004; Weiss, 1974).

Emotional support relates to the amount of caring, understanding and esteem available from others (Thoits, 1995) and is most often provided by an intimate other, such as a spouse. Having a confidant has been shown to reduce the effects of stressful experiences on both physical and psychological outcomes (S. Cohen & Wills, 1985). The lack of an intimate other, as in the case of men who live alone due to bereavement or divorce may, therefore, have a significant effect on the quality of life of such individuals.

Instrumental support relates to the assistance with practical needs such as cleaning, cooking or gardening (House, 1981). As people age and become frailer, it is expected that instrumental support will be increasingly necessary but, as argued in relation to emotional closeness to a partner above, it is also likely that emotional support continues to be valued, perhaps more so, if an older man has experienced the loss of a spouse or other life losses.

Informational support is useful for the provision of information and advice with regard to particular needs and services (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000). The more extensive the network, the more likely it will be that such information will be accessible from the network members, as seen in the review of social capital. Informational support may become less important as an older person will not require knowledge about possible employment opportunities. However, active older people may want information about activities in their area and frailer older people may need information about available formal support.

Some researchers have found that providing support to others in the social network may be more beneficial to individuals than receiving support (S. Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; Liang, Krause, & Bennett, 2001). Krause, Herzog, and Baker (1992) have suggested that there are at least three reasons why this is so. Firstly, the feelings that come from helping others can bolster psychological well-being. Secondly, supporting and aiding others can foster intimacy and trust which in turn can strengthen existing social bonds. Thirdly, giving support to others can increase the chances of receiving support from a significant other, highlighting the benefits of reciprocal relationships. In addition, Hunter and Linn (1980) have proposed that role losses in later life may be compensated for by supporting others, particularly in the form of volunteering. For older men who have lost their role as provider through retirement, and possibly their role as husband through the death of a spouse, getting involved in supporting others may provide a socially approved activity which can offset role losses. However, as Chapter Two explored, in relation to ageism, volunteering tends to decline after the age of 70 making it harder for older men to reclaim social roles.

The above review has demonstrated the interconnectedness of social capital, social networks and social support (Figure 2). Social capital may be drawn on in later life for support but in order to accrue social capital, older people need to be, or have been, socially engaged.

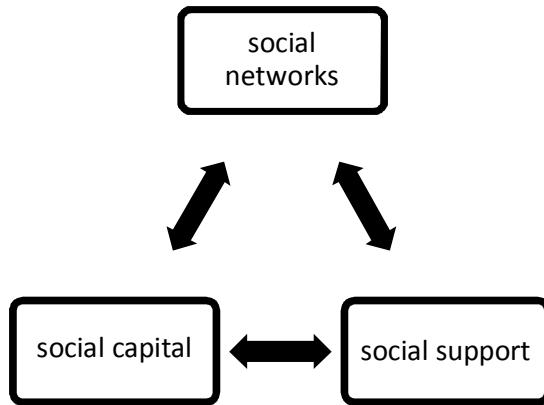


Figure 2. The interconnectedness of social capital, social networks and social support

Situating social networks

Having established the necessity of social relationships and connectedness for both social capital and social support, it is of interest to explore the social worlds and some of the many types of relationships which can make up an individual's social network.

Most people belong to a number of different social worlds, for example family, sports club or volunteering activities. Social worlds are dynamic structures and older men will belong to different social worlds during their lives. The introduction (Chapter One) provided a definition of social worlds, as used within this thesis. Social worlds represent a distinct form of social organisation and access to information about social worlds can either facilitate or limit individual involvement. Older men who have retired from paid work, then, will no longer belong to a social world of work. Unruh (1983) suggests that studies on integration into social worlds have tended to focus on conventional links, such as family, informal groups or voluntary organisations, but in a globalised world with increased communication through technological advances, social worlds may be much more diverse and even less bounded. Integration into social worlds will often be invisible since activities that link people together are not always publicly performed, for example the making a telephone call or sending of an email.

Unruh (1983) studied what he called a 'problematic population', that is, the ageing population in the US. He saw the ageing population as problematic in terms of older people's exclusion from certain social worlds and their status and treatment in other social worlds. Age-related losses

and physical frailty can further influence integration into social worlds as older people may find comfort in familiar social worlds, maybe family, but are less willing to join in new social worlds such as an organised activity with other older people. Anyone who can access information about the activities of a social world is a potential participant and such information may be shared through books or technology (e.g. the World Wide Web). In other words, older people may be able to connect with many others through shared social worlds without their presence being known to others and therefore not easily recognised in research on social relationships.

Friendship, kinship and acquaintanceship

Within social networks and social worlds exist different types of relationships, such as kinship and friendships, which may be considered close ties. However, there are also acquaintanceships which may be seen as more peripheral ties. There are common themes as to the behaviour within and character of different types of relationships (Allan, 2005). Social relationships can be viewed as structural or functional (Avlund et al., 2004). Structure can be defined in terms of the number of social relations people have, the interconnection between social ties and reciprocity of those relationships (Avlund, Damsgaard, & Holstein, 1998). The functional aspect of social relationships is viewed in terms of their qualitative and behavioural aspects, that is, seen positively as 'social support' or negatively as 'relational strain' (Avlund, et al., 2004). Relational strain is not simply lack of social support and has been defined as 'the extent to which functions of social relationships cause emotional or instrumental strain' (Due, Holstein, Lund, Modvig, & Avlund, 1999, p.663). There are two aspects of relational strain which are important to older men: conflicts and excessive demands (Due, et al., 1999). Both the roles of caregiver and being cared for can induce strain and most incidences of violence and abuse take place within families or among people who know each other well (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002; Manthorpe & Bowes, 2010; Twigg, Atkin, & Perring, 1990). The types of relationships that older men have with friends, family and acquaintances will need to serve a positive or supportive function in order to be beneficial.

Friendship

Studies of older people's social relationships have often marginalised non-kin relationships, such as friends and acquaintances, and thereby the complexity of older people's social worlds is downplayed (Victor, 2005). Friendships are typically more fluid than kinship and more likely to be influenced by the social and economic context. Friendships may also take a number of forms, from very close friendships to acquaintanceship (Allan, 1989). A significant issue for this study is the view that friendships are relationships of equality. In other words, people who are friends tend to be of fairly equal status and occupy similar positions. When a change in status occurs, such as divorce or bereavement or even retirement, it may be difficult to maintain balance and reciprocity (Allan, 1989). Whereas Allan (1989) suggests that changes in friendships over time are quite usual, it may be harder to replace friends when one's peers are older and, in the case of older men, mainly female.

It has been argued that men's same sex friendships are limited by homophobia (Nardi, 1992). Boys are socialised to be sociable but they must also restrict how much they reveal about themselves in relationships as intimacy with other men can be mistaken for homosexuality (Allan, 1989). Hall (2011) has systematically assessed research on sex differences in friendship expectations and found that men and women may differ in pathways toward friendship, but similarly value the social meaning of relationships (i.e. reciprocity). Thus, men are likely to value friendships as much as women but 'men hide behind a facade of strength and independence rather than admitting need' (Tognoli, 1980, p.273). Powers and Bultena (1976) found that intimate friendships were a very small part of men's social worlds and older men were not likely to have friends who provided emotional or social support unless they had lost other social resources. In marriage relationships, men relied on their wives for friendship and for making friends. However, it is important to note that there were both men and women in the study who had never formed close ties outside the family, emphasising the importance of individual differences. It is therefore likely that some older men will have close friendships outside the family but others will not and may never have had such social relationships even when they were much younger.

Based on oral biographies, Matthews (2000) identified three friendship styles in a group of older people. She found that assumptions held about the meaning and importance of friendships varied from one person to another but she was still able to develop three distinct ways of doing

friendship. The 'independents' did not claim to have any close friends although they had friendly relations (Kurth, 1970) and tended to talk about their present relations. The 'discerning' could identify a small number of close friends they had had during the course of their lives which had been or were highly valued. The final group, the 'acquisitive', were more open to making new friends. They talked about past, present and even future friends which may be added as circumstances changed. There was no indication of gender differences or variations but as Powers and Bultena (1976) noted above, variations will exist across groups of older men.

Kinship

The levels of support and commitment between friends and family members often differ with friendships generally marked by a higher degree of reciprocity (Allan, 2005). Family relationships, in contrast, do not involve an emphasis on reciprocity or equality and support received from family usually differs from that received from, or indeed given to, friends (L. Clarke, 1995; Morgan, 1996). Allan (2005, p.236) suggests that family, rather than friends, are seen as the 'rightful carers'. Again, this is significant for older adults living alone who may need longer-term support or care, especially if there is no kin available due to either geographic mobility or lack of family altogether. It is not clear whether those older people will be able to call on friends for long-term support or if, in the case of older men, there will be a network of friends to call upon.

Family is commonly seen as a crucial resource in later life (Wenger, Dykstra, Melkas, & Knipscheer, 2007), with the parent-child relationships singled out as the most significant (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Hence, there has recently been an increased interest in the childless elderly population. After spouse, adult children are most likely to provide care and support, leaving single, childless, older men without access to two potential sources of support (Wenger, et al., 2007). Having children can also delay the need for residential or other formal care (Koropeckyj-Cox & Call, 2007). In a cross-national comparison of childless adults and parents, Koropeckyj-Cox and Call (2007) found that in all countries (Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States), women were more likely to be childless than men. This may be because women's fertility decreases with age more rapidly than men's. In general, however, older childless adults were more likely than parents to live alone or in institutions adding weight to the assumption that children constitute an important source of social support

in later life. Having children can also open up access to other social networks through in-laws and grandchildren (Sorensen & Cooper, 2010).

There are many kinds of family bonds: ascribed (assigned by birth, adoption or marriage), persistent (bounded only by birth or death) or symbolic (e.g. ties to deceased family members). These bonds are embedded within a kinship system which may span generations and multiple roles such as spouse, child or sibling (Bedford & Blieszner, 2000). Different men will have access to differing types of bonds. For example, a childless older man, who has never married will not have ascribed bonds with children although he may have ascribed bonds with siblings. He may have symbolic bonds with deceased parents or siblings, too. A widower who has adult children may have ascribed bonds with in-laws and children, persistent bonds with children and symbolic bonds with a deceased spouse. How meaningful such bonds might be for older men is not known.

Within families, negative relationships can occur due to obligation from which neither party gains pleasure and in such cases, geographic distance may be appreciated and the relationship may even do better at a distance (Bedford & Blieszner, 2000). This is often the case when siblings have been dispersed and older people are only able to keep in touch through letter writing or telephone but family (and roles) will often still persist in the memory of older people (P. Chambers, et al., 2009; Johnson, 1993).

Acquaintanceship

It may be that for older people, the more peripheral ties remain important, not so much for information but for 'stimulation and novelty' (Fingerman, 2009, p.81) or 'momentary pleasures' as an ethnography of singles dances described the fleeting relationships at the dances (Beattie, Christopher, Okamoto, & Way, 2005, p.46). Fingerman (2009, p.79) also suggests that people may establish links with 'consequential strangers' in order to establish some sense of familiarity when away from usual familiar surroundings or family. Older people who attend organised activities may therefore try to link with other people present but not maintain contact with them outside the setting and the ties remain weak. In other words, weak ties also need to be considered as serving complimentary functions to close ties when exploring social networks.

Morgan (2009) suggests that acquaintances occupy a space between intimates and strangers. Acquaintances are rarely chosen, as in the way of friends, or ascribed, as in the way of family, but 'occur "naturally" in the course of everyday living' (Morgan, 2009, p.122). If strangers are individuals whom we may notice but who quickly disappear and are never seen or recognised again, then acquaintances can be considered as strangers who we may see repeatedly and although they are not friends, they cannot be considered strangers (Morgan, 2009). Thus, acquaintances are individuals that we are familiar with 'those whom we have met, with whom we have shared time and space and information' (Lofland, 1973, p.17). The issue of time in relationships ranges from durable to transitory, the place from private to public. Thus, acquaintances occupy the transitory and often public end of the spectrum whereas intimate relationships are generally durable and usually private.

The main issue here is whether acquaintances or, perhaps more broadly, peripheral ties remain a significant part of older men's social networks and everyday lives. We do not know much about the function of peripheral ties in old age; the possibility that they impact on psychosocial wellbeing, for example (Fingerman, 2004). As older men experience losses of peers and close personal relationships, they may turn to more peripheral relationships in public places, such as daily encounters with a newsagent or postman. Counter to Carstensen's (1990) socio-emotional selectivity theory, such relationships appear to require little emotional investment and have the possibility of opening up new social worlds to the men. They can also be considered as relationships similar to those the men would have encountered in the workplace, i.e. public rather than private relationships (Morrill & Snow, 2005).

Oldenburg (1999) describes how seeing others on a regular basis, but without obligation, often occurs in 'third places' (p.16). Third places can be identified as public settings away from home and work. Pubs, bars and barbers, for example, are all third places that allow opportunities for sociability and can create a sense of belonging for men who do not want to see people on an obligatory basis (Oldenburg, 1999). It is also possible that some close ties become more peripheral in later life due to geographic distance. If older men need to relocate to more suitable housing, they may leave friends and neighbours behind, changing the characteristics of those relationships to those of more peripheral relationships. It is most likely that both men and women need a broad and varied social network which will include both core intimate relationships, as well as peripheral relationships, in order to achieve social embeddedness (Dykstra, 1995).

In conclusion, social capital, when considered as an asset of the individual older man, may be built up through diverse types of social networks available to older men and will affect access to various forms of support, particularly when living alone in later life. Being socially isolated due to personal circumstances or structural obstacles will make it harder to accumulate social capital through social networks although social capital, if accrued earlier in life, may be drawn upon in later life. Access to other people, as well as to activities involving other people, is therefore a necessary route to building supportive social networks. However, identifying which links with others will be meaningful to individual men is not always straightforward when looking at social relationship research and it is possible that some meaningful relationships remain undiscovered or unexplored. The following chapter will review living alone as a household arrangement, loneliness as a subjective feeling and social isolation as the antithesis of social capital.

Chapter 4

Living alone, loneliness and social isolation

Introduction

Chapter Three discussed the importance of social relationships and networks for the accumulation of social capital and subsequent availability of social support in later life for older men. This chapter moves on to a discussion of living alone, loneliness and social isolation since the experience and subjective meaning of living alone is a fundamental part of this study. It is important to distinguish between the three terms, often assumed to be synonymous.

‘Living alone’ is purely a description of household composition and does not necessarily indicate that an individual is lonely or socially isolated. Furthermore, living alone means that one person is not sharing the household with others but it does not signify how much time is spent alone. The knowledge that a person lives alone has to be considered by researchers in conjunction with the length of time the person has lived alone and the route to living alone, in order to understand the significance for individual men of the living arrangement. Living alone in later life is often problematised by policy-driven agendas which tend to focus on the decline of multigenerational households, in which older people were more often co-resident, and the rise in single-person households, increasing the need for suitable housing (Victor, et al., 2009). However, living alone earlier in the life course is viewed as the expression of choice with an assumption of a temporal arrangement. Younger people who establish an independent household are thus viewed positively as transitioning into adulthood (Kiernan, 1991). Yet, some men may have chosen to live alone and it is possible that others may find potential benefits after marital disruption (divorce or bereavement) and adapt positively (Cooney & Dunne, 2004). Literature relating to changes in families, for instance, smaller families with fewer children, women’s increased participation in the labour market and marital stability leading to step-families (Scanzoni, 2004), is discussed below. The importance of home to older people is explored, as well as the socio-cultural expectations of ageing in place (A. Sixsmith & Sixsmith, 2008).

Loneliness may be viewed as the opposite of social embeddedness and both loneliness and social isolation can carry negative connotations (De Jong Gierveld & Havens, 2004). However, a

distinction between loneliness and social isolation needs to be made as individuals who are socially isolated may not necessarily feel lonely. Similarly, people who objectively appear to have many friends and connections may still feel lonely, suggesting that loneliness should be viewed as a psychosocial, rather than a simply social, phenomenon.

Loneliness and types of loneliness, including the influence of gender, is examined as a psychosocial phenomenon, not because I accept the stereotypes of older people living alone as necessarily feeling lonely or isolated but because there is already much knowledge about social relationships in later life within the loneliness literature which needs to be considered (Victor, et al., 2009). Finally, social isolation as an objective measurement of contacts is rejected as an adequate measure of social connectedness for older people, suggesting that it is necessary to take into account individual differences, previous life experiences and cultural and societal values when exploring living alone, loneliness and possible social isolation in later life. The area is complex and conceptual connections between living alone, loneliness and social isolation are not straightforward or obvious to deduce.

Living alone

‘Living alone’ is a demographically descriptive category describing a specific living arrangement and is generally used interchangeably with ‘one-person household’, particularly in statistics on population living arrangements (Ogg, 2003). However, data on how many older people are living alone do not distinguish between those who enter old age having always lived alone and those where living alone is an arrangement which is new to them (Victor, 2005). Victor (2005) speculates that the route to solo living in older age will influence the experience of living alone. It is possible that the experience will be easier for those who are continuing a previous living arrangement compared to those who are new to living alone although there is as yet no research on the topic. Research on the experience of living alone in old age, therefore, needs to consider the route taken to solo living in order to understand the range of meanings that particular household structure may have.

It is clear that the group of older men living alone will not be homogenous in terms of previous relationship history and experiences and should not necessarily be classified as a ‘risk group’ by professionals or researchers (Iliffe et al., 1992; Victor, 2005). For example, a man who has

always lived alone and who has an established pattern of life may not necessarily face increased risk of loneliness or isolation when older and living alone although issues of health and mobility can influence feelings of loneliness and isolation. How living alone as a process of life changes is experienced, and the different meanings attached to it, is not clear.

Older women are more likely than older men to live alone and as people grow older they are generally more likely to be living alone. (Office for National Statistics, 2005b). This reflects the cultural norm of men marrying women younger than themselves and the gender difference in life expectancy (Office for National Statistics, 2006a). For women, the death of a partner and the change in household arrangement to living alone can be described as an 'expectable life event' whereas for men it is an atypical event (van den Hoonaard, 2010, p.5). So far, little research has explored the specific experiences of the minority group of older men living alone. It can be argued that as a minority group, older men living alone will not have the peer support from other men who have experienced the transition to living alone, something which will be more readily available to women (Lopata, 1973).

It is likely that solo living takes on differing social meanings according to where it is located in the life course (Chandler, Williams, Maconachie, Collett, & Dodgeon, 2004). When younger and living alone, the arrangement may not be viewed as permanent but older people may view it as less likely to change (Kiernan, 1991). Research has consistently documented that older people prefer to live independently with a spouse or alone (Shanas, 1980; Troll, 1971). Living alone during the earlier stages of the life course may be more easily viewed as 'exercising choice' but by the later stages of the life course, living alone is considered by policy-makers as more of a problem situation as older people living alone are often assumed to be isolated and lonely and in need of expensive outside support (Iliffe, et al., 1992). Victor (2005) has suggested that we need to be more critical of the assumption that living alone in later life is a negative experience. It is possible that maintaining an independent household is more of an indication of successful ageing, that is, a manifestation of autonomy rather than an indication of social disengagement. Living alone may be a preferred arrangement for some older men but an unwelcome situation for others due to a sensed lack of alternative living arrangements. Living alone does not say anything about family, kin or social networks and older people may nominally reside alone in a dwelling whilst they are enmeshed in a complex web of relationships (Victor, et al., 2009). However, some social commentators have argued that the changes in family forms from the traditional intergenerational households to nuclear family households has disadvantaged the

elderly and largely caused the increase in older people living alone later in life, as will be discussed in the following section.

Changing families and living arrangements

Living alone has not just become more common amongst the older age group nor is the greater number of single households specific to the UK. Throughout Europe, the number of one-person households has grown, with the highest growth among people aged 25 to 35 (Kaufmann, 1994). Younger men, in particular, are ever more likely to live alone. In the UK, the largest increase in the proportion of households containing people living alone has been among men aged less than 65, more than tripling from 3 per cent of households in 1971 to 10 per cent by 2000. Projections suggest that this trend will continue and that by 2021, 14 per cent of households will contain men under the age of 65 living alone (Summerfield & Babb, 2003, p.43). As these younger men age, the need to know how living alone is experienced and managed by men will become even more pressing.

Changes in living arrangements since the earlier, classic studies (Shanas, et al., 1968; Townsend, 1957; Tunstall, 1966), which gave primacy to contact with family and friends, need to be considered within the broader social context of demographic changes. Such changes include gendered employment patterns, legislative changes such as availability of divorce and access to abortion, family expectations and social norms regarding family formations and economic prosperity in the form of pensions and benefits (Victor, 2005; Victor, et al., 2009). Changing patterns of partnering may also contribute to the rise in living alone. One example is 'living apart together' (LAT) relationships which have become more acceptable and although they may be viewed as a stage on the way to cohabitating for younger people, for older people such relationships may be more enduring as the intimacy of being in a couple relationship can co-exist with other commitments, such as commitments towards adult children (Duncan & Phillips, 2010). In other words, an individual's living arrangement needs to be considered in the context of all the ecological systems, including the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1988).

Some social commentators and scholars have proposed that with industrialisation, the lives of older people changed for the worse and family relationships have become problematic (e.g. E. Burgess, Locke, & Thomes, 1963). Older people's skills became outdated and their role in the

extended family declined as nuclear families (i.e. parents living with their children), rather than intergenerational households, came to predominate. Previously, the elderly had been custodians of traditions and, men especially, had been able to assert power well into old age (Haber, 2006). Other commentators dispute such a theory. Laslett (1972) argues that the supposition that domestic groups were universally larger in the past is essentially unfounded. He asserts that the failure to appreciate the developmental cycle in domestic groups means that the large patriarchal family described by Burgess et al. (1963) would have 'contained grandparents at all points in time, which must imply an extended life expectation improbable in earlier epochs' (Laslett, 1972, p.6).

Bengtson (2001) has also disputed the 'problem' of families today. Using US data from a longitudinal study, he argues that the changes in family form from a pyramid (predominantly a young society with large families and little intergenerational presence) to a beanpole (smaller families and similar numbers alive in each generation) may strengthen intergenerational ties. He argues that as generations are able to get to know each other over many more years, stronger bonds may be formed. Furthermore, the increase in marital instability, and consequent weakened nuclear families, will enhance intergenerational solidarity to the benefit of young and old

Finch (1989) considers the historical evidence relating to changes in support and obligation from family members. She concludes that despite changes in the amount and type of support offered to older family members, support cannot be simply seen as declining but needs to be viewed in relation to what is available. Sources and availability of support will vary with historical circumstances; currently older people have a longer life expectancy and the previously traditional care-givers, women, are more likely to be employed (Tinker, 1992). Smaller families are also increasingly the norm, reducing the number of kin-carers potentially available in later life (Victor, et al., 2009). Furthermore, financial support in the form of a basic state pension is now available to older people, allowing them independence from their families. Both the old and their children are more likely to have the resources necessary to set up separate households (Daatland & Lowenstein, 2005; Haber, 2006) and pay for support, if required, from outside agencies.

The home in later life

The home may take on particular significance when living alone in later life. Older people who own their own homes may prefer to live in them, even after bereavement, rather than to move in with adult children or other relatives. Hence choice, rather than lack of interest or alienation from children, may lead them to place themselves in the single household category (Shanas, 1979). Home can be viewed as a positive place for older people. As frailty reduces opportunities to socialise, friends and relatives die and income is reduced by retirement, home may take on a new significance. Studies have consistently demonstrated that home is meaningful and important to older people (Haak, Fänge, Iwarsson, & Dahlin Ivanoff, 2007; Oswald & Wahl, 2005) and research has estimated that older people spend as much as 80% of their time in their home, indicating its importance (M. Baltes, Mayr, Borchelt, Maas, & Wilms, 1993; M. Baltes, Wahl, & Schmid-Furstoss, 1990). It may be a place of memories of a spouse who has passed away and of a family raised (Oldman, 2003). Attachment to a place is often emphasised by older people and the home environment supports the sense of self and identity. Gurney and Means (1993) found, in a study of the meaning of home to older people, that 'their houses are an anchor orienting them both in time and place' (p.124). Memories and a sense of belonging can therefore provide an important emotional dimension of the home (Dahlin-Ivanoff, Haak, Fänge, & Iwarsson, 2007) and housing histories are often linked to key personal events such as marriage, retirement or bereavement (Gurney & Means, 1993).

However, the home can also become an undesirable place when older people are unable to leave it easily or the neighbourhood feels unsafe (Oldman & Quiggars, 1999). It can become a source of anxiety when it is no longer possible to carry out essential repairs, either physically or financially (Clapham, Means, & Munro, 1993). The privacy of the home as a place of individuality and independence, away from public institutions and workplaces, can also be lost if older people require assistance with daily tasks and the home becomes a working space for carers (Tamm, 1999). In his study on the meaning of home in later life, Sixsmith (1990, p.173) suggested that concern should not be with 'the home environment as a physical entity or commodity, but with the home as a meaningful context for everyday life'. Familiarity, attachment and memories are therefore likely to influence the choice to stay in one's home, rather than the physical space or value of the home, although the physical space can become increasingly important for less mobile, frail or visually impaired older people. The physical space where older men live in later life, as well as the emotional attachment to the space, will affect

the experiences and meanings men attach to living alone but it is not clear if the experiences are gendered or whether specific home needs can be supported or facilitated.

Socio-cultural expectations of independence and ageing in place

I have suggested that there is a political focus on older people who live alone as a vulnerable group of people who may be in need of assistance from the state (Victor, 2005). At the same time, policies emphasise independent living (Means, 2007) and 'Ageing in Place' (A. Sixsmith & Sixsmith, 2008). Encouraging family to assist older people and accept responsibility for their welfare can reduce the need for state support and associated costs (Oldman, 2003; Victor, 2005). In that way, older people are being expected to replace dependency on the state with dependency on family and friends (Oldman, 2003). A qualitative study⁶ conducted in the north-west of England, explored the meaning of home, autonomy, social and community participation, health and well-being and societal support for 'Ageing in Place'. Through in-depth interviews with 40 people aged 80-89, Sixsmith and Sixsmith (2008) found that although there may be psychological benefits to ageing in place, it can also be detrimental in terms of the informal support available, the neighbourhood and the physical environment of the home. Without information about the locality within which older men live, it is hard to assess available relationships, support or issues regarding feelings of safety.

Living alone may also take on diverse meanings according to the pervasive culture. Jylhä and Jokela (1990) hypothesised that loneliness would be more prevalent in countries where living alone was unusual. Older people are likely to set their standards and expectations according to the cultural norm. In a recent review, Dykstra (2009) discusses the importance of considering older people's frame of reference and normative orientation when researching ageing. In particular, she argues, in more collective cultures where older people are expected to be cared for by the extended family and local community, living alone is likely to be viewed as undesirable for both the older person and society. In individualistic cultures, on the other hand, living alone and looking after oneself is more likely to be a desirable arrangement,

⁶ Part of the ENABLE-AGE Project, conducted between 2002 and 2004, involving Sweden, Germany, UK, Hungary and Latvia Iwarsson, S., Wahl, H., Nygren, C., Oswald, F., Sixsmith, A., Sixsmith, J., et al. (2007). Importance of the Home Environment for Healthy Aging: Conceptual and Methodological Background of the European ENABLE-AGE Project. *The Gerontologist*, 47(1), 78-84.

demonstrating self-reliance and autonomy. A Eurobarometer⁷ survey has demonstrated wide variations in loneliness between countries, with loneliness highly prevalent in the southern European countries (seen as strongly family-oriented), compared to western and northern Europe (seen as more individualistic), again highlighting the influence of culture on the significance of living alone (Walker, 1993). The above makes it clear that it is essential not to treat older people living alone as a single social category. Living arrangements in later life need to be placed within a life course or biographical context as well as a socio-cultural and historical context and in that way, our understanding of the experience for individuals may be enhanced (Victor, 2005).

Finally, although used as an objectively-founded concept, the term 'living alone' can take on an existential meaning, according to Ogg (2003). In that way, the term can signify the subjective world of an older person and living alone may infer being alone or even being lonely with assumptions about an older person's social relationships being made simply from a description of their living arrangement (Victor, et al., 2009). Of course, some older men who live alone will feel lonely but available research suggests that any feelings of loneliness may not reflect the size of an individual's social network, as will be demonstrated below.

Loneliness

Loneliness is not just experienced by older people; younger people can also feel lonely (Victor & Yang, 2012; Weiss, 1973b). However, older people tend to undergo more experiences that can lead to a sense of loneliness, such as bereavement, retirement and relocation to a smaller retirement home or sheltered accommodation (Wenger, et al., 1996). Starting from an assumption of loneliness as a social problem of old age has often driven the research agenda and added to stereotypes of older people (Victor, 2005; Victor, et al., 2009). Such an assumption neglects the differences between individuals whether young or old.

Loneliness can be considered as the subjective feeling of social isolation and differs from social isolation which is usually viewed as an objective concept (Golden et al., 2009). That is, loneliness is the unpleasant subjective state caused not just by being alone (or living alone) but by experiencing a discrepancy between the desired number and type of social relationships and

⁷ The Eurobarometer survey series is a programme of cross-national comparative social research conducted on behalf of the European Commission and is designed to monitor social and political attitudes

that which is available in the individual's environment (Golden, et al., 2009; Weiss, 1973b). Social isolation, as an objective concept, is measured in terms of social network type or size (Wenger, et al., 1996). Social isolation does not necessarily lead to feelings of loneliness and a large social network may not prevent people from feeling lonely, suggesting that more is not inherently better, when it comes to social relationships (Meeuwesen, 2006; Van Baarsen, Snijders, Smit, & van Duijn, 2001).

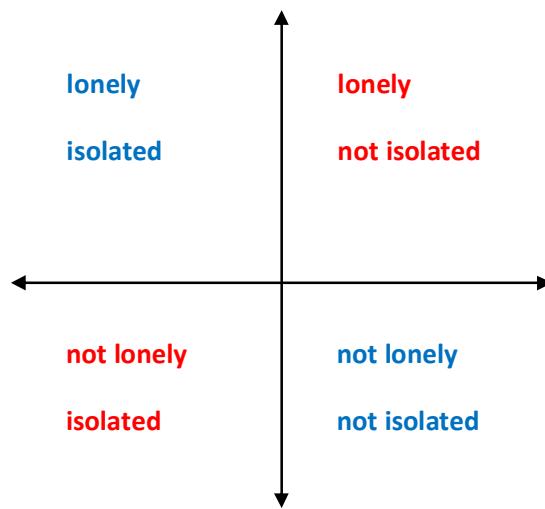


Figure 3. Proposed combinations of loneliness and social isolation

Meeuwesen (2006) has suggested that there are four possible combinations of network size (indicator of social isolation) and feelings of loneliness (see Figure 3). Two of the combinations: lonely/not isolated and not lonely/isolated, appear to be more complex than lonely/isolated and not lonely/not isolated. One would not expect people with a large network to feel lonely but it is likely that people with small networks will feel lonely. Clearly, therefore, there are more complex influences on feelings of loneliness other than the size of the personal network. Research needs to explore not just the size of older men's networks as a proxy for loneliness but also the perceived quality and availability of meaningful social relationships, that is, the subjective experience of living alone and possible feelings of loneliness.

Types of loneliness

A seminal work by Weiss (1973b), rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973a), identified two types of loneliness with reference to its cause: emotional and social loneliness. He suggested that emotional loneliness 'is initiated by the absence of a close emotional attachment' and social loneliness 'is initiated by the absence of socially integrative relationships' (Weiss, 1973b, p.33). For older men who have lost an intimate partner, emotional loneliness may be experienced. It involves a sense of absence of others in the older man's environment. Furthermore, if living alone and in poor health or lacking transport, some men may also encounter social loneliness due to difficulties in getting out and interacting with others. Such men would be expected to feel socially isolated or desolate and evaluate their lives more negatively as Gubrium (1975) found in a study of single older people. This corroborates previous British data which suggested that the loneliest older people tended to be widowed men in their eighties who were living alone, most likely due to the loss of an intimate partner (Townsend, 1957; Tunstall, 1966; Willmott & Young, 1960). Connidis (2010) argues that the lower morale of the widowed elderly, referred to as 'the desolates' in Gubrium's study (1975, p.32), compared to the never-married, indicates the greater negative impact of emotional loneliness than social loneliness. Being single (never married), in other words, resembles being married in its effect on feelings of loneliness (Gubrium, 1975). Hence, the route to solo living is significant when exploring loneliness in sub-groups of older men but such routes, which can be tortuous, are rarely made explicit (Peters & Liefbroer, 1997).

Three loneliness pathways have been proposed: a continuation of a long-established personal attribute, late-onset loneliness, often caused by a trigger such as bereavement, and decreasing loneliness (Victor, Scambler, Bowling, & Bond, 2005). This highlights differences between older people and their experiences of loneliness and the importance of viewing such differences within the social context and a life course perspective. Men who have always felt lonely may be resigned to be so in later life whereas men who feel lonely due to a trigger may need assistance to get back on track. Men who experience decreasing loneliness in later life may have developed strategies which have not yet been explored by researchers. Exposing such strategies may help other older men who are feeling lonely after the loss of a close relationship.

Loneliness as a psychosocial phenomenon

Defining loneliness as an undesirable state that occurs when there is a discrepancy between the interpersonal relationships desired and those available, highlights the affective character of loneliness but also the construction of loneliness to ideas about 'available relationships'. In addition, loneliness has a cognitive element as the perception is that the current state of relationships is inadequate, or perceived to be so, in relation to some ideal state of quantity and quality of relationships within a certain social and cultural context. Peplau and Perlman (1982) consider antecedents to loneliness as personal characteristics and cultural and situational factors. Thus, individual differences will influence the experience of loneliness. From a psychological perspective, people who are shy or introverted may be less likely to take social risks. The inability to take such risks can make it difficult to initiate new relationships, especially after the loss of a spouse who has been a main companion and friend. Other people may be more able to adapt to change and thereby effectively minimize or alleviate loneliness (Peplau & Perlman, 1982).

As demonstrated above, the literature suggests that some people are life-long isolates and others may become isolated in old age but humans are mostly social beings who seek out relationships with others (R. Bennett, 1980). At each stage of an individual's life, strong bonds are usually made with a few special people. With those bonds in place we are enabled to feel safer but if they are broken, we can become distressed or anxious, irrespective of age (Bowlby, 1973a; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Some older men who have been accustomed to living and sharing their lives with another individual, often a spouse, may, as a consequence of losing that bond, find it difficult to form new relationships if they feel distressed and anxious, thereby perpetuating possible feelings of loneliness. Lonely individuals have been found to attribute their loneliness to external, uncontrollable events or causal beliefs (Marangoni & Ickes, 1989; Newall et al., 2009). Studies have also revealed that lonely individuals are more cynical and have more negative views about human behaviour as well as their relationship partners (Wittenberg & Reis, 1986). However, personal characteristics cannot alone account for the differences in loneliness that people experience but need to be considered in relation to cultural and situational factors. Indeed, it has been suggested that overemphasising personal factors can lead to blaming individuals for their social difficulties (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Weiss, 1973a).

To understand the agency of older men and the nature of interpersonal relationships, both a sociological and a psychological perspective is required. In adopting a psychosocial perspective on loneliness, both individual differences and the social context can be considered, as expressed by Sheldon (1948, p.130):

...loneliness cannot be regarded as the simple direct result of social circumstances, but it is rather an individual response to an external situation to which other old people may react quite differently.

The structure of society can influence the opportunities to meet and socialise with others and therefore potentially facilitate or hinder social engagement. Weiss (1973b) has commented on life patterns that may be detrimental to social interactions. For instance, one can imagine that the segregation of the population by age through specialist retirement housing is detrimental to social integration for many older people. Morgan (2009) also suggests that flexible working hours and the use of private cars can reduce the likelihood of meeting the same people, at the same time, every day. In that way, fleeting interactions with others may be reduced. Structural barriers to social inclusion can, therefore, lead to loneliness, although it is not obvious what kind of environments or communities are conducive to social interactions, particularly for older men.

Gender and loneliness

Gender has been found to influence reported rates of loneliness (Beal, 2006; Victor & Yang, 2012). The social construction of gender and the way in which young boys and girls are socialised will have a profound influence on the creation of social networks and the opportunities to connect with others throughout the life course. Peer group studies have considered the distribution and prevalence of loneliness and sought to identify individuals vulnerable to this experience. Risk factors identified so far have included socio-demographic factors (being female, aged over 75, living alone), socioeconomic status, health and recent negative life events such as bereavement (Victor, Scambler, Bond, & Bowling, 2000; Victor & Yang, 2012). Where gender has been considered as an influence on loneliness, women have consistently been found to experience loneliness to a greater degree than men (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001). However, men living alone were more likely to be lonely than women with similar partner histories in a study from the Netherlands by de Jong Gierveld (2003). She also

found that the never-married men had the highest loneliness scores, possibly due to their reduced social resources in the form of kin which can be one factor influencing feelings of loneliness. This again highlights the need to look at individual men, their route into solo living and partnership histories as never-married men may still have experienced close relationships while remaining unmarried.

Loneliness has been associated with low levels of self-disclosure, with females feeling lonelier with a perceived lack of self-disclosure (Berg & Peplau, 1982). For males, lower social network density and lower participation in organised groups have both been related to reported loneliness (Stokes & Levin, 1986). . Closeness for men is seen as derived from the sharing of interests, experiences and activities (Pleck, 1975). Current organised activities for older people tend to cater for groups of women and may be ineffective when it comes to encouraging new social interactions or alleviating loneliness, both for men and women (Davidson, et al., 2003b). The needs of men and women appear to differ in this aspect and it is necessary to undertake research to improve our understanding of the specific needs of older men.

Gender has also been considered alongside marital history in a Dutch study investigating gendered loneliness. Dykstra and de Jong Gierveld (2004) hypothesised that due to notions about the differences in marriage gratification between men and women, it is likely that both within and outside marriage, men and women exercise different sources and manifestations of loneliness. Women are considered to do more of the relationship work, organise the social agenda of the couple and act as kin-keepers (Dykstra & de Jong Gierveld, 2004). Women have also been thought to have a greater capacity for same sex friendships and intimacy in friendships (Lowenthal & Robinson, 1976), whereas men's relationships, in Western cultures, are influenced by homophobia. Chodorow (1978) has argued that for boys, the formation of self will involve separating from their mother. The mother is experienced as different or 'other' and self-separation involves repressing their female aspects, in turn rejecting the tenderness and intimacy that was part of the earlier relationship. Girls, on the other hand, can continue to identify with their mothers and therefore they are able to maintain strong needs for attachment and intimacy. Chodorow (1978, p.199) suggests that women's relational needs are so complex that 'an exclusive relationship to a man is not enough'. Men have more often reported that they rely on their wives as confidantes than women have reported relying on their husbands (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987), adding weight to Chodorow's (1978) theory. The consequences

for a man of losing his wife through death or divorce would therefore appear to be more catastrophic in terms of having emotional needs met elsewhere.

Pinquart & Sorensen (2001) suggest that the relationship between loneliness and gender could be associated with the greater number of losses that women experience as they tend to outlive their husbands. Of course, this loss burden would also be an issue for older men who outlive their partners and end up living alone. Victor, Scambler, Marston, Bond, & Bowling (2006) suggest that the methodology used to generate data relating to feelings of loneliness may be the reason that gender differences have been found as by asking men directly about loneliness, they are less likely to disclose experiences of loneliness. It is culturally less acceptable for men to express emotional difficulties (Tijhuis, De Jong Gierveld, Feskens, & Kromhout, 1999). A more indirect, qualitative approach is required to avoid the perceived stigma attached to feeling lonely and this influencing the research data as direct questions about loneliness may not produce an accurate picture of loneliness among older men (Victor, et al., 2006). However, whether male or female, the stigmatisation of expressing loneliness handicaps lonely people even more as they are reluctant to disclose problems to others, specifically their experience of loneliness (Borys & Perlman, 1985; Rotenberg, Gruman, & Ariganello, 2002).

The reluctance of lonely people to disclose their feelings of loneliness needs to be considered when targeting interventions at lonely people. Jerome (1991), in her study on possibilities of interventions to reduce loneliness amongst older people, found that their success rate was very dependent on the type of club and who the club was run by. Although clubs and organisations may have the same goals, their style of leadership was found to have a big influence on the ability to encourage new friendships. Attempts by outsiders to create friendship and intimacy where none previously existed, takes more than seating arrangements and a desire for everyone to be friends with each other. Jerome (1991) found that older people did not go to clubs expecting to find intimacy, nor did they find such friendships or intimacy. Another issue is that of gender appropriate interventions. It is unlikely that older men will value 'Knit and Natter' sessions aimed at the larger female older population. Instead, older men have been found to value activities that resonate with their identities as men and appeal to their interests (Ruxton, 2006). Overall, Jerome (1991, p.205) found that 'the acutely lonely and isolated people for whom the clubs are set up are conspicuously absent' which further supports the reluctance of lonely people to disclose experiences of loneliness.

To summarise, loneliness is a subjective concept, likely to differ between and across gender, depending on individual differences and social structures. It is the perceived discrepancy between the desired and actual level of social interactions and emotional closeness to others but loneliness is not the same as social isolation and does not necessarily lead to social isolation as discussed below.

Social isolation

Although it is possible to feel socially isolated (a subjective concept as discussed with regard to loneliness), social isolation has mainly been viewed as an objective concept by researchers, referring to the level of integration of individuals into the wider society and therefore a proxy for social inclusion for policy-makers (Victor, 2005). Its use generally involves quantitative measures of the number of social interactions an individual has. Counting the number of contacts an individual has in a given period does not, however, take into account brief meetings with neighbours and other acquaintances in the street (Townsend, 1957). In addition, it is not always clear how long an interaction has to last in order to count as a social contact by the participant or the researcher (Victor, 2005) nor is any account taken of the function or quality of the interaction (Townsend, 1957). Morgan (2009) suggests a scale or continuum of proximity or distance of social interactions. However, he also raises the point that such a 'continuum might underestimate possible qualitative differences in the comparison between intimates and acquaintances' (Morgan, 2009, p.11). In either case, the point is made that a quantitative measure may not satisfy the complexity of older men's connectedness to others and we lack specific knowledge of how older men perceive the quality of different types of relationships, particularly more peripheral relationships.

Both loneliness and social isolation are connected to inadequacy of social relationships, either perceived or actual (Social Exclusion Unit, 2006). The difference is in the subjectivity of the concepts: loneliness is an undesirable, subjective feeling whereas social isolation may lead to loneliness but does not necessarily do so. It is possible to be socially isolated and not feel lonely but research has demonstrated that most lonely people are socially isolated (Andersson, 1998; Townsend, 1957). It is also clear that living alone might increase the risk of social isolation, particularly where there has been a recent change in the household composition. Therefore, social isolation may be acute for older people who have been bereaved, not just because the

spouse is no longer in the household but also because bereavement may alter the nature and focus of other social relationships (Morgan & March, 1992).

Findlay and Cartwright (2002) have suggested other losses which may contribute to social isolation including losses of health, transport and relationships which may be more likely in later life. Loss of hearing, vision and deterioration in general health can make it difficult to initiate new relationships as well as make it problematic to negotiate going out. Cognitive impairment and depression may cause the sufferer to lose confidence when interacting with other people. It is difficult to ascertain whether poor health causes social isolation or whether social isolation is a factor in the development of health problems. The problem of health and relationships therefore appears to be circular (Anderson, 2001). Transport, especially in rural areas can make it expensive to meet friends and family face-to-face and even impossible where there is no public transport infrastructure in place. As well as the loss of an intimate relationship, relationships losses may occur through geographic mobility of family and friends and the older person may move into housing with support, leaving longstanding friends behind.

Again, individual differences have to be considered as well as other barriers to social participation. As discussed above, some people do not require as much company or social interaction as others and may be quite happy with a network so small that they would be described by researchers as 'socially isolated'. A recent UK study on well-being and lone older men demonstrated that differences between men in their level of isolation were often based on a continuation of their previous situation. Men who were used to being alone and having a limited social network were accepting of this as the norm for them and even found it desirable. For some men, however, lack of sufficient social contact led to feelings of isolation and was an unwelcome situation (Sopp, Miller, & Gunnell, 2007). There may be many ways that social inclusion can be improved for the second group of men, including better transport, appropriate social activities, safer neighbourhoods and adequate financial support.

Previous life experiences will influence the roles older people can access in later life. Family and friends are usually important components of our social network (Victor, 2005). Having children and siblings can provide roles as father, grandfather and brother, in the case of older men (Sorensen & Cooper, 2010). Being part of an extended family can reduce social isolation if relationships are positive. However, being dependent on family for care can in some cases lead to overly protective behaviour on the part of the carer. For example, they may express concern

about the safety of an older man which can result in them restricting his activities which in turn can cause his social isolation. Finally, technology may have the potential to lessen feelings of loneliness or social isolation through virtual relationships which can take place within the home but we do not yet know if such relationships are considered an attractive alternative to face-to-face interaction by older men who live alone.

This chapter has demonstrated the complexities of defining and conceptualising living alone, loneliness and social isolation, the interconnections between and possible overlaps of all three terms (Figure 4).

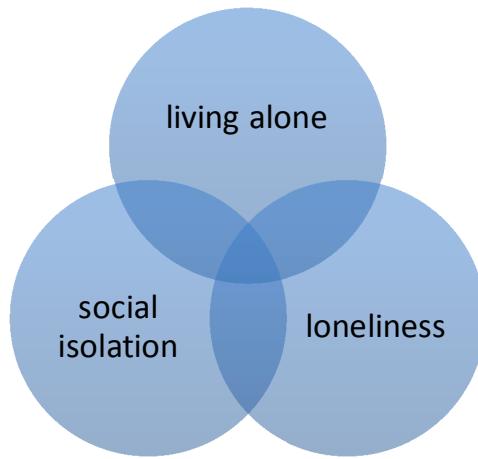


Figure 4. The interconnections and overlaps of living alone, loneliness and social isolation

The literature has highlighted the paradox of living alone as desirable for older people but at the same time as problematic as older people are viewed as being 'at risk' when living alone. We do not know if there might be positive benefits for older men of living alone. The above has also emphasised the importance of individual differences, as well as an understanding of the life course of individuals, especially the route to living alone. There appears to be no single cause of loneliness felt by older people but there are some conditions under which older people are more likely to feel lonely, which include living alone and recent loss of a partner. Both conditions may apply to older men living alone, depending on the route to living alone.

Individual older people will reach old age with certain accumulated experiences and those experiences will vary between men and women but also within groups of men and women. The reported disadvantages women face in later life, particularly in relation to poverty (Hoff, 2008) and health (Arber & Cooper, 1999), have been extensively explored by others (Arber, Davidson, et al., 2003b) but we know far less about the lives of older men who live alone and their social needs. This chapter has sought to explore the, at times, tenuous connections between living alone, loneliness and social isolation, exposing the gaps in our knowledge of older men's later life experiences. In order to understand the interplay of individual development and environmental factors, the following chapter (Chapter Five) will explore the psychosocial aspects of ageing and wellbeing in later life, again with a consideration of relationships with others and their possible benefits to development and psychosocial wellbeing.

Chapter 5

Psychosocial development and wellbeing in later life

Introduction

The study of ageing is multidisciplinary with each discipline bringing its own theoretical stance and research methods (Bond, Briggs, & Coleman, 1993). Each discipline thus has a focus on specific aspects of the ageing process. Chapter Two set out the significance of social policies for social relationships and engagement in communities. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), that is termed the macrosystem and provides the broadest and most encompassing influence on older men and their social experiences. Chapter Three examined the exosystem influence on the availability of social relationships, access to social networks and the accumulation of social capital. Living alone and the differences between loneliness and social isolation have also been discussed, all the time with a focus on understanding what we know about men's relationships across all of the systems within the model, as well as what we need to explore. The final literature review chapter will look at what we know about psychosocial development and wellbeing of older men in later life.

The field of psychology can sometimes offer a picture of decline in later life (Stuart-Hamilton, 2006) if its dominant model proposes psychological growth and development in early life, followed by stability in mid-life and then inevitable decline in later life (Labouvie-Vief & Blanchard-Fields, 1982). However, there are many caveats to this and it is necessary to look at the individual and his or her experience of ageing rather than make statements about the 'typical' older person. For example, although living alone and social isolation are often viewed as pathological concepts (Victor, et al., 2009), there may be positive aspects to living alone and, as the previous chapter suggested, some people may not feel lonely despite being categorised as socially isolated by researchers or practitioners. Again, the route to living alone is likely to influence the way an older person adapts to and experiences living alone. Stuart-Hamilton (2006, p.233) suggests that 'making a statement about a typical older adult means accepting that the said person will come equipped with a wide range of options'. There are, of course, certain themes that are more likely to appear in old age such as increasing social, emotional and physical dependency, bereavement, facing issues of own mortality and finding meaning as the

end of life approaches (Magai, 2008). However, the way individuals deal with those issues will vary and psychological ageing is influenced by many social, cultural, historical and environmental factors which must be taken into account, as well as the opportunities and options available to ageing individuals, including social relationships with others. Therefore, it is necessary to view lives in the context of current, as well as previous experiences. In other words, through life-span psychology approaches and life course sociology. Life-span approaches are usually concerned with person-level psychological variables and life course approaches, in contrast, focus on the interplay between biography and situation (Shanahan & Porfelli, 2002). This chapter, then, will consider psychosocial development across the life course, particularly the theories of Erikson and Jung as their theoretical approaches are particularly relevant to later life. It will also explore identity as a relational concept and attachment relationships as providing fulfilment of the need for human intimacy. Finally, resilience and the ability to cope with losses in later life will be considered.

Psychosocial development across the life course

Although people change as they grow up and grow older, they do not become totally different people. As well as changes, there are continuities and 'past behaviour and temperament are reliable guides to the future' (Sugarman, 2001, p.2). Development therefore needs to be considered across the life course when exploring the behaviour, experiences and positive functioning of older people. Here I will discuss Jung's analytical psychology and Erikson's life-span theory of psychosocial development, as both theories pay particular attention to development across the life-span and are therefore relevant to this review of older men's development.

The psychology of Jung

A major contribution to the field of developmental psychology has come from Carl Jung. Jung was initially influenced by Freud's theories of psychoanalysis but argued that Freud was too focused on sexuality as a motivating force (Stevens, 1991). He rejected Freud's psychic energy model which viewed the libido as exclusively sexual. He also rejected another fundamental part of psychoanalytical theory, namely the universality of the Oedipus complex. In particular, Jung

denied that the conflict was inevitably sexual; instead he suggested that it was spiritual. Jung's theory is of particular interest as it gives importance to adult development, unlike Freud.

Jung divided the life span into four main developmental stages: childhood, early maturity, middle age and late maturity (Staude, 1981). Running through Jungian theory are principles of growth, development and individuation. Individuation of the self is a journey of self-discovery where individuals finally become what they were destined to become from the very beginning (Stevens, 1991). Jung saw the mid-life crisis as important for establishing new patterns of development for the second half of life (P. Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004). Individuals reconsider their earlier goals and relationships and either create new paths or stagnate (P. Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004). In his critical discussion of identity in later life, Biggs (1997) draws on Jung's concept of individuation. Through the process of individuation, the parts of the self that have been suppressed during the first half of life become more evident in the second half of life and hence it is a discovery of new possibilities as well as an expansion of the continuous self in new contexts (Biggs, 1997). Older people may discover new interests and abilities in later life. Their lives can become more meaningful if they are able to explore those interests and abilities, even if support is needed to enable them to do so.

Erikson's psycho-social stage theory

Erikson (1950) added a social perspective to Jung's psychological theory. His work on developmental psychology built on psychoanalytical theory but stressed the importance of social determinants of personality rather than innate instincts (Erikson, 1968; 1982). Child development, according to Erikson, cannot be understood outside the social context. In other words, it is necessary to look at the social environment in which the child is developing (Erikson, 1950). He developed a theory of stages and proposed that personality development continues over the life cycle, from infancy to old age and is, therefore, relevant to the current research. Furthermore, he presented a more optimistic view of ageing by attributing greater strength to the rational and adaptive ego. The work of Erikson has been particularly influential in relation to older people as although his main interest was in child and adolescent development, he also took an explicit interest in the stages of later life. Coleman and O'Hanlon (2004) suggest that one of the lasting achievements of Erikson's theory is to bring to the attention of gerontologists

the importance of psychological and social conditions that might enable people to flourish in later life.

Erikson (1968) proposed 8 stages of personality development, the eighth and last stage will be considered here. Erikson named the psycho-social challenge of this stage 'Ego Integrity versus Despair'. Only by successfully resolving the preceding seven developmental crises can individuals feel that they have lived a life worthwhile, that is, achieve ego integrity. The antithesis assigned to ego integrity is despair. There may be many reasons for experiencing despair in older age according to Erikson and colleagues (1986). These can include regrets about the life lived, aspects of the present life which may not be satisfactory and fear and uncertainty about the future. However, if ego identity prevails over despair, it results in the ego quality of wisdom. Erikson et al (1986, p.37) formulated this final strength as 'detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself'.

One criticism of Erikson, and also of Freud and Jung, is that their theories are based on clinical experience and personal reflection rather than developed in the context of empirical research (P. Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004). Another criticism of stage theories is that they are based on a heterosexual and Western cultural view of the nuclear family. The family life cycle, consisting of marriage, child-rearing, the empty nest and, in particular for men, retirement from paid work is, thus, portrayed as the cultural norm (Applegate, 1997). Not only is that not the case for all cultures but it is also less likely to portray the family cycle of contemporary culture where women have fulfilling careers, delay child-bearing and both gender spend longer in education. I return to Erikson's theory of development below, in the discussion of identity.

Gerotranscendence

The theory of gerotranscendence is concerned specifically with development in later life (Tornstam, 2005). The theory aims to get away from the polarised theories of change versus continuity and either-or outcomes where older men who do not manage to resolve previous developmental crises are assumed to end life unhappily (Applegate, 1997). The theory of gerotranscendence proposes that there is a change of meaning and importance of relationships in later life, with individuals becoming more selective about their relationships and finding an

increased need for solitude and is therefore potentially useful for understanding the relationships needs of older men living alone (Tornstam, 1992).

Drawing on Erikson (1950) and in an attempt to provide empirical evidence for a positive developmental theory, Tornstam (1997) has put forward his theory of gerotranscendence. This is a theory which emphasises change and development during the latter part of life. In a qualitative study of changes in worldview and self-attitudes, he demonstrated that older people did desire some detachment from life, as suggested by Erikson's model. However, it was viewed as part of a development of becoming more selective and the older people expressed a need for positive solitude but this was not interpreted as loneliness or disengagement by the participants. Tornstam (1997) argues that from a more 'traditional' perspective, the older people's wish to detach themselves from life to a certain degree, would be viewed as a negative disengagement 'or as part of a social breakdown syndrome' (p. 153). The 'traditional' perspective to which he refers is the performance oriented perspective where productivity and effectiveness is valued over weakness and dependency (Tornstam, 1992). The difference between Tornstam's theory of gerotranscendence and Erikson's stage theory of psychosocial development lies in the final achievement; for Erikson it is ego integrity and for Tornstam it is gerotranscendence. Erikson (1950, 1982) proposes a backward integration of the life lived within the same definition of the world as before (when one was a younger person) whereas Tornstam (1997) proposes a more forward and outward direction with a redefinition of reality more relevant to the age a person has become. Jung, Erikson and Tornstam do have one thing in common: that people naturally progress towards a final developmental stage, regarded as maturation and wisdom.

Reminiscence and life review

Ageing, then, can be seen as a continuous process of adaptation where individuals are confronted with challenges to which they have to adapt, such as changing roles (Bohlmeijer, Roemer, Cuijpers, & Smit, 2007). It has been suggested that reminiscence can aid in the process of adaptation which is said to contribute to successful ageing through the following four processes:

- Identity-forming and self-continuity
- Enhancing meaning in life and coherence
- Preserving a sense of mastery
- Promoting acceptance and reconciliation

One would expect that individuals with a positive identity, high levels of meaning in life, high levels of mastery and the ability to reconcile events in their past lives will age more successfully and have increased psychosocial wellbeing (Bohlmeijer, et al., 2007).

Butler (1963) viewed the increase in reminiscence of the elderly not as a symptom of degeneration but as a normative or universal process. He argued that it was brought about due to the realisation of approaching death and was characterised by the return to consciousness of past experiences. Particularly, unresolved conflicts return to consciousness and such conflicts may be reviewed many times and eventually integrated into a coherent and meaningful life story with the help of a counsellor (Butler, 1995). There is, of course, a possibility that past conflicts will not be resolved and regret becomes overwhelmingly painful resulting in depression, terror or panic and even suicide as the individual feels that his or her life has not been worth living (Butler, 1995). Life review is therefore consistent with the developmental tasks described in Erikson's (1968) stage theory, particularly the eighth stage of 'Ego Integrity versus Despair' as the term despair implies that the outcome may be psychologically undesirable.

Although Butler made little distinction between reminiscence and life-review, later researchers have attempted to do so. Reminiscence is considered a part of life-review but reminiscence alone is less structured and systematic than the life-review process (Bohlmeijer, et al., 2007). Reminiscence is more concerned with certain moments in the past rather than the entire life. Life-review may be used as an intervention similar to psychotherapy and occurs in a dyadic relationship (Butler, 1995), whereas reminiscence can take place in a group setting and serves to improve not just psychological wellbeing but also to increase socialisation and improve communication skills (Haight & Burnside, 1993). Reminiscence may consist of private, internal thinking or external communication in a social setting, such as an interview setting where thoughts are elicited by questions or prompts (e.g. photographs) (G. Cohen & Taylor, 1998). Private reminiscence may be involuntary and brought into consciousness without any preceding intentional retrieval (Berntsen, 1996).

Wong and Watt (1991) attempted to develop a comprehensive taxonomy to classify reminiscence so that types of reminiscence associated with successful ageing could be determined. On the basis of past research, they identified six types of reminiscence:

- Integrative – attempt coherence of past and present
- Instrumental – problem-focused coping strategy
- Narrative – describes past memories
- Transmissive – passing on of culture and personal heritage
- Escapist – defensive, glorifies the past
- Obsessive – persistent rumination, despair

Wong and Watt (1991) found that people who were assessed as ageing successfully showed more integrative and instrumental reminiscence, concluding that only certain types of reminiscence are beneficial.

Young people have been found to use reminiscence to relieve boredom, middle-aged people reminisce to solve problems and older people reminisce to maintain family relationships and friendships which they depend upon (G. Cohen & Taylor, 1998). Reminiscence, then, occurs across the lifespan and is a source of guidance for future plans and behaviour (Bluck & Levine, 1998). Butler (1963) also argued that people of all ages may at various times question their identity and use the past as a source of guidance, thus, reminiscence is related to identity development and maintenance. Theories related to identity development will be explored next.

Identity development

Identity, used both in the sense of individual identity (self as a certain kind of person) and collective identity (identification of self within a group), is a concept used in psychology and sociology. The way older people view themselves as a certain kind of person may be at odds with the way others view them once old and frail. Collective identity may also become problematic for older men as they increasingly share the marginalised status of women and gay men rather than identifying with younger, heterosexual men (Applegate, 1997). The two aspects, individual uniqueness and life themes and social group membership, are linked in the

construction of identity as articulated by Taylor (1998, p.345) in relation to social policy discourse:

The paradox of uniqueness and sameness is easily resolved, of course, by recognising that individuals as unique selves are only formed within social relations between others and through the participation in and construction of social categories. There is no pre-social individual 'squatting outside' social relations.

The sociologist Charles Horton Cooley developed the idea of the 'looking-glass self' (Cooley, 1902/1983). He reasoned that individuals reflect the imagined appraisals of others. We imagine how we appear to others, how others judge that appearance and that develops our self-concept (Cooley, 1902/1983). A person's sense of self is, therefore, derived from interactions with others, stressing the importance of positive social interaction for identity development. The sense of self is not fixed but depends on how we evaluate other people's perceptions of us as we interact with different groups within the wider society. George Herbert Mead expanded the idea of others behaving in a certain way towards an individual which eventually leads to him or her taking on the role of the other (Mead, 1934). Mead divided the self into 'I' and 'me'. 'I' is the subjective element of the self and 'me' is the objective element, composed of the internalized representation of the roles of others (Mead, 1934).

Mead's symbolic interaction perspective forms the basis of identity theory which assumes that there is a reciprocal relationship between self and society (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The theory asserts that 'role choices are a function of identities so conceptualized' (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.286), and identities are organised in a hierarchy of their salience which is thought to reflect hierarchies within society. Goffman (1952/1997) pointed to the self as built out of many, loosely-integrated social roles. He did not consider the self as a unitary concept and if one social role (or self-identity) is destroyed, the individual will usually find consolation in another. Older people may therefore project multiple identities from the past and present and they may have to construct new identities as their life circumstances change, for example, if they become widows or widowers. Older men living alone due to the loss of a spouse will, therefore, construct new identities as single men or widowers but such constructions need to take place within a relational context.

Identity has traditionally been viewed as a fair static entity but contemporary perspectives on social identity stress the importance of a dynamic approach to identity (Biggs, 1999; Giddens,

1991). Individuals maintain a continuous sense of self through repeated interactions with people they have formed emotional attachments with (Bowlby, 1980). Weeks (1990, p.88) suggests that 'identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others'. Bonanno, Papa and O'Neill (2002, p.195) argue that, accordingly, when interactions with a person important in the life of an individual cease, the self can be experienced as 'fragmented and incomplete'. One implication of the view that the self is multidimensional is that when faced with loss, a well-developed self will be able to withstand the emotional impact of bereavement. The extent to which the bereaved person has developed a self which includes relationships outside the marital relationship will determine the grief. Therefore, a person whose sense of self was constructed primarily by a marital relationship will experience more fragmentation of the self (Howard, 2000; Weiss, 2001). For many men, their primary relationship is with a spouse (Askham, 1994; Davidson, 1999) hence they may not have initiated or maintained many other relationships outside the marriage and will therefore struggle to overcome the feeling that a piece of them is missing (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993).

Ageing identities

Continuity of self amid changes across the life of an individual was explored by Kaufman (1986). By conducting life story interviews with older people, she discovered that people create themes which give substance to their perceptions of who they are. Older people deal with problems and changes as they arise in the same way as they have been doing throughout their lives and interpret such problems and changes in the light of the themes established earlier in life (Kaufman, 1986), suggesting that older people adapt to changes much like younger people. The process of constructing a unified self is on-going, as explained above. In that way, identity can be viewed as both a cumulative process as well as a current phenomenon. Kaufman (1986) found that the older people in her study did not define themselves as being old although they knew that they were old and also were aware of their limitations (e.g. physical decline). Instead, they described themselves in terms of themes which had evolved throughout their lives and through which they understood themselves, demonstrating the influence of the past on their present identity.

Myerhoff (1978, p.222), in her anthropological study of the process of ageing, found that the sense of continuity with a past self was 'actively sought and maintained by examining, selecting,

interpreting and connecting elements from one's inner and outer history'. She suggested that it was particularly important for older people to experience the self as a continuous being as they have vast and varied memories to make sense of. If older people do not feel old, they are unlikely to want to solely mix with or specifically seek the company of other old people. It is more likely that their identity as, for example, handyman or teacher will encourage them to socialise with other people with similar interests whether they are young or old.

One potential problem for individuals of the idea of 'agelessness' is that retaining a youthful spirit, whilst at the same time the body grows old, can produce an artificial division of the self (Andrews, 1999; Bytheway, 2000). However, Bytheway (2000, p.786) suggests that it is 'not so much a denial of age as a reassertion of identity' that makes individuals attempt to separate self from the body. Kaufman (1986) also suggests that older people do not perceive meaning in ageing itself. Instead, they perceive meaning in just being themselves in old age. Gibson (2000) speculates that when people say that they do not feel old, what they really mean is that they do not identify with the stereotypes of older people. Being considered old or elderly is offensive to many people and Bytheway (1995) has called for the renouncement of the word 'elderly', suggesting that a relative rather than an absolute age category should be used. It is unlikely that eliminating a category will also eliminate the dynamics of the oppression, rather, it is likely that the 'us' (young) and 'them' (old) distinctions will persist (Andrews, 1999). Calasanti and Slevin (2001) argue that the words we use not only signify what we intend but they also denote opinions and values which often go unspoken. Therefore, they suggest that it is ageist to call older people anything other than *old* as, although the term carries stigma, it would be wrong to suggest that old people are not really old but instead measured with relation to younger people as being *older*. They call it 'age-blindness' as it adopts a stance which pretends that age does not matter (p. 46). The title of this thesis and the content refers to *older* people, not in opposition to *younger* people but as an acceptable and recognised way of describing people who are aged 75 and over. An example is the title of Tinker's book which changed from *Elderly People in Modern Society* to *Older People in Modern Society* in the later editions 'because of a growing recognition that the term "elderly people" gives the impression of a clearly defined group' (Tinker, 1997, xv).

Older men and masculinities

Later life masculinities is a much neglected topic despite a burgeoning literature on (young) men and masculinities (Thompson, 2006). Masculinities differ between cultures, environments, historical times and men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity in Western society is considered the ideal type but many men do not accomplish that. Hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinate masculinities some of which relate to age, relationship status and sexuality (Connell, 1987). Within hegemonic masculinity manliness is constructed such that men are expected to be independent, tough, aggressive, competitive, physically competent but emotionally restrictive (Smith, et al., 2007). Clearly, old age including widowerhood and physical frailty provide a challenge to masculinity and what it means to be a man and requires negotiation in order for older men to preserve a sense of masculinity (K. Bennett, 2007). In order to preserve notions of masculinity, older men may strive to remain independent and self-reliant in the face of losses of relationships by avoiding seeking help. If physically frail, they may withdraw from interactions with others in an attempt to preserve their masculine identities.

Masculinity and ageing identities may be even more difficult for gay older men. Although a diverse group, the socio-historical era in which gay men grow up will influence the availability and acceptability of a gay identity. Homosexuality became legalised in the UK in 1967, hence men born in the 1920s and 1930s will not have been able to openly disclose their sexuality as young men. This often lead to gay men following the socially acceptable path into marriage and child rearing whilst denying their gay identity (Bozett, 1982). Studies have found that gay men are more ageist and worry more about negative evaluations by others than do lesbian individuals (Schope, 2005). Gay men, from the generation under discussion, may internalise the negative stereotypes they have been exposed to and find it hard to be accepted by both gay and non-gay populations, which in turn can lead to a reluctance to form meaningful relationships (Friend, 1991). Identity is founded relationally, as already discussed, but if those with whom one tries to form relationships are discriminating, both because of age and sexuality, and are also the cause of exclusion and repudiation, it can be hard for gay older men to sustain a salient identity (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001; Fuss, 1991).

The sociologist, Bauman (1995, p.82, italics in the original), suggests that 'one thinks of identity whenever one is *not sure* of where one belongs'. Difficulties may occur when one is not sure

where to place oneself when there are many choices of behavioural patterns. It is necessary to know that people around would accept a certain behaviour as right and proper (Fortier, 2000). This may apply to men both as men but also as older people. Feeling ageless may not give men the freedom to *act* ageless and being an older man still carries masculine ideals (Connell, 2005; Gradman, 1994). Such identity constructions may make it hard to interact in settings designed and dominated by older women.

The above demonstrates the necessity of others in personal development. Social relationships or interactions are thus required to sustain a sense of identity. Although Erikson's theory of adolescent identity crisis suggests the development of identity in the early part of life, more contemporary research has demonstrated changes throughout the life course and, in particular, the re-negotiation of identity in the second half of life (Biggs, 1999). Erikson's theory was formulated during the post-war years and the situation of older people, particularly in the developed world, has changed (P. Coleman, Ivani-Chalian, & Robinson, 1999). Older people may take up educational classes, travel or even work part-time, just as younger people do, and it is possible that in the future, older people will be able to access an even more diverse menu of roles (P. Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004). With the relational nature of identity in mind, below I review some of what is known about relationships in later life in terms of attachment, the loss of attachment, in particular due to bereavement, and resilience and coping in the face of losses.

Attachments across the lifespan

Attachment relationships are formed in infancy and the style of early attachments is thought to influence the ability to form close relationships later in life. Therefore, I will explore the growth of attachment theory from a focus on infancy to a consideration of attachments across the lifespan. Attachment issues may throw light on the distress felt by older people when facing separation and losses, such as illness and death, which become increasingly likely later in life.

Social psychologists argue that there is a 'universal human tendency to form close relationships' (Hazan & Shaver, 1994, p.1). The motivational system that gives rise to a close emotional bond between a parent and a child is also thought to be responsible for the bond that develops between two adults in emotional relationships (Fraley, 2004). In order to understand adult social relationships, it is therefore necessary to look at attachment theory. Bowlby's (1969,

1973b, 1980) theory of attachment originated in observational studies of children during infancy, and has stimulated research on attachment during childhood, adulthood and, to a lesser extent, later life (Magai, 2008). The empirical origins of attachment theory and the classification of attachment relationships stem from the work of Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). They devised a system of classification of relationships based on separation and reunion behaviour in a laboratory setting, called the Strange Situation. It was initially a theory to aid understanding of the child's tie to the mother and attachment behaviour has the predictable outcome of bringing the child closer to its caregiver (Cassidy, 1999). Proximity between the mother and child in turn increases protection and chances of survival, from an evolutionary perspective (Cassidy, 1999). An infant uses his or her caregiver as a secure base from which to explore the environment (Ainsworth, et al., 1978). If the attachment system is activated then infant play and exploration declines whereas if the attachment system is not activated, exploration and play is enhanced (Cassidy, 1999).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) explored romantic relationships using attachment theory as a framework. Their aim was to create a coherent framework for understanding not just love but also loneliness and grief at different points in the life course. In contrast to childhood attachments, adult attachments are typically reciprocal. Adults can usually derive comfort from the knowledge that the attachment figure can be contacted if needed and the attachment figure is usually a peer or sexual partner (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). They argued, however, that romantic love is a process of becoming attached and therefore shares the characteristics of the child-caregiver bond. They also suggested that other types of close relationships will share those characteristics. Their findings demonstrated that adults with different attachment styles differed in the way they experienced their romantic relationships and attachment style was related to beliefs about the relationship and about oneself. Securely attached individuals were found to have relationships characterised by friendship, trust and happiness. Anxious or preoccupied attachment was marked by jealousy and obsessive preoccupation with their partners and emotional highs and lows. Finally, avoidant or dismissive attachment was manifested as fear of intimacy and a pessimistic view of relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Attachment style, then, may influence older men's views of relationships.

Another central thesis of Bowlby's theory was the internal working model (Bowlby, 1969; Winnicott, 1965). Based on cognitive psychology, internal working models involve the mental representation of the self, the attachment figure and the environment (Cassidy, 1999). They can

help individuals manage their social world by predicting the behaviour of others, plan their own behaviour and thereby achieve relational goals. Working models tend to accommodate to new information in early development and later on, once established, they guide the processing of information and assimilate it to the existing structure (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994). Although Bowlby (1969) saw changes to inner working models as generally slow, they do tend to be adjusted to new experiences, particularly when the lack of fit between the inner working model and reality becomes impossible to manage (Bretherton, 1985). The reason inner working models can be resistant to change is that they tend to be self-fulfilling (Collins & Read, 1990). For example, if an older man expects to be ignored by his neighbour, he will behave in a way that does not encourage the neighbour to strike up a conversation, thereby confirming his belief that the neighbour is disinterested or unfriendly. As inner working models include memories of childhood attachment experiences, beliefs, attitudes and expectations of both self and others, the attachment style of an individual will influence the strategies for achieving attachment related goals and needs (Feeney & Noller, 1996). This will be relevant to the way older men go about strengthening or initiating relationships. Securely attached older men are likely to have few self-doubts and view others as dependable and trustworthy. Older men with avoidant or dismissing attachments will be less interpersonally oriented and view others with suspicion regarding their motives. They will feel a lack of control over their lives. Older men whose attachment style is anxious or preoccupied will be hesitant about interacting with others and find others difficult to understand (Feeney & Noller, 1996). This demonstrates that there will be differences in the way that older men will embrace opportunities to form new relationships.

Psychologists Bradley and Cafferty (2001) and Cicirelli (2010) have provided a useful overview and insight into attachment relationships in old age. On reviewing studies on attachment among older adults, Bradley and Cafferty (2001) found that overall the results point to an association between attachment patterns and various outcomes in later life in a theoretically consistent manner. Those outcomes included adaptation to chronic illness, reaction to death of a loved one and general well-being. The size of older people's social and attachment networks tends to reduce due to death of friends and family. Older married men's primary attachment figure is often the spouse and widowhood will involve the loss of that relationship. Bowlby (1969) proposed that one of the functions of a secure attachment relationship is to allow an individual to explore the environment. Securely attached older men would therefore feel more motivated to continue to explore, learn and achieve (Cicirelli, 2010). Cicirelli (2010) found that the main

attachment figures in old age included adult children, deceased spouses and God. Lesser attachment figures included doctors, caregivers, clergy and pets. This demonstrated that older adults have a greater variety of attachment figures compared to younger adults (romantic partner, parents, friends and siblings).

Distribution of attachment styles have also been found to differ in samples of older adults compared to younger adults (Magai, 2008). Particularly, an increase in dismissing older adults has been observed (Magai et al., 2001). Proposed reasons for this increase have included the losses experienced by older adults (Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeau, & Labouvie-Vief, 1998) and cohort effects (Magai, et al., 2001). As older adults experience multiple losses, they may begin to feel that others cannot be relied upon to satisfy their attachment needs. In that case, older men may not be willing to commit to new attachment relationships. In an attempt to explain the cohort effects, Magai and colleagues (2001) suggested that the influence of Watsonian behaviourism, which advocated withholding of affection from children, reached its peak in the 1920s and 1930s and therefore children born during that period would adopt an insecure attachment style.

The changes in social relations across the life course have also been explored using the convoy model (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). According to this model, people are surrounded by a network of individuals but the network is not static. Changes in the composition occur with time and are influenced by situational factors as well as personal factors. Hence, age and gender, as well as role expectations and resources, say, influence the convoy at any one time. Differences in the function and structure of the social convoy have been found at different ages and in different cultures. Lang (2004) has developed a hypothetical trajectory of the changes in the social convoy from age 7-103, using the Antonucci (1976) circle diagram method to assess personal networks, in which both close inner circle relations and peripheral relations decline in old age. However, after peaking in mid-life, the decline in peripheral relations is most dramatic, suggesting that peripheral relationships reduce in numbers but it does not tell us whether such relationships reduce in importance as people age. It may be that opportunities for encountering peripheral relationships are reduced when people become older and frailer.

In summary, most of the research on attachment has focused on children and adults in romantic relationships. It appears that there is an association between attachment patterns and adaptation to losses in later life and that some attachment styles may be more conducive to strengthening old or initiating new relationships. Reduction in relationships in old age, resulting

from losses in the social convoy, need to be managed by older people in order to ensure a sense of well-being and therefore resilience, as a protective factor and the way older people cope with losses as they age will be examined in the next section.

Resilience and coping in later life

Differences in the way older men manage living alone in later life may be explained by resilience as a protective factor, promoted by social support systems. Resilience is a major feature of psychological well-being in later life (Bergeman & Wallace, 1999). Protective factors which may promote resilience fall into two broad areas: individual and familial or community support (Rutter, 1987). The second area is of particular interest to this study as it involves mobilising social resources in time of stress (Bergeman & Wallace, 1999). It includes ties between family members and support from outside the family, including friends, neighbours and acquaintances, and suggests the need to look at all types of relationships available to older men.

Like the work on attachment, work on resilience originated in studies of childhood (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Rutter, 1987; Staudinger, Marsiske, & Baltes, 1995). Originally thought of as protective or competence factors in the field of psychiatry and developmental psychopathology, resilience appeared to provide children exposed to stressful events with some degree of resistance (Masten & Obradovic, 2006). Resilience can be conceptualised as a mechanism that protects against the psychological risks associated with adversity (Rutter, 1987). Rutter (1987) does not view resilience as a fixed attribute of the individual. Therefore, an older man may cope successfully with adversity at one point in his life but react adversely if his circumstances change. Rutter (1987, p.317) puts the dynamic nature of resilience succinctly: 'If circumstances change, resilience alters'.

Resilient individuals are found to be better able to regain physiological and psychological equilibrium after a stressful event and to continue forward (Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2010). The potential protective effect of resilience lies in the successful management of risk (e.g. stressors such as bereavement and other kinds of loss) rather than evasion of risk and therefore requires some exposure to adversity. The adaptive changes that follow successful coping result in protection or resilience. Therefore, resilience is best viewed in terms of process and mechanism (Rutter, 1987). Masten (2001) has argued that resilience is a surprisingly ordinary phenomenon

and results from basic human adaptational systems. She also implies that there is little evidence to indicate that severe adversity has major lasting effects on adaptive behaviour unless adaptive systems (e.g. cognition) have been compromised prior to the adversity or as a result of adversity (Masten, 2001).

Coping and coping strategies have been explored using the cognitive stress theory (Aldwin, 2011). Coping is generally understood as behavioural and cognitive efforts to manage the demands of a person. Furthermore, '[d]efinitions of coping must include *efforts* to manage stressful demands regardless of the outcome' (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.134, italics in the original). Resilience and coping are therefore related constructs but also distinct as coping refers to the effort and skills used (whatever the outcome) and resilience refers to positive adaptation to adversity, as explained above. Coping responses, or efforts, may be both conscious, unconscious or even semi-conscious and, hence, individuals may not always be aware of their coping behaviours (Aldwin, 2011). Coping does not occur in a vacuum and the social context, friends and family, as well as personality, will influence the choice of coping strategies (de Ridder & Kerssens, 2003). Studies have explored proactive coping (Aspinwall, 1997; Ouwehand, de Ridder, & Bensing, 2008), that is, the ability to be future oriented by looking ahead and planning for the future, something which is particularly important for older people as they face changes due to ageing. Research has also found that the type of potential stressors, as well as situational and personality factors, interact in complex ways to influence proactive coping (Ouwehand, et al., 2008). Five basic coping strategies have been proposed after a review by Skinner, Edge, Altman and Sherwood (2003):

- Avoidance – denial
- Distraction – positive behaviours to minimise stress
- Problem solving – behavioural, cognitive and motivational actions
- Support seeking – reaching out for various types of support
- Positive cognitive restructuring – reinterpreting situations

The above five strategies were identified from hundreds in the literature and are all thought to be adaptive, depending on the situation. Older people have been found to use more nuanced and sophisticated coping strategies than younger people (Aldwin, 2011). Emotional regulation is thought to improve with age and older adults have been found to use it as a strategy to focus on positive emotions rather than rely on social support which is more usual for younger people

(Carstensen, Mikels, & Mather, 2006). Religious coping strategies are also more frequently employed by older people (Krause, 2006) as is relinquishing unattainable goals (Wrosch, 2011). Aldwin (2011) suggests that the strategies used by older people can be mistaken for passivity but are in fact highly adaptive.

Rutter (1987, 2010) has compared the process of acquiring resilience to that of acquiring immunity to infection. In order to become immune, individuals have to be exposed to, and successfully cope with, an infection. With a heterogeneous population of older men, some will have experienced adversity and some will have acquired skills to adapt and cope with subsequent adversity, making those men more resilient in the face of the changes that accompany ageing. However, it is important to remember that successful coping is not guaranteed in all situations as resilience is not a fixed attribute of an individual, as discussed above. Older men who have coped well with previous adversity and are considered resilient by family, friends and even practitioners, may find coping with the loss of a spouse as difficult as someone considered less resilient. That is because coping does not occur in a vacuum but is influenced by personality as well as situational factors, as discussed.

It has been suggested that the capacity for resilience is not found within the individual alone but also within the primary network of family and friends and even the neighbourhood (Zautra, et al., 2010). In that way, resilience should be viewed from a biopsychosocial perspective with many factors interwoven to produce the capacity for resilience. Opportunities and choices may also present themselves at critical times in an individual's life course such as marrying a supportive partner or moving away from an undesirable neighbourhood (Masten, 2001). A focus on individual resilience may not give the whole picture regarding coping with stressful situations when studying resilience. Casting the net wider and studying both close relationships and neighbourhoods in which an individual is embedded, that is, taking an ecological stance, is necessary to fully understand differences in levels of coping and managing later life when living alone (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Resilience in time of loss

As discussed above, resilience is the ability to cope with stress and this section will discuss bereavement as one kind of stress experienced by many older men who live alone later in life.

Some men will have experienced the loss of a spouse but others may have experienced other losses such as that of an adult child or sibling. Indeed, it is likely that very old individuals will have experienced multiple losses.

The death of a spouse has been assumed to be one extremely stressful experience that older people may encounter (Bonanno et al., 2002). Although it is not the intention to discuss the literature on loss and bereavement in any depth here, the death of a spouse is a major stressor in the lives of married men and resilience and coping are important processes with regard to overcoming the loss of a spouse and aiding psychosocial wellbeing in later life. Variations in the reaction to such a loss, that is, variation in grief and the ability to bounce back after the loss, have been observed (Bonanno, Papa, et al., 2002; Bowlby, 1980).

Traditionally, bereavement theorists from a psychoanalytical perspective, have stressed the importance of severing the attachment bond to the deceased and the inability to do so was often seen as pathological (e.g. Freud, 1917/2001). The 'normal' grief process has been proposed to occur in stages although there has not been agreement as to the number of stages (Bowlby, 1980). However, the stages have included an initial numbing, searching for the lost person, disorganisation and despair culminating in a final stage of some degree of reorganisation (Bowlby, 1980; W. Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). More recent studies have found that rather than becoming detached from the deceased during the last stage, it may be more adaptive to retain bonds (Bonanno, Papa, et al., 2002; Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). However, there is some dispute in the field of bereavement research as to the differentiation between 'the types of continued bonds that provide comfort and promote adjustment and those that reflect severe grief reactions' (M. Stroebe & Schut, 2005, p.489). It is possible that older men will continue to feel connected to a deceased spouse and that such a symbolic relationship will be meaningful, although little explored.

This chapter has reviewed literature related to psychosocial wellbeing in later life, particularly literature concerned with personal relationships. It has examined development and associated lifespan developmental theories. Furthermore, the development of identity, including contemporary theories of identity, was discussed. The relational nature of identity development was further related to attachments across the lifespan and resilience in later life, particularly in the face of losses. Wellbeing in later life is dependent on social relationships which may lead to social support and the ability to lead a fulfilling life. However, that cannot take place without

policies which support social connectedness and the maintenance or formation of social relationships, demonstrating the embeddedness of the individual to his or her wider social environment and the transactional influences of the individual and the environment.

Summary

The literature within this review has social relationships as the main focus. The ability to lead a fulfilling life needs to be supported by appropriate social policies which encourage social connectedness and the maintenance of social relationships. Chapter Two highlighted and discussed specific issues or areas of policy which are especially relevant to social relationships. Those included transport and housing policies although how such policies affect older men in particular is not clear. Men are more likely than women to be car-drivers and owners but when they are no longer able to drive, do the current transport provisions adequately allow them to access the kind of social worlds that they seek?

Social capital was discussed in Chapter Three as an asset of individual older men which may be built up through social relationships and by being embedded in social networks. In later life, social capital and social networks can provide social support, particularly when living alone. Social isolation can reduce opportunities for accumulation of social capital through social networks but older men may be able to draw on social capital accrued earlier in their lives. Access to other people and activities involving other people is necessary for building supportive social networks but we know little about the types of social ties that older men find meaningful. There is a particular dearth of research on peripheral ties which are often less visible. An assumption that men are less interested in social relationships may be too simplistic.

Chapter Four looked at the complexities of the concepts living alone, loneliness and social isolation. It emphasised the importance of the life course of individuals, individual differences and the route to living alone and stressed that without that knowledge, it is not possible to understand the meaning of living alone, feelings of loneliness and social isolation. It also identified some conditions under which older men may be more likely to feel lonely, mainly when living alone and having suffered a recent loss of a partner, but it is not clear who older men turn to, if anyone, to overcome loneliness or isolation.

Chapter Five addressed psychosocial wellbeing and development in later life. Well-being depends on social relationships which may lead to support (emotional and instrumental) but relationships are also necessary for later life development. The influence of the past on present experiences was emphasised by the available literature, particularly in relation to identity development and adapting to being an older man. Others are necessary in personal development but the literature does not suggest which others are important for older men's development. Bereavement can lead to continued bonds with the deceased and those relationships and their meaning to older men have not yet been considered within the social network literature. In summary, there is much we do not know about older men and their social worlds and relationships, especially which relationships are considered meaningful when living alone as an older man. The literature review has influenced the emergent methodology as described below.

Chapter 6

Methodology

Introduction

The literature review has indicated that there is inadequate research about the everyday experiences of being a man living alone in later life which can respectfully engage with the social worlds and relationship needs of older men. Many types of relevant relationships (e.g. virtual, symbolic and peripheral) remain largely unrecognised and, therefore, unexplored as existing studies have tended to focus on relationships which offer conventional support in later life and on experiences of widowhood rather than widowerhood. Thus, the weight of attention has been given to family ties with less attention given to ties with non-kin such as friends, neighbours and acquaintances. Indeed, the meaningful relationships of men who are not imbedded in intergenerational chains, such as childless men, have not been given much research time at all. Furthermore, research with older men has often measured their relationships with a 'feminine ruler' (Cancian, 1987, p.74) by comparing men's relationships against those of women, resulting in older men's relationships and social worlds being viewed from a deficit-perspective as lacking depth.

Exploring relationships which are meaningful to the men, but not 'regular' in the sense of not being visible to a researcher, requires insight from older men who are actively experiencing living alone. Gaining a form of access to their lives which did not also require my continuing physical presence, which would then have meant they were no longer living alone, as would be the case in an observational or ethnographic study, was negotiated through the use of collaborative photography within the research process.

The purpose of my study was, therefore, to examine all relationships which had significance for the men as well as their everyday social interactions and experiences of living alone. I intended to portray the 'mundane quality of the doing of everyday life' (Plummer, 2003, p.3) and the nuances in meaningful relationships so as to capture what is otherwise hidden or cannot be easily articulated. This chapter evidences the process of choosing the methodology and design of the study.

Motivation for the research

When, during my undergraduate study, I was introduced to the development of children, adolescents and young adults, I became interested in the continuing development of adults into old age, as well as the role of older men within families. Later, my Masters dissertation enabled me to explore adult male development from the perspective of grandfathering. Only one of the men interviewed for that research lived alone and this raised questions for me, given the rather distinctive social relationships that he discussed compared to the married men, as well as his relationships with his grandchildren. My recruitment of these men and how I set up appointments to interview the men in my grandfathering study tended to be facilitated through their wives or partners as it became clear how the women were often the initiators and perpetuators of the men's social contacts. I began to wonder about the constitution of social worlds of older men who were not living with a partner in old age.

As a volunteer for Age UK, I spent time with older men living alone, as I helped them to write their life stories. The men had all been diagnosed with dementia and the purpose of the life story was to compile their life experiences *as they remembered them*, the purpose was not to find out *facts* about their lives. A life story book was, thus, a compilation of life experiences which, as a whole, helped each man provide unity and purpose in relation to his identity. McAdams (1988) has suggested that 'the life story is a joint product of the person and environment' (p.18). In telling their stories, the men were situating themselves within the nested systems as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Therefore, in giving accounts of their lives, people refer to influences upon those lives, including family, friends, neighbourhood and wider structural and organisational influences, in order to put their lives in context and make sense of their past and present (McAdams, 1988).

I also made regular visits to two local sheltered housing complexes where I chatted to residents over morning coffee and generally 'hung out' with the older residents. All of those experiences fuelled my enthusiasm for learning more about the small but growing minority of men living alone that I came across, whose life stories drew on rather different social environments and seemed to take different directions from those whose lives were shared.

This study is, thus, an attempt at exploring the social worlds and the social connections that older men living alone value and articulate as meaningful. It specifically did not attempt to define relationships in a pre-determined hierarchical manner but sought to allow the men to

articulate their own significant social connections. I did not seek to quantify the extent or intensity of relationships as my interest lay in the type and diversity of relationships available to the men, allowing for more peripheral or weak ties to be included, such as acquaintances, virtual and past relationships. This meant talking to older men who were experiencing living alone so that they might inform me of the types of relationships that they valued. I wanted to explore their experiences as older men living alone in later life in a way that could inform practice and policy, thereby potentially facilitating greater inclusion of this diverse, minority group of older people.

Research aims and questions

The lack of research about the lives of older men living alone necessarily means that any study of the topic at this stage would need to be exploratory as so little was known. It also meant that the men participating in the study would need to be closely involved in the research process and therefore formulating questions for the research was challenging if preconceived ideas and theories with little relevance to their lives were to be avoided.

Aims

The aim of the current study was to conduct detailed, empirical research into the day-to-day lives of older men living alone, also taking into account their previous life experiences, to provide insight and knowledge as to their needs and desires regarding social relationships. The ways in which men aged 75 and over managed and interpreted their experiences of daily living, especially the social activities and networks in which they participated, would need to be explored. A particular research focus was on the kind of relationships the men wanted and whether and where they looked for new social or other connections at a time in their lives when they may often have experienced losses in their peer networks. In summary, there were two main aims:

- To engage older men in research in terms of setting the agenda, giving them some control over the research process and avoiding stereotyping this group of men as problematic and deficit in terms of social relationships.

- To understand the social worlds of older men who live alone in terms of social relations and social engagement. I would not be seeking to quantify the extent or intensity of relationships but to gain qualitative indications of the types of relationships that these older men sustained and valued through the co-construction of rich data which could convey meanings and experiences of the topic.

Research questions

The research aims were explored through the following research questions:

- How do older men experience living alone?
- What role does social interaction play in older men's lives?

Methodological challenges

In answering the above research questions, certain challenges had to be considered, in relation to avoiding stereotyping the men, encouraging participation and negotiating unobtrusive access to these men's worlds, as set out below.

Firstly, as relatively little is known about older men's views of relationships, one research method challenge was to avoid imposing stereotypes on the men taking part in the study. Assumptions of the men's needs and desires in terms of relationships could potentially ignore peripheral relationships not often considered in research on social networks. Consideration was therefore given to possible methods which were collaborative and had an emphasis on researching 'with' rather than 'on' the men. I wanted to involve the men in choosing what was important to them rather than me, as a younger woman (i.e. outside their age and gender group), setting the agenda.

A second challenge was finding a way to encourage the men to participate in the research. Men have been found to be less willing to participate in research which involves talking about personal matters (Cunningham-Burley, 1984, 1986; McKee & O'Brien, 1983; Oliffe & Mróz, 2005) and it was going to be essential to this research to talk to them about living alone and

possible loneliness which can carry a stigma. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003, p.57) have suggested that for men 'an interview situation is both an opportunity for signifying masculinity and a peculiar type of encounter in which masculinity is threatened'. When talking about life events in which older men may be powerless, for example the loss of a spouse, and topics which are emotional, the situation can, for some men, be unusually threatening (van den Hoonaard, 2009). A direct question and answer type of interview may be threatening to some men and I wanted to minimise that possibility. It was necessary to think of a method which might appeal to the men.

Thirdly, a means was needed to facilitate a less obtrusive form of researcher access into the lived worlds of older men living alone. An observational method was ruled out as, in being observed, the men would no longer be alone. Observing the men would give some indication of the number and possibly group affiliation of people they interacted with but observation alone cannot throw light on the meanings and experiences of relationships. Neither could an observational study provide information about previous experiences. It was necessary to use a method which would not be intrusive but at the same time allow me access to the everyday social worlds of older men as well as their previous experiences.

To summarise, the research aim was to elicit rich data about the experiences of daily life and relationships from individuals who have often been reported to be reluctant to take part in research which involves discussing personal matters. As little is known about men's relationships in later life, it was necessary to hear the voices of the men themselves rather than to prematurely rush to compare their relationships with the already extensive research on older women and women's relationships in general, which would run the danger of imposing issues and concepts which have emerged specifically from women's experiences and could not be assumed to be relevant to this group of men. All of the methodological challenges were considered when choosing the methodology which would enable me to answer the above research question.

The research paradigm

The type of research question being asked has implications for the methodologies that can be employed to answer them. My research questions were based on uncovering subjective

meanings and lived experiences. In other words, I wanted to generate knowledge from social actors' accounts and interpretations of their social life (Blaikie, 2000). Therefore, a qualitative research strategy was appropriate. To understand interpretations of everyday experiences, verbal data, in the form of talk, were needed. Such a research paradigm, which assumes that individuals interpret their experiences through interaction with others, is interpretivism. According to Blaikie (2000, p.115) interpretivism takes 'the meanings and interpretations, the motives and intentions, that people use in their everyday lives and that direct their behaviour – and it elevates them to the central place in social theory and research'. Furthermore, interpretivism aims to discover the insider view rather than impose the views of outsiders on a particular phenomenon (Blaikie, 2009). That notion was of particular importance in this study of older men where the researcher (me) was a younger woman; I was in every way an outsider seeking the views of insiders, hence, interpretivism offered several advantages for the design of this study.

Interpretivism is conceptually distinct from positivist thinking and offers a distinctive response to the assumption that scientific methods, used to study the natural sciences, can also be used to study social life and human behaviour (Bryman, 2004; Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007). The goals of research within the positivist paradigm are related to establishing laws through generalisation and statistical accuracy (Geertz, 1973). Positivist researchers abstract from the social world and rarely study it directly. They employ large numbers of randomly selected cases from which they calculate probabilities and test hypotheses. The rich descriptions that qualitative researchers strive for are not required within the positivist paradigm, as such data are less easy to generalise from (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The interpretivist researcher, on the other hand, searches for meaning and understanding of the world and human interaction (Schwandt, 1994) and 'are committed to an *emic*, *ideographic*, case-based position that directs attention to the specifics of particular cases' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.12). Interpretivism, then, does not remove human behaviours from their social and historical location. Instead, the way individuals negotiate their way around their world includes the interpretation of common activities and the resulting meanings constitute their social realities. Meanings are thus intersubjective and maintained through ongoing interaction (Blaikie, 2000).

An important aspect of interpretivism is social understanding or *Verstehen* (Weber, 1964) and requires the researcher to grasp the subjective meanings used by social actors and involves 'understanding the other' (Hollstein, 2011, p.406). Weber (1964) used the term *Verstehen* to argue for the need of different methods for studying the natural sciences and human social action. The dependence on *Verstehen* makes social phenomena distinct from physical phenomena and, therefore, different methods are required (Morrison, 2004).

As subjective meanings were sought from a group of which I, as the researcher, was not part of, an interpretivist approach was considered appropriate for this study. The main aim of the research was to understand the everyday lives and experiences of older men and the way experiences and behaviours are interpreted through interaction. I was interested in the specific rather than a generalised view of the relationships of older men, taking into due consideration the context of their lives both past and present.

Using the interpretive research paradigm in studying older men living alone

What is not the intention here is to polarise the virtues of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, which of course are often used in tandem. However, it is necessary to evaluate some potential advantages and limitations of the interpretive paradigm for this research to explicate my methodological choice and its relevance to this particular research study.

Qualitative research is open to new knowledge and does not frame the research as testing knowledge which is already known. It is therefore especially suited to exploratory research of phenomena previously little researched. Beck (1992, p.50) has suggested that individualisation leads to changes in 'societal characteristics and normal biographies'. Hence, qualitative research becomes increasingly important as explorations of those biographies and changing characteristics are undertaken. Flick (2009) also argues that a time of rapid social change is not a context suitable for traditional deductive methodologies and a move away from grand theories is more appropriate in an increasingly polarised and individualised world. She does, however, point out the reliance on theory as sensitising concepts for qualitative researchers.

A further strength of qualitative research is its understanding that research cannot be truly objective. Rather than striving for objectivity, qualitative researchers actively reflect on their influence in the research process, from the formulation of research questions and data co-

construction to the interpretation and writing up of findings. Through making the research process transparent, qualitative researchers are better able to demonstrate the credibility of their findings (Charmaz, 2006). Reflecting on the creation of knowledge and the constructed nature of the social world requires and further enables self-awareness and scepticism. In other words, interpretive researchers approach the world and the knowledge constructed critically (Moses & Knutsen, 2007). That is an essential issue for this research as a collaborative venture between the researcher and the researched.

Finally, the attention to detail, including non-verbal behaviour of the research participants and the cultural and historical contexts, can provide insight into the subtleties and complexity of lived experiences. This can be particularly significant in studies with under-researched and marginalised groups and therefore relevant to this study with older men who are seldom heard.

In summary, qualitative research pays attention to things and actions often ignored by quantitative research including meanings, motives and interpretations. Accessing and examining meanings and interpretations of experiences is central to this study as we know little about the social worlds and relationships of older men who live alone. Conducting the study within the research paradigm of interpretivism has, of course, implications for ontological and epistemological positions and those positions are discussed below.

Ontological assumptions

I now set out the nature of social reality as viewed within this study. The nature of social reality differs within different research paradigms. Within the interpretivist paradigm, as discussed above, social reality is the consequence of shared interpretations that social actors produce and reproduce during everyday interactions (Blaikie, 2007) This type of ontological assumption is referred to as idealist and can take a variety of forms including at one extreme, the existence of a reality independent from socially constructed realities. However, according to Blaikie (2009, p.93-94), in another form 'constructions of reality are regarded as different (multiple) perspectives on an external world'. The latter suggests that meanings are constructed and reconstructed and at any one time there are local and specific constructed realities, that is, there are multiple realities 'dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or

groups holding the constructions' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110-111) and it is those multiple realities that this study aimed to explore.

Moreover, the multiple realities are influenced by context (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). The ontological position of idealism, therefore, denies the existence of an objective reality (Bernstein, 1983), which fits with the exploration of the way older men construct meanings and stories of living alone and the process of becoming an older man living alone. Walsh (1974, p.19) summarises this position by suggesting that 'we cannot take for granted, as the natural scientist does, the availability of a pre-constituted world of phenomena for investigation' but we need to 'examine the processes by which the social world is constructed'. Human beings are thus viewed as malleable and adaptable in a world which 'appears differently to different observers; its appearance varies with the contextual setting (temporal, geographical, gendered, ideological, cultural etc.) of the observers' (Moses & Knutsen, 2007, p. 192). Thus, as Blumer (1969) suggests, individuals or groups can live in the same spatial location but experience very different social worlds as those worlds arise out of the way objects are defined by others with whom a person interacts.

My ontological stance of idealism is therefore appropriate for studying how different men may experience and interpret realities differently. Each man's reality is also influenced by context and therefore it is necessary to explore the realities of men who are living under various conditions and within different family contexts.

Epistemological assumptions

The epistemological assumption, on which this study is based, is concerned with how social reality can be known. Following the ontological assumption that social reality is the consequence of shared interpretations and meanings and, therefore, changing and negotiated with emphasis on the subjective inter-relationship between individuals, it is possible to infer that researchers are active participants in the construction of meanings during the research process. Hence, my interactions with the men in this study will influence the construction of a social reality based on shared interpretations. Such ontological and epistemological assumptions fit with the social constructionist perspective, that is 'social reality is not simply given but constructed' (Hollstein, 2011, p.406).

The term ‘social construction’ was first used by Berger and Luckmann (2007 [1966]). They proposed that ‘knowledge is learned in the course of socialization’ and ‘is at the heart of the fundamental dialectic of society’ (Berger & Luckmann, 2007 [1966] , p.51). Knowledge is, therefore, not discovered but constructed, however, not in any arbitrary fashion (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010) as although the person is viewed as being agentic, he or she is also constrained by society (Burr, 2003). Facts of the world do not exist independently of us as observers, waiting to be collected or discovered (Gergen, 1991; BG Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Instead the constructionist position asserts the ‘pluralistic and plastic character of reality’ (Schwandt, 1994, p.125). Accordingly, truth and knowledge are created and knowing is not passive but active as concepts and models are invented to make sense of experiences and those models are, in turn, continuously tested and modified (Schwandt, 1994). Each person will perceive the world differently, creating their own meanings from experiences (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism is therefore concerned with the processes by which individuals describe, explain and make sense of their world (Gergen, 1985) and each older man living alone will construct meanings from their individual experiences.

However, the focus should not just be on meaning-making as an activity of the individual mind but on the collective generation of meaning shaped by social structures and processes (Gergen & Gergen, 1991) as no one lives in a social vacuum but interacts with wider social structures. This study was concerned with the lived reality of older men who live alone and the way older men create meaning and experience life from their particular position in the social hierarchy. As an observer and an inquirer into constructions, I would need to see myself as involved in the co-construction of meaning rather than external to the process, supporting the above ontological assumption that social reality is the consequence of shared interpretations and meanings. As an outsider in terms of gender and age, I would need to be sensitive to power relationships within the co-constructions.

In summary, social constructionism holds that ontological assumptions are based on the precept that each of us is an active participant in the construction of our own world. Therefore, there are multiple realities. The epistemological assumptions accept that knowledge is co-constructed as the knower and researcher co-create understandings and knowledge is also intersubjective. Furthermore, knowledge is anchored in collectives as well as carried by the individual (Moses & Knutsen, 2007). Hence it is necessary to employ a methodology which identifies the socially constructed patterns of daily lives and to use tools appropriate to access that knowledge.

It is not possible to divorce the question of ontology from the conduct of social research. My ontological and epistemological assumptions of idealism and social constructionism hold that there are multiple realities which are constructed and reconstructed during interaction with others and which appear different to different individuals. Those assumptions have fed into the formulation of the research questions and the method used. To know about the lives of older men living alone, I need to gain knowledge of the 'inside'. That knowledge will be co-constructed during the interactions between the men taking part and me as the researcher and interpreted both during the interactions and the analysis of data. However, this raises challenges of accessing experiences of older men living alone without making assumptions of the significance of those experiences as an outsider. The way a method used to answer the research questions in this study was constructed will be set out below.

Constructivist grounded theory method

Constructivist grounded theory method was considered especially useful and appropriate for exploring the experiences and processes of living alone and the social worlds of older men. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and further evolved by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (1990, 2006). There are, thus, variations in the various approaches to grounded theory and it is important to point out some differences to justify the approach used here. Glaser and Strauss (1967) saw grounded theory as a method of discovery. The approach was initially developed in a climate of positivism and therefore aimed to gain the same status as quantitative work (Charmaz, 2009). However, Strauss and Corbin (1998), building on interactionism and the philosophy of pragmatism, moved the method forward. They recognised that knowledge was created through action and interaction and did not share the view of Glaser and Strauss that 'researchers' expert knowledge superseded that of their research subjects' (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p.40). Later, Corbin (2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) acknowledged that she had been influenced by contemporary thought, especially the writings of feminists, constructionists and postmodernists and the third edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research* have many similarities with the constructivist grounded theory method.

Charmaz (1990) developed constructionist grounded theory which she later termed constructivist grounded theory. She views constructivist grounded theory as a 21st century form of the classic grounded theory method:

Constructivist grounded theory loosens the method from its positivist roots, moves it into interpretive inquiry, and preserves and enhances its pragmatist heritage (Charmaz, 2008a, p.132).

In ontological and epistemological terms, differences between the 'classic' grounded theory method and the constructivist grounded theory method are similar to the differences between positivism and interpretivism. The table below summarises some of those differences (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011; Charmaz, 2009):

'Classic' grounded theory	Constructivist grounded theory
There exists an external reality	There are multiple realities
Data is discovered	Data is co-constructed during interaction
Researcher is objective, passive and neutral	Researcher's values, experiences and ideas affect the social process observed

Table 1. Differences between 'classic' and constructivist grounded theory

In practice, differences are concerned mainly with reviewing the literature and the reflexivity of the researcher. As data is discovered according to classic grounded theory, the literature review becomes the subject of some controversy. Glaser (2004) has argued that undertaking an extensive literature review violates the basic premise of grounded theory and may impair the researcher's ability to remain open (objective) to the emergence of new theory in the data (i.e. instead they risk forcing data and analysis to fit preconceived ideas). However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) see the literature as a way of sensitising researchers to the data allowing them to question the data using prior knowledge. Charmaz (2006) also accepts that researchers will already have knowledge of the topic area under study and it is more the transparency of the researcher and the analysis which determines whether data has been forced. It is therefore important to use sensitising concepts explicitly. In this study, I undertook a review of the

literature prior to the field work as I already had an interest in and knowledge of the lives of older men from a previous research undertaking.

Reflexivity of the researcher is necessary as data is considered co-constructed in constructivist grounded theory method. It means taking a reflexive stance towards participants, actions and situations which arise (Charmaz, 2009). In classic grounded theory method, the researcher is viewed as objective and separate from the 'discovery' of the data. The influences of the researcher's perspectives, political and otherwise, go unmentioned. Throughout the research process, I considered my own influence on the data, including the instructions given initially, the joint interpretation of the photographs and co-construction of data, as well as the final analysis.

The above makes explicit my own position with regard to the grounded theory method employed in the study. Constructivist grounded theory fits with my ontological and epistemological positions, as well as my feminist orientation towards interviewing (Reinharz, 1992). Hence, the grounded theory approach used in this study draws on the later writings of Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, 2011; Charmaz, 1990, 1995, 2006, 2008b, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Data collection (co-construction)

Above, I set out some methodological challenges as well as the conceptual framework for the study. This section will take the reader through the data collection method used. It is helpful to keep the methodological challenges in mind in order to justify the method:

1. Little is known about older men's views of relationships therefore the study needed to involve research not 'on' but 'with' the men taking part.
2. A method was needed which would encourage active participation of men in the research which would involve talking about personal matters.
3. Unobtrusive research access was required into the worlds of men who live alone.

During earlier research with grandfathers (Sorensen & Cooper, 2010), I had found that the men would often spontaneously introduce photographs and other objects during the interview process. The introduction of objects or photographs often happened when they found it easier to 'show' rather than 'tell'. I noticed how sharing the viewing of photographs sometimes

defused potentially awkward situations when talking about personal or emotional matters. That sparked my initial interest in using photography as part of the methodology from the outset of the research to tackle some of the research challenges identified earlier, rather than as an add-on later in the process. I attended various workshops to further my interest in and understanding of the use of different visual methods.

The use of photographs might help solve the issue of how to research 'with' rather than 'on' the men if they could be asked to take photographs of their daily lives, thereby deciding for themselves issues important to them⁸. Furthermore, using the photographs in the interview setting might reduce the intimacy of the interview situation and potential awkwardness when talking about personal matters and, finally, it can offer a means of addressing the difficulties involved in gaining access into the worlds of older men's daily lives. Below I take the reader through the use of photographs within the interview setting (photo-elicitation).

The photo-elicitation interview in social science research

One of the most widely used tools for collecting data in social science research is the interview (Douglas, 1985). However, the interview, in its standard question and answer form, may not always be suitable and Douglas (1985) urged researchers to become more creative interviewers so that both the quality and quantity of data may be changed. In the case of this study, collecting rich data through lengthy discussion about the men's lives was a priority and standard interviews might not provide this because of the documented reluctance demonstrated by men when invited to participate in research which involves talking about personal matters. The photo-elicitation interview is thus an attempt to change the quality and quantity of data.

Photo-elicitation interviews have been used extensively with various groups in society although less so in research involving older people. It is a method often used to decrease the power differential between the researched and the researcher (Packard, 2008). It can also reduce the potential awkwardness of standard in-depth interviews as there is familiar material to focus on. Previous examples have included exploring the working lives of children (Mizen, 2005), studies of mothers with learning difficulties (Booth & Booth, 2003), homeless adults (Packard, 2008;

⁸ Giving participants cameras and asking them to take photographs of their environment is also called auto-photography Ziller, R. (1990). *Photographing the Self*. London: SAGE..

Radley, Hodgetts, & Cullen, 2005), an ethnographic investigation of rural home care for older adults (Magilvy, Congdon, Nelson, & Craig, 1992), experiences of older people living with dementia (Hulko, 2009) and the illness experiences of prostate cancer survivors (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007).

Photo-elicitation involves inserting photographs into the interview setting to evoke comment, encourage lengthy discussion and reduce awkwardness arising from being put on the spot when talking about personal matters. Harper (2002, p.22-23) also believes that 'photo elicitation mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews' and 'may lead an individual to a new view of their social existence' (Harper 2002, p.21).

The method was first named by anthropologist and photographer John Collier in the 1950s as he studied the mental health of people living in changing communities in Canada (Collier, 1957). The photographs used can originate from various sources. For example, photographs found in the media or historical archives can elicit discussion about a previous era or changing environment (Collier & Collier, 1986). Images can also be created by the researcher and the captured images are then presented to the participant during the interview (D. Harper, 1986). Researcher-generated images are useful for theory-driven research as they allow the researcher to select, organise and present images based on the researcher's own research questions and existing theories (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007). There are issues to consider when the researcher decides what to photograph. First, the researcher will decide, based on preconceived ideas, what will be meaningful to the participants. This can lead to the omission of issues pertinent to participants and opportunities for increased insight into the world of the participants may be lost (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007). Secondly, there is often a temptation for the researcher to take more shocking, provocative or even beautiful pictures. In other words, researchers may tend towards more 'visually arresting' photographs (Orellana, 1999). Harper (1986, p.26) suggests that 'the quality of being "visually arresting" derives from meaning in the culture of the photographer rather than the culture of the photographed'. Images that the researcher, as photographer, consider too commonplace or uninteresting may, in fact, be the most meaningful to the participant (D. Harper, 1986).

An approach where the collaborators generate their own photographs, which are then used for photo-elicitation interviews, is more inductive by building rather than testing theory and more

suitable for exploratory research, and is thus appropriate for this study. The idea that the men in this study take images from their point of view can introduce issues that may have been poorly understood or overlooked by me, as an outsider (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007). The photographs can therefore capture and help convey a specific part of the world and point of view of the person who is holding the camera (Booth & Booth, 2003).

Using photo-elicitation in collaborative research with older men

As noted above, in previous research involving grandfathers, I found that the men often used photographs to explain or demonstrate issues. For example, relationships with others as demonstrated by the viewing of photographs of adult children and grandchildren. As my experience from the 'grandfather study' had suggested, and as the study progressed, men consistently seemed to be more willing to talk once I produced their photographs into our interactions. My initial invitation to 'Tell me about this photograph' would usually be enough and the men would converse and explain for lengthy periods. They would not only describe the images but talk beyond them and reflect on their day-to-day lives and relationships. Despite my interest in their social worlds as a whole, my particular focus here was on relationships and it was possible to introduce questions on the research agenda during the interviews while they were being led primarily by the men themselves (Appendix A). The photographs were not introduced by me in any particular order and not all of the photographs were necessarily discussed at great length. The photographs gave rise to different lines of enquiry than would otherwise have been the case. They allowed me entry into the worlds of the older men and gave me insight into their daily lives. By having the photographs available during the interview, the men were reminded of the daily things that they did and things that may not have come to mind if asked on the spot. The lengthy, in-depth interviews, centred on the photographs, also provided rich verbal data for further analysis. However, viewing the photographs as a representation of their daily lives was a very powerful experience and caused the men to reflect on their lives. Harper (2002, p.23) argues that,

Photographs appear to capture the impossible: a person gone: an event past. That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph and it leads to deep and interesting talk.

Several men had taken photographs of old photographs, which appeared to demonstrate the importance to them of past events. On reflecting, some would express regret about the past and wonder about the future. Photography, therefore, had the capacity to move beyond a purely illustrative function (Mizen, 2005) by eliciting talk and offered me a much deeper understanding of the social worlds of older men.

Van den Hoonaard (2009), exploring the experiences of widowhood and widowerhood using in-depth interviews, commented on gender differences in interviewee style and intensity. She found that men and women talked differently about their experiences and that the men were more 'business-like' in their approach and provided interviews about half the duration of the women's (one hour as compared to two hours, on average). The interviews with men in this study were comparatively lengthy, averaging 1 hour 40 minutes. While the two studies are not directly comparable, it does seem that longer interviews, when discussing personal matters with men, are not readily elicited. The style and pace of photo-elicitation interviews contributed to the relaxed atmosphere, conducive to lengthy talk and discussion about the research topic.

Older men and photo-elicitation: the logistics

The logistics of carrying out visual research will vary with the issues researched, the age and ability of the participants, and the sensitivity of the topic under investigation. However, there are decisions common to all studies involving photography which have to be made. Here I will discuss those decisions in relation to research with older men as collaborators.

The camera

An initial decision had to be made about the kind of camera to be used. Disposable cameras have been used extensively in visual research as they can be posted back to the researcher in pre-paid envelopes and have the added advantage of being cheap and easy to use. However, because of my fundamental interest in giving some degree of control over the research process to the men, I decided instead to use automatic digital cameras. Digital cameras offer the option to delete photographs at any time and therefore gave the men more choice over which pictures they finally allowed me to see. In her study with inner-city children, Clark-Ibáñez (2007)

reflected that, with hindsight, she would have made sure that the children were aware that they had the right to withdraw any photographs that they did not want to discuss; once the researcher has printed the photographs and therefore viewed them, the situation cannot be remedied. The use of a digital camera removed that problem as the men were able to make choices as the research process progressed and they were able to delete photographs that they may have regretted taking. This corresponds with the right to withdraw the verbal data from a research interview, as required for ethical approval. It is possible that sometimes individuals may say more than they intended to, especially during a less formal interview situation and where a trusting relationship has been established⁹. In that case, they may wish for some of their data to be withdrawn. The ability to delete photographs gave the men control over their visual data without involving me.

Another consideration is the number of photographs the participants take. A limit on the number of photographs produced by each participant was necessary in order to manage the photo elicitation interview and keep costs to an acceptable level. A disposable camera has a fixed and limited number of exposures whereas the number of images available to take with a digital camera depends on the quality settings as well as the capacity of the memory card. I wanted good quality pictures so that reproduction quality would be high, but at the same time, I limited the total number of images available to each man to 27 by using a low capacity memory card (128 MB).

Camera instructions and research guidance

At the initial meeting with the men, biographical details thought relevant to the study were noted (Appendix B). These included age, time lived alone, time in neighbourhood, relationship history, number of children, siblings and extended kin, previous occupation, available transport options and self-reported health status. The biographical data was thought relevant to the study because the impact of the social situation unavoidably influences individuals' perceptions.

The brief was kept very open in order to let the men decide what was important to them in their social worlds. The men were asked to 'Show me your daily life and world' which was an

⁹ See, for example, Finch, J. (1993). 'It's great to have someone to talk to': Ethics and politics of interviewing women. In M. Hammersley (Ed.), *Social Research: philosophy, politics and practice* (pp. 166-180). London: SAGE. in relation to interviewing women who are grateful to have someone to talk to.

indication that I was interested in everything about their lives. Some men found it difficult, initially, to work out exactly what I meant by that and in some instances it was necessary to give slightly more direction, for example: 'Take photographs of anything in your daily life that you value and/or enjoy'. The reason for the open brief was to allow the men to consider for themselves what was important in their daily lives and relationships rather than me placing assumptions on their lives and relationships.

Some men felt that their lives were not interesting enough but all of the men managed to produce a photographic account of their social worlds. I did not direct the men to take certain photographs nor did I train them in composition as the aesthetic of the photographs was not important. I did, however, teach them how to operate the camera so that they were able to proceed with the photography and left clear, written instructions and diagrams for them to refer to if they encountered difficulties with operating the camera (Appendix C). I also contacted the men during their time with the camera to ensure that they were not running into any unforeseen problems and they were able to contact me if needed. Some men required extra visits if they were unsure about operating the camera or, on one occasion, the batteries had failed unexpectedly.

At first, I had expected that the men would keep the cameras for seven to ten days (which would have included two weekends). On reflection, I realised that this was because I measured the men's lives with my own ruler. I expected the men to do different things during the weekends compared to the weekdays, reflecting my own working life. It became obvious, during the pilot studies, that many of the men needed to keep the camera for longer than ten days and most of the men kept the camera for over one month. The reason for needing the camera for longer was due to the time gaps between events which the men thought worthwhile photographing. Many of the activities or social arrangements in which the men were involved would take place on a monthly, rather than a weekly basis and in order to record those important social engagements, the men needed to keep the cameras for longer than anticipated.

Retrieval of the camera

As discussed, researcher contact was maintained with the men during their period using the camera, later arranging a convenient time for retrieval. The initial meeting and the retrieval of the camera, both served to establish trust and rapport with the men. Taking time to get to know my collaborators was important if the men were to trust me with personal information which they had never shared with anyone before and it enabled me to gain a better understanding of their situation (Liampittong, 2007). The visits were generally long and involved the exchange of news and a cup of tea or coffee in the men's home. The meetings provided richly informative field notes and were deliberately not audio-recorded to maximise the chances of the men feeling comfortable talking about their lives, trusting to memory and allowing 'the cream to rise to the top' (Stern, 2010, p.118). The final photo-elicitation interviews were audio recorded, with full consent from the men, as by that time a trusting relationship had been established (see Appendix G for a diagram of the research process).

After retrieving the camera, two sets of photographs were printed. Each man was given a set of his photographs to keep as a thank you for his collaboration and in recognition of his co-ownership of the research. Another set was numbered and labelled with identifiers for each man and used during the interview.

The use of pilot studies to refine the research design

Initially, I undertook three pilot studies. I asked three men to photograph their daily lives and used those photographs for photo-elicitation interviews. Pilot studies can serve to assess the feasibility of a research project and refine data collection strategies (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Thabane et al., 2010; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Thabane et al (2010) suggest that in both quantitative and qualitative studies, the rationale for a pilot study can be grouped under classifications such as process, resources and management. Process refers to the feasibility of carrying out the study design. Resources in terms of time and tools used also needed to be evaluated for their usefulness and, finally, I was able to refine the management of the data, particularly the photographs. Therefore, the pilot studies were useful for assessing the suitability of the digital cameras, the size of prints required or whether prints were more useful than viewing the photographs on a laptop.

As the process was only changed slightly for the main study, please see below for further details. However, there were some changes in terms of resources. For the pilot studies I used an additional tool which was a network diagram, adapted from Antonucci (1976). The network diagram is a hierarchical mapping technique consisting of concentric circles, which is usually used to present the closeness of members of the social support network (Appendix D). The collaborator is in the centre of the circles and is asked to map individuals in the social support network on the three circles, according to closeness. Although I was not primarily interested in relationships as a source of support, I felt that the diagram would assist the men in thinking about their various relationships. However, that was not the case. The men found it very difficult to think of any relationships to place on the circles and often appeared uncomfortable and concerned when they realised how small their social networks appeared on paper. They also felt the need to place family, adult children and siblings, usually, on the diagram even if, as I later discovered during interviews, they had minimal contact with them. In other words, the diagrams appeared to cause the men distress and they were not considered to be a useful tool for capturing the more 'hidden' relationships as they were difficult for the men to pinpoint or articulate both in a verbal and diagrammatic form. For the later interviews, I only used the photographs generated by the men.

Methods of recruiting the research collaborators

The study sought to recruit men aged 75 and over. The age was set in order to allow the recruitment of men who were no longer in work and therefore, potentially, did not have regular contact with work colleagues. As I was interested in the lives and social relationships of older men living alone, there were certain criteria which needed to be fulfilled:

- The men had to be living alone in the community and not in receipt of formal social care services. This decision was made in order to explore the daily lives of men who did not have regular access to others through agencies and consequent information through formal care services.
- The men needed to be willing and able to use a digital camera

As this was a qualitative study, exploring the detail of everyday life, I was not interested in representative samples for statistical purposes as would be the case with a quantitative study.

In recruiting the men, I was careful to avoid contacting places that the men may have been referred to by social services, for example day centres, for the reasons stated above. Older men living alone were approached, initially, through mutual friends. Although snowballing would have been an appropriate way of recruiting the first few men, it was not a successful strategy as the men who had already agreed to take part appeared not to know of other men living alone who might take part. Whenever I asked if they knew of anyone, they insisted that they did not. It is possible that they were unwilling to suggest other men because they did not want them to know that they were taking part in research themselves. They may have been reluctant to assume another man was aged 75 or over, or they may simply not have known any men living alone of the right age. Other researchers have found it useful to use partners as mediators when recruiting men for research (for example see Oliffe & Mróz, 2005). As the men in this study all lived alone, that was not an available avenue to pursue when recruiting. I found that men did not respond to advertising in village newspapers or local shops (Appendix E). However, they tended to respond positively to the idea of taking part when addressed in person, either through a gatekeeper or by me. I was invited to talk about my research on local radio and attempted to use this as an opportunity to recruit for the study but again, no one contacted me as a result. A particularly productive route was through local family doctors where information sheets about the research project were left (Appendix F). Other gatekeepers, such as sheltered housing managers, were also helpful and proved to be a useful way to recruit older men, especially as the study progressed, and I purposely sought out specific collaborators to elaborate or differentiate emerging categories also termed theoretical sampling within grounded theory methods (see data analysis section).

All of the men who expressed an interest in taking part contacted me by either telephone or email after receiving an information leaflet. I would respond, usually by telephone, and discuss further the nature of the research. I always encouraged the men to consult and discuss their collaboration in the research with family or friends. Every man who contacted me was happy to progress after the initial telephone conversation. A convenient time was arranged for a first meeting during which I would explain the research and the implications of taking part. During the initial meeting, I would also seek informed consent (written), record biographical information and demonstrate the digital camera (Appendix F). I did not encounter any

difficulties with gaining informed consent and always read through the form with the men (one man had very poor literacy skills). All of the men who decided to take part were excited about the photographic aspect, even if they had not used a digital camera before.

The collaborators

A total of sixteen men eventually took part in the study. Interviews took place between May 2009 and November 2010. The men ranged in age from 75 to 97 (mean age 82). They all resided in various parts of Norfolk, UK and were not in receipt of formal social care services. Norfolk is a largely rural county in the East of England with a population of almost 850,000 people. One in ten of the population are aged 75 and over and nearly 96% are white British (Norfolk County Council, 2009). Despite efforts to recruit men from ethnic minority groups, I was not successful. I contacted a local Muslim Association and worked closely with an outreach worker from Age UK who had access to local ethnic minority groups, including local travellers, but I was not able to access men aged 75 and over who were living alone from these groups. This may have been partly due to cultural differences. A young Jordanian man from the Muslim Association told me that leaving an older man to live and manage on his own would be very unlikely. He felt it was almost inconceivable, as his children would always look after him and have him living with them. A similar situation would be likely in a community of travellers where older men would never truly be living alone. I also tried to recruit men from homeless organisations and Salvation Army but again, I did not succeed. I was poignantly reminded by the organisations that such disadvantaged men rarely survive into old age. Indeed, a recent report from Crisis found that the average age of death of a homeless person is 47 years old (Crisis, 2011).

The men varied from having lived alone throughout their adult life to having lived alone for just six months (Appendix H). Only one man identified himself as gay and all the men were white British. They varied in their self-reported health status from good to poor health. Eight of the men were car owners, eleven had been married, three had never married and one man lived alone because his wife was in a residential home for the elderly mentally infirm. The routes to living alone were therefore varied and at times very complex, as demonstrated in Table 2 overleaf.

	Never married	Kin household	Married	Separated or divorced	Re-partnered or remarried	Bereaved	Separated or divorced	Living alone
Arbour								
Beejay								
Bridge								
Brown								
Crosby								
David								
Delaney								
Dennis								
Dickie								
Harris								
McBeth								
Pollock								
Rastus								
Smith							*	
Swalds								
Young								

*Mr Smith was separated from his wife only in a spatial sense as she was living in a residential home.

Table 2. The various and complex routes to living alone

The data collection (co-construction) process

The photo-elicitation method used has already been described above. Here, I intend to elaborate on the setting and interactions during the meetings and interviews. The meetings and interviews produced co-construction of data through shared talk and interpretations of photographs. Most of the men were very active within that process but some were slightly more reluctant to elaborate on their life experiences. Some men felt that the sharing of experiences was a mutual process and expected me to contribute with my own experiences, which at times I had to do in order to support the process of co-construction.

The meetings took place in the men's homes but one man initially met with me in a communal room in his sheltered housing complex and another asked if we could talk in a local café on one occasion. On arrival, I would introduce myself by my first name but address the men using their title and surname. On just two occasions was I requested by the man to use his first name. We sat where the men chose, which was usually in the living room or a conservatory. Most of the men offered me a drink, which I always accepted. The act of sharing refreshments reduced a potentially formal situation to a visit by a 'friendly stranger' (Cotterill, 1992, p.595) as the meeting resembled a social occasion rather than an interview and served to put the men at ease. van den Hoonaard (2005, p.402) has described the change that occurs in the relationship when sharing a drink as a hybrid: 'half researcher, half guest and acquaintance'. By the final interview, some men would greet me at the door when I arrived, having already prepared my preferred refreshment. I was always conscious of the length of the meetings and looked for any signs of tiredness, particularly with the frailer collaborators. I offered breaks and on one occasion I terminated the interview as the man felt very tired and we continued another day.

Some men had prepared written lists of significant dates and other information about their lives before I arrived and would at times refer to the list during the interview, sometimes providing me with copies of this information. Often the men would give me tours of their houses and gardens and show me photographs and other objects in their homes. One man demonstrated his flight simulator to me by taking me on a virtual flight to New York and I was given invitations to a daughter's wedding, a 90th birthday celebration and several lunches. It was clear that the men had not had such an extended opportunity to talk about their lives before and many of them thanked me for listening.

Some of the men would ask me about my own family. I was also asked where I was from (detecting an accent), whether I had elderly parents or relatives and in some cases, about my religious beliefs. As explained above, I tried to be forthcoming when asked questions about myself in order to establish trust and rapport but I was constantly conscious of my role as a researcher rather than that of a friend.

Personal reflections on the researcher-researched relationship

I have acknowledged that data were co-constructed during interviews and meetings with the men. Therefore, I had an influence on those data and it is important to be transparent about my own feelings and actions during those interviews. Below, I discuss some issues which may have influenced the data co-construction.

My position, with relation to the interviews, is best described as feminist. In other words, I was prepared to self-disclose and committed to the ethic of egalitarianism rather than the scientific ethic of role differentiation and detachment (Finch, 1984; Reinhartz, 1992). I was interested in a collaborative relationship for exploring mutual interests in ageing. I was not interested in what Reinhartz (1979, p.95) has termed the 'rape model' which suggests that the researcher takes what she needs and then runs, giving little or nothing in return.

The co-construction of data within my research approach, makes it necessary to elaborate on my relationships with the men who collaborated with me. I have alluded to the interviews being informal and more like 'conversations with a purpose' (R. Burgess, 1988) although they were clearly not conversations as one would encounter outside the interview situation. In interview conversations, the collaborator does the talking and the researcher does the listening and provides support and encouragement (Atkinson, 1998). There were also at least three lengthy meetings with each man (each lasting two hours on average), including the interview, during which time I was deliberately attempting to build up a trusting relationships so that, through discussion, I could gain a deep and frank insight into their worlds as they viewed them (Liamputpong, 2007). I viewed the men as experts and as collaborators in the research although I accept that the relationship was not equal as the research aims, methods, lines of analysis and interpretation remained under my control (E Mishler, 1986) and the eventual submission of a doctoral thesis benefitted me alone.

Power relationships within the interviews showed themselves sometimes when the men commented that I was too young to understand their lives, especially their early lives, which included war and post-war years. The changed position of women, both within families and society, was also something they frequently pointed out to me as a way of educating me about a historical era which I had not been part of. I always dressed conservatively for interviews in an attempt to look professional but not business-like. Arber, Davidson and Ginn (2003) have argued that, on the one hand, matching the interviewer with the interviewee (e.g. matching gender) may create better rapport. On the other hand, female interviewers can often generate open and free discussion about family issues with older male respondents, perhaps because a woman is traditionally seen to be more expert at understanding emotional topics. Also, confiding in a woman may pose less of a threat to their masculinity than would confiding in a man. Overall, I found the men to be very forthcoming with information and they did not seem to consider my gender as a hindrance in terms of trust or rapport. The men took on the role of experts with some confidence and I accepted their knowledge about being an older man living alone as superior to mine. In many ways, being female and younger could be viewed as an advantage as the men could be sure that I could not have any direct knowledge of the way they experienced their lives and therefore they were keen to explain and elaborate so that I might gain an understanding.

At times, my position as an academic from the university initially appeared to intimidate some of the men. Some told me that they expected me to ask 'tricky' questions and I noticed that during the initial meeting they would often attempt to formulate their responses in an 'intellectual' manner. They would also quiz me about the purpose of the research and ask what I would get out of it. I attempted to answer all questions honestly and clearly. After the initial meeting, the power relationships seemed to melt into the background as the men became immersed in the task and realised their superior knowledge base.

The interviews involved emotions and often tears, as each man told his unique story. I always allowed the men time to compose themselves and offered to stop recording although none of the men ever wanted me to. Through the photographs and our conversations, some men felt that their lives may be viewed as 'inadequate' although the style of interview gave them control to narrate a positive self. For example, one man felt that taking the photographs had confirmed that his life was 'narrow':

If I was a bit immobile and couldn't get out, this is not a bad place to be...life would be very narrow, it is narrow enough as it is...taking the photographs brought it home to me...I thought gosh, no great painting this week, you know...no van Gogh coming off the production line [laughing] (Mr Beejay)

However, looking at the photographs with me had also made him realise that he went out quite a lot, as the majority of his photographs were of places he had visited. This style of interviewing which allows men, within a supportive environment, to review their current and past lives, fits with the literature on life review and reminiscence, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Building a reciprocal relationship requires self-disclosure by the researcher and, as indicated above, when asked questions about myself, I would answer to the best of my ability. I was also asked my opinion on various matters, including the chances of a younger woman marrying an older man because of his wealth and what I would consider a full social life. Some men wanted advice about activities in their area or access to other information from agencies. I would always do my best to provide contact details for legitimate agencies dealing with issues appropriate to such queries.

I found it harder when the men had 'researched' me as it was an unexpected experience. For example, one man had found my home address and using Google Earth he had been able to look at my small farm. He was interested to know about any animals I might keep and asked extensively about my family. On that occasion, I tried to keep my answers and information to the minimum although I did still answer his questions honestly.

Data analysis

Managing the verbal and written data

During the research process, I collected data in the form of field notes, transcribed verbal data and photographs as hard copies and digital files. Only the final photo-elicitation interview was recorded digitally which meant that immediately after each of the first two (or more) meetings, I would write up field notes, sometimes on my laptop in the car and at other times I would wait until I was back at my office. The audio recordings were stored on a password-protected computer and on an MP3 player to allow for frequent listening to the original recordings.

Staying close to the text is essential when using a grounded theory method in order to ground the analysis in the original data and increase trustworthiness of the findings. Therefore, the verbal data were transcribed verbatim, along with notations of nonverbal behaviour (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004; E Mishler, 1986). At times, the men's voice recordings were very faint and one man had moderate dysphasia which made transcription challenging.

Transcribing text is inherently an interpretive task as there is no true representation of spoken language (Riessman, 1994) and therefore it cannot be treated as a purely technical procedure; transcriptions are inevitably tailored towards particular theoretical aims (E. Mishler, 2003). Riessman (1994), referring to Mishler (2003), suggests that transcribing text is like taking a photograph and assuming that the photograph presents reality. Of course, a photograph does not present reality, nor does the transcription, but the analogy is pertinent in this visual study. Furthermore, transcriptions are done using conventions that 'provide grounds for our arguments, just like a photographer guides the viewer's eye with lenses and by chopping images' (Riessman, 1994, p.294).

Although the recorded data were transcribed verbatim, quotes used within the text of the thesis have sometimes been tidied up for two reasons. First, it makes the text which has been taken out of natural talk more readable and coherent in terms of written prose. Second, natural talk can appear inarticulate at times when written as text giving (wrongly) the impression that the collaborators were themselves inarticulate (Poland, 2003).

All the written transcripts were stored in NVivo 8 which was used for the management and coding of the data through the use of free nodes and tree nodes and the linking of memos.

Managing the photographs

As well as the verbal recordings and written transcriptions, I had to manage a large number of photographs related to the interviews. The digital photographs were stored within NVivo 8 software which enabled the linking of photographs to relevant points in the transcriptions. Paper copies of the photographs were also kept, labelled with suitable identifiers for each man, to review during data analysis which accompanied data collection.

The process of data analysis

Generating data was planned to occur alongside analysis. The process of data analysis proceeded as follows. First, I read through an interview transcript and coded line by line, a process referred to as open coding, to break open the data so that I could consider all possible meanings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Charmaz (2006, p.45) proposes that open coding 'generates the bones of your analysis' which will later be assembled into a working skeleton through theoretical integration. The initial coding, therefore, shapes the framework for the analysis. Second, I combined codes into categories and made connections between categories (Appendix I). More detail is provided below.

Coding is part of a process to reduce and make sense of the large amount of data without forcing data into preconceived categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The process of coding defines what the data are all about (Charmaz, 1995). By moving quickly through the data and staying close to the data, short, simple but precise codes were constructed. Charmaz (2006, p. 48) suggests that 'speed and spontaneity help in initial coding' as it can spark 'thinking and spawn a fresh view of the data'. Often the initial codes were mundane but they provided a basis to work with and developed into more conceptual categories. Codes grew rapidly and each interview had over a hundred codes.

The next step involved using the most significant initial codes to refine the salient categories, a process termed focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). Initial codes which made the most analytic sense would thus be pursued. Codes were linked and overarching higher level codes were created (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Coding was an active process and involved continuous interaction with the data. The initial codes were provisional and at times they were made redundant, revised, split or grouped with other codes (Dey, 1993). As the coding and links between categories became more complex, I used clustering (Appendix J). Clustering offered a basis for diagrammatically representing the relationships between the codes and allowed me to think more creatively (Charmaz, 2006; A. E. Clarke, 2005). All the time, I would seek to interrogate the data, looking for understanding rather than explanation or prediction. Data were compared with data and later, data and categories were compared so as to build an understanding of the conditions under which a particular category could arise. Memos provided a means of organising thoughts and developing the categories (Appendix K).

Coding directed subsequent generation of data. After initial sampling, grounded theorists employ theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). Unlike quantitative researchers, I was not looking for statistical representation of a given population. Instead, I sampled for theory construction, that is, I looked to refine and check my categories. For example, I wanted to develop a category 'neighbouring and neighbourhood' which included codes like 'feeling safe'. To test my category, I needed to speak to men who lived in a more undesirable and potentially unsafe neighbourhood to hear their views and experiences of neighbouring. Thus, my sampling was guided by the developing categories. Ultimately, the aim is to saturate categories. In other words, when fresh data no longer reveals new properties of core categories they can be said to be saturated (Charmaz, 2006). However, claims of saturation relies on the researcher's conjecture and the term 'theoretical sufficiency' may be more appropriate (Dey, 1999, p.257).

Constructivist grounded theory provided a framework for systematic and rigorous analysis of data whilst staying close to the experiences of the men. However, like Tanner (2010), in her research with older people, I sometimes felt that individual men were not considered in a 'holistic' way. Their life histories and the social context were often lost in the analysis. The recording of the interviews contained emotions such as laughter and crying and my research diary and field notes described individual men in more emotional terms, with an emphasis on the individual rather than a comparison with others which the grounded theory method had produced. Therefore, I also looked at the men's individual narratives to enhance my understanding and supplement the grounded theory analysis (Appendix L). Narrative analysis was not considered to be useful on its own as the style of photo-elicitation interviews did not lend itself to long sections of talk. Instead, it was more fragmented as we moved between photographs, their significance and other thoughts and emotions which had been elicited.

Ethical issues

There are some key ethical issues to consider when undertaking any research with human beings. Relevance of the research, in terms of doing good, needs to be considered. For example, during the interviews in this study, the men had to confront not just their current situations but also their past and future. For the very old men, confronting a future of dependency and, ultimately, death was difficult. Justification for evoking such negative feelings is that from their experiences I may produce new and credible insights which have not yet been available and

which may contribute to improving the situation of others in a similar situation. Doing no harm and respecting the rights of the individual are two equally important principles (Flick, 2007). Furthermore, informed consent in the form of a written and signed contract, providing information about aims and expectations of the research, was provided to all collaborators in the research.

Full ethical approval for the study was obtained from the School of Social Work and Psychology Research Committee, University of East Anglia, UK and professional guidelines were consulted, including The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological Society, 2009) and The British Sociological Association (BSA) Visual Sociology Group's statement of ethical practice (British Sociological Association, 2006). The BSA guidelines were particularly useful in highlighting issues specific to research using visual methods although 'it does not represent a core method for resolving ethical choices or dilemmas' (BSA, 2006, p.1). An instance of this related to the importance of consulting with the collaborators before any publication of photographs, even though they may have given permission for their photographs to be used, was a sound reminder that the men may not have considered the many ways in which their photographs could be used. I therefore contacted any man whose photographs I wanted to use on a poster for a local event for non-academics, to explain that if his photographs were used they would be seen by local people and to make sure that he was entirely happy for his photographs to be used on that particular occasion. If, after a discussion with the men, they insisted that they were still comfortable with the use of their photographs, then I would go ahead.

On another occasion, I was interviewed about my research by a local newspaper and the reporter was keen to have photographs, taken by my collaborators, to enhance his piece of writing. However, after much discussion with the men who owned the photographs in question and my supervisory team, it was decided that it could potentially pose a risk to the men who were, of course, all living alone, as was made explicit in the article. The reporter used generic photographs of older men instead. In this way, constant reference to the ethics guidelines allowed me to think more critically about the use of the photographs and the consequences of their use. The added emphasis on ethical use of visual data serves as reminder that all data, including verbal data, needs to be used with care and consideration (Scheper-Hughes, 2001).

Thus, there are some specific ethical and moral issues facing a visual researcher which need serious consideration. Ethical issues emerge which have to be grappled with on a case-by-case basis and managed throughout the research process. This reflects an approach referred to as ethics-as-process (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2002; Ramcharan & Cutcliffe, 2001) where the balance between risks and benefits to my collaborators was considered continuously and as specific issues emerged.

However, there are some common issues to consider and predict when asking research collaborators to take photographs, including the taking of photographs of other people not involved in the research, inappropriate photographs and the implications of the publication of photographs, including on the internet. Consideration of the sustained involvement and relationship between the researcher and the male collaborators is also necessary with regards to leaving the field at the end of the research project. I discuss the issues in turn below.

Informed consent was obtained from the men at the beginning of the study but discussion of the implications of involvement in the study and, in particular, publication of the photographs, was on-going. Permission to use specific photographs was discussed in the final meeting and interview with the men. Initially, the men would generally tell me that they were happy for all of the photographs to be used. However, once we had gone through and discussed the implications of publication of individual photographs, most of the men would agree that some images should not be released into the public domain (e.g. images of children, identifiable places). As the men who took part in this study all lived alone, revealing where they lived would not only be unethical but irresponsible. The trusting and collaborative relationships with the men aided frank discussion and decision making.

Although the men selected pseudonyms, it is not possible to guarantee anonymity through the use of pseudonyms in the case of images of the men themselves. However, a photo elicitation study, where the photographs are used as a tool during the interview process, seldom requires the images to be displayed during the final write-up. That is not the case if the photographs are used for exhibitions at a later stage and at that point, any text accompanying the photographs needs to be circumspect. Schepers-Hughes (2001, 12-13) has suggested that:

Anonymity makes us forget that we owe our anthropological subjects the same degree of courtesy, empathy and friendship in writing that we generally extend to them face to face in the field, where they are not our subjects but our companions.

Hence, bearing in mind that people and places may be recognisable in written accounts, even in the absence of photographs, it may be that the presence of photographs can contribute to a more acceptable presentation of research participants and their lives, as long as it is sensitively handled (Crow & Wiles, 2008). I have used some photographs within this thesis, partly to illustrate the usefulness of the method but also to reinforce the issues relating to the study as brought up by the men through the use of photography. The men have given their permission to include the photographs but with their self-selected pseudonyms.

Photographs of people not involved in the research project

The men taking part in the study were requested to ask permission from any person they wished to photograph, before doing so, and to explain the nature of the research to those individuals. The majority of images of other people were of friends or family members although some men had taken street views or photos of acquaintances, such as a local newsagent and a barmaid in a pub. Where photographs included other people, where it was not possible for me to contact those people and ask permission for the photographs to be used, I have not used them in publications nor have any photographs of children been used.

Inappropriate photographs

The men had the opportunity to photograph anything they wanted and there is always a possibility that the researcher will be faced with photographs depicting behaviour or content that would be inappropriate, for example, violent or criminal behaviour. Again, decisions have to be made on a case-by-case basis. I did not judge photographs of children partially undressed (playing in gardens on hot summer days) to be appropriate images for publication. However, I did not consider a photograph of a calendar with images of semi-naked men, purposefully depicting the sexuality of a collaborator in the research, as inappropriate. None of the photographs depicted illicit or criminal behaviour.

Ethical implications of publication

As described above, some images were not considered appropriate for publication. The main consideration was the protection of the individuals in the images, particularly children. Some images contained identifiable street names, house names or other geographical markers which may have led to the identification of the abode of an individual. In such cases, it was necessary to either blur the specifically identifying part of the image using a pixel reduction technique or make the decision not to publish. This, of course, discriminates against those men who want to be seen and have their voices heard and can also defeat their object in taking the photograph in the first place (Prosser & Loxley, 2008). An example of a man who wanted his voice heard was Mr Bridge, aged 89. He was terminally ill but managed to live in his own home with help from his daughter. He talked to me about the difficulties he had when it came to more intimate care, such as bathing. He had asked his daughter to take a photograph of the hoist that he used so that he could get himself in and out of the bath (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Mr Bridge demonstrating his bath hoist which increases his independence

It was important to him that I agreed to use the photograph as he felt that it demonstrated the difficulty with informal care, particularly the sensitive negotiations that have to take place between the carer and the cared for:

The idea was to show you the hoist...you sit your bum on that and slide the legs in and then you have a gizmo, in my hand, and you are in charge then, it lowers into the bath and Sally can hear when the beeping has stopped and then she'll come and...oh, she is good, she is really good, you know, she knows I might perhaps be embarrassed as an old man with all the dangly bits...she will do my hair and my back and then she puts me in charge of all the other bits [laughter]

I have consideration for them; they don't want to see an old man, do they? I have got rather sort of gangly and even lost more weight recently (Mr Bridge, 89)

In the case of images of the men themselves (as in Figure 5), blurring the faces was not considered an option by the men due to the negative connotations of pixelated images (e.g. as in press images of criminals). The men all signed forms, adapted from Davies (2008), allowing the use of all, none or some of the photographs in publications (Appendix M). The implications of publishing those photographs, including access to them on the internet, were discussed. The real names of individuals have not been used with the photographs.

Leaving the field

As with any lengthy research process, consideration needed to be given to the impact of the researcher-collaborator relationship. The older men who volunteered to collaborate with me were all living alone and some articulated that they were lonely and isolated and enjoyed the company that my visits offered. Therefore, it was important to address the issue of the research ending and my visits ending. To that end, I explained the timetable for the research and visits at the initial meeting and reiterated the schedule at every meeting so that the men knew when their involvement would come to an end and my visits would stop. Even after the collaboration came to an end, some men would still contact me from time to time, especially to report major events in their lives (e.g. hospital admissions, weddings, house moves) and some continue to do so even now. After the final interview, I sent the men a card to thank them for their

collaboration and some men contacted me to thank me for the card. In particular cases I had very much enjoyed my time with individual men and it was at times hard for me when I no longer had to visit for research purposes.

Researcher safety

It is always necessary to consider possible risks involved when meeting strangers in their own homes. I did not expect that visiting the men in their homes would pose a danger to me in my spending time alone with them and indeed, none did. They were all courteous, although on some occasions I received personal remarks about my appearance, and listening again to the recordings of those interviews, I still detect my discomfort from flattery in my voice. The main focus of the interviews was to discuss their relationships and, naturally, topics related to sexual activity sometimes emerged in the interviews. At times the men would use sexual innuendos, particularly when they expressed their interest in younger women. Apart from the awkwardness I felt on rare occasions, I never felt at all vulnerable when visiting the men in their homes. However, on one occasion I felt vulnerable in the neighbourhood where one of my collaborators lived.

It was a very rundown area where many of the other houses were boarded up. There were many young people hanging around seemingly with little to do. Usually, I was able to park right outside his sheltered accommodation but, on one occasion, I had to park further down the street near a small shopping precinct. There was a large group of young men gathered there and they were shouting and laughing at people hurrying by. Although I was not sure if they shouted specifically at me, I felt quite intimidated as I left my car and walked along the road. I talked to the collaborator about my experience and he told me that he often had similar experiences and he was relieved that I was able to understand his apprehension about walking around the neighbourhood.

Brannen (1988) has suggested that there is little attention paid to the interviewer and the interviewing relationship and expressed worry at the lack of safeguards in place to protect the researcher from becoming overwhelmed by the distress sometimes conveyed by research collaborators during interviews. The more sensitive the topic and the more unstructured the interview, the higher the emotional demands on the interviewer are thought to be (Arksey &

Knight, 1999). As my interviews were best described as loosely structure and I was talking to the men about personal matters such as previous life experiences, loss and relationships, my interviews at times carried high emotional demands on both the interviewer and interviewee. Sometimes I did feel upset and disturbed by the information given to me during my visits and interviews or even by the general circumstances of some of the men's lives. Such concerns and issues were discussed with my supervisors who would listen and support. Before every meeting I would leave details of the time and address of the interview with a colleague and I carried a mobile telephone on all visits (Paterson, Gregory, & Thorne, 1999).

Managing the quality of the research

Trustworthiness throughout the study design

The quality of qualitative research cannot be measured with a quantitative ruler such as objective validity and reliability. The different philosophical underpinnings and theoretical orientations require different criteria for assessing quality (Patton, 2002). However, it is still necessary to evaluate qualitative studies for their 'overall significance, relevance, impact, and utility of completed research' (Morse, et al., 2002, p.15) and some criteria for judging qualitative research have been proposed. Hope and Waterman (2003, p.121) suggest that the literature on evaluating quality in qualitative research can be divided into three positions:

- The adoption of the same criteria as quantitative research
- Adoption of different set of criteria
- No criteria are required

This third position is not one which should be taken in this study because it is necessary to evaluate research quality on ethical grounds, such as reporting findings which reflect the participants' experiences. The first position is not consistent with having adopted different underpinning research concepts, although some scholars have called for the use of the same terminology but operationalised differently for qualitative research (Morse, 1999). The adoption of different criteria to assess the quality of qualitative research nonetheless raises other problems, partly due to the many types of qualitative research methodologies, guided by different positions on knowledge creation.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) much cited work has suggested 'trustworthiness' which includes: transferability, dependability, confirmability and credibility as concepts suitable for assessing quality (Morse, et al., 2002). Transferability is the extent to which the findings can be thought to be transferred to another setting. Dependability of the findings is concerned with the way that decisions made by the researcher can be followed by others. Confirmability relates to the way in which the interpretations are made apparent by the researcher and, finally, credibility is assessed on the description and interpretation of the research process and data.

Within the grounded theory community, Corbin (2008, p.302) suggests that methods themselves gain credibility with use over time and offers the following:

To me, the term 'credibility' indicates that findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants', researchers' and readers' experiences with a phenomenon but at the same time the explanation is only one of many possible 'plausible' interpretations possible from the data.

Charmaz (2006, p.182) argues that criteria for evaluating qualitative research 'depend on who forms them and what purpose he or she invokes'. Judging this grounded theory study, therefore, is not straightforward. However, one way of fostering credibility is through methodological consistency as demonstrated in this study. Evaluation strategies are then built into the research procedure at each stage of the research rather than applied *post-hoc* (Morse, et al., 2002). The use here of an iterative method, where I move between data collection, data analysis and theory generation, is hopefully self-correcting (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Data are checked against new data and rechecked against original data, constantly monitoring and confirming interpretations (Morse, et al., 2002).

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that men who were experiencing the phenomenon were invited to collaborate. In that way, the likelihood that the findings would resonate with other groups of older men living alone was increased i.e. making the findings more transferable. Engagement with the men over an extended period allowed us to get used to each other and establish trust and rapport, thus increasing trustworthiness. Time is essential for gaining trustworthy data. That includes time establishing relationships and interviewing, which increases the likelihood that participants feel comfortable to talk openly and frankly (Glesne, 2006).

Shared interpretations

Comments and feedback also served to reinforce the credibility of the findings and suggestions served to further explore and interrogate the data. The research was presented to varied audiences, both academic and non-academic. For example, a poster presentation to the general public early on in the study identified older men as 'invisible' and with 'special needs'. Several men disagreed with that; they did not feel invisible and they did not want special treatment. Several older women, however, agreed with the suggestion on the poster and told me stories of men who they knew who did not participate in organised activities because they were designed for women. They suggested to me that men needed special 'men's' activities. The men's reactions were quite different to my initial findings and made me reflect on the motivation of the men who were agreeing to collaborate in my study. It also encouraged me to reflect on my role as a woman in the research process.

I subjected my research findings to peer scrutiny in presentations to academic audiences of relationship researchers interested in relationships across the life course. There was a high degree of resonance with my findings of gender differences in social needs in later life and the social needs of men and women earlier in the life course, suggesting some continuity of needs and credibility of my findings. Thus, strategies to enhance trustworthiness were embedded throughout the research process through transparency, a reflexive approach to data collection and analysis and methodological consistency.

The above has illustrated the challenges and some possible solutions to studying the social worlds of older men living alone. The following chapters will present the findings of this research.

Chapter 7

Introduction to the research findings

This chapter introduces the research findings, offers a brief overview of the findings and explains the organisation of the chapters. It also attempts to justify the identifiers used for the direct quotes from the original transcribed data, used extensively in the following chapters. The focus of this study has been on everyday life and social interactions of older men living alone. Those lives have been explored through the voices of older men who have diverse backgrounds, past experiences and partnership histories. In order to convey the diverse and unique life lived by each of the men, pen pictures of all of the men are included in Appendix N.

The following three chapters will present the research findings based on analysis of the data. The organisation of the chapters aims to be representative of the three kinds of photographs the men took during the research process. The photographs could generally be placed in one of three categories:

1. Photographs of the house and home, including gardens and immediate locality
2. Photographs of neighbourhoods, trips out, shopping and modes of transport
3. Photographs of family, friends and acquaintances

Photographs often also depicted interests, both inside and outside the home, such as photography, computing, music, cycling and travel. Some men had photographs of themselves, taken by others, indicating the presence of friends or family in their lives but other men had taken photographs which indicated a solitary life spent at home. The men used photographs to inform me of significant past experiences and relationships. For example, some men had taken photographs of photographs on display within the home, particularly of partners, siblings or adult children who were no longer alive. In that way, each man produced his own collection of photographs which were meaningful and each collection was unique. The number of photographs taken seemed to indicate, to some extent, how engaged the men were in social worlds. Men who took many more photographs were generally more active, particularly outside of the home, whereas the men who took very few photographs were generally more isolated.

However, as discussed in Chapter Four, being isolated is not necessarily an indication of being more or less lonely.

The total number of photographs taken by the men of each of the above categories was used as an indication of the importance of various experiences and subsequently orders the findings chapters (Table 3). Thus, Chapter Eight presents findings relating to home as all of the men had taken photographs of their home and immediate locality. Chapter Nine presents the findings relating to going out and about, both for socialising and more practical matters such as shopping or medical appointments. The final findings chapter (Chapter Ten) presents those findings relating to men's experiences with their families. Only seven of the sixteen men had taken photographs of family members or friends who were 'like family'. This is not to say that this is a representation of the importance of family in the lives of these older men but perhaps it may challenge assumptions that family will necessarily be central to day-to-day interactions, at least in relation to the types of interactions that can be photographed. It does not mean that the men did not have daily contact with family via telephone or email. These issues of value and representation of family are discussed in Chapter Ten.

Name	Home	Out and about	Family	Total
Arbour	8	10	5	23
Beejay	4	14	-	18
Bridge	7	10	5	22
Brown	20	2	-	22
Crosby	6	10	-	16
David	13	-	-	13
Delaney	5	10	2	17
Dennis	4	-	-	4
Dickie	11	-	-	11
Harris	3	1	7	11
McBeth	8	15	7	30
Pollock	4	23	-	27
Rastus	3	14	-	17
Smith	9	2	-	11
Swalds	3	2	1	6
Young	6	1	4	11
Total	114	114	31	259

Table 3. Summary of the number and types of photographs taken by individual men

I want to alert the reader to the identifiers to be used for each man, in the context of providing extracts from the original data within the findings chapters. Due to the complexities of the men's previous life experiences, it is difficult to apply any one 'partnership label' to the men as widower, never married or the like. Being a widower does not give any indication of the path taken by an individual. A widower can have married, divorced or even been bereaved several times. Indeed, a never married man may have been in relationships or lived with kin and, therefore, having never married does not indicate having always lived alone. The quotes from the original data provided in the following chapters, do not include such 'partnership labels' for the men. Instead I provide a table so that individual men's route into solo living may be traced by the reader as I acknowledge that the route to solo living is important for the subsequent experience of living alone but the routes taken for most of the men are too complex to describe with a single label. Table 2 (page 128) shows Mr Crosby, for example, as having been married, divorced, re-partnered and bereaved which had led to him living alone. Mr Bridge, on the other hand, had been married and then bereaved. Both men could be 'labelled' widowers but, as can be seen, their routes to living alone are very different and may have an influence on their later life relationships.

Within the thesis I identify each man by his chosen pseudonym. The men were invited to choose a first name and a surname and they were at times very inventive with the names by which they wanted to be known. The names chosen had significant meaning to the individual man, for example, a favourite singer or a nickname from work. However, as discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter Six), during research encounters, only one man asked me to address him using his first name. Therefore, to respect the majority wishes and preferences, I refer to each man using his formal title which was in all cases 'Mr'. In addition to the name, I have included the men's age, represented by a number (e.g. Mr Crosby, 80). The collaborators in the research were real men and, as such, I am keen to introduce the men and their lives in which the analysis is rooted. By real, I emphasise that the research is rooted in the real experiences of my collaborators, as explored through photography and articulated by the men themselves. I introduce the collaborators by giving the reader a pen picture of each man in Appendix N.

Chapter Eight, entitled 'Men at home', will discuss the experiences of living alone for this diverse group of men. It is important to stress that living alone in later life was sometimes a continuity of a previous arrangement but for some men it was a completely new experience. Starting to

live alone in later life was for many related to a number of events, for example, bereavement or separation from a partner who had moved to a nursing home. Earlier life experiences and transitions could also culminate in living alone, such as divorce and separation and subsequent loss of contact with adult children or the loss of kin who the men may have shared a household with. Reaching later life had thus been a journey of complex life transitions and experiences. The chapter explores the meaning of becoming an older man living alone and the, for some, new status of being single. It presents the findings relating to practical coping within the home and strategies to relieve loneliness. The home is used by some men as a window into the community through the strategic organisation of furniture and as an arena for virtual relationships. For most men, the home has meaning, often connecting the past and the present.

The second findings chapter (Chapter Nine), entitled 'Men out and about', presents the lives of men outside of the home, including their interactions with others, interests and daily lives. Many aspects of life outside the home became apparent during analysis of the data. First, in order to participate socially outside the home, the men needed information and transport. Second, they also needed appropriate activities to participate in although some men did not want to participate in any organised activities. Third, all of the men did interact with others when out and about, especially with acquaintances and strangers in shops, on the streets and on bus journeys.

The third findings chapter (Chapter Ten), 'Men in families', positions the men within families and presents findings related to family relationships, such as negotiations and intrusiveness of family but also the expectations from family members. Family is central in many of the men's lives but relationships are often not straightforward. Past histories are taken into account through the photographs generated by the men and the loosely structured interview style.

Chapter 8

Men at home

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the data analysis relating to the experiences of living alone, including the practicalities of managing everyday life when older. The literature has made clear the complexity of relationships between living alone, feeling lonely and being socially isolated. The paradox of living alone later in life and equating the arrangement with loneliness and isolation, while at the same time encouraging older people through policies to age in place, has also been highlighted in the literature.

There were many aspects to the experience of living alone for older men which are discussed below. They included feeling a sense of freedom, learning to be single rather than part of a couple and running a household. The home was mostly experienced as a safe base where the men could connect with their past and their memories but it could also form an arena for connecting with others through technology. For some men it was a continuation of a previous arrangement but, for others, it was a new experience and the process of becoming single had an impact on the consequent experience. There were, therefore, complex reasons for staying in the home and the men developed strategies for coping, both practically and emotionally.

Becoming an 'older man living alone'

Becoming an older man living alone contains four sub-categories: *home alone, being single, the practicalities of living alone and strategies to relieve aloneness*.

Home alone

The public and policy discourse of living alone may often be associated with evoking visions of loneliness and isolation but the term living alone merely denotes a household arrangement. An important goal of this research was not to assume that living alone would equate to feeling

lonely or isolated. However, a consequence of living alone may be experiencing limited interaction with others, particularly for men who are less mobile. I wanted to explore both the positive and the negative sides of becoming an 'older man living alone'.

Living alone did have some advantages, particularly when it came to having the freedom to do as they wanted. Mr Beejay, aged 75, who had always lived alone, felt that on your own 'you can do what you damn well please'. He had got used to living alone but remembered how he felt when he first started living alone, as a younger man:

When I first moved into a flat and lived on my own...that was when I was living alone and that's when you find...when you first start...it is a little bit...that word isolation, you do feel a bit isolated and I did think that because there is everybody around you and fair enough, they all say good morning, good evening and how are you and that sort of stuff but you are still isolated to a certain degree...but I think people more or less are isolated aren't they? (Mr Beejay, 75)

He was expressing the view that we are all autonomous individuals and despite networks of various sizes, people are individuals, on their own, even within a family. Isolation was a more physical thing; he felt isolated in a flat by himself despite having a busy working and social life but here, isolation is distinguished from loneliness. Hence, isolation was articulated as an objective concept and loneliness as the subjective feeling of the discrepancy between desired and actual number of social relationships (Golden, et al., 2009):

We are all on our own anyway in that way...if you are married and have quite a nice family or whatever, you are still an individual family group (Mr Beejay, 75)

He had experienced a particularly unhappy family life as a child which had discouraged him from marrying and having his own family. Being content with his living arrangement, he pitied older men who were part of a couple:

Oh, I see them walking along, old boys with the old girls and I imagine how awful to be stuck like that for the rest of your life (Mr Beejay, 75)

Even the men who had experienced marriage, and where living alone was a new experience, found that there were some positive aspects to living alone:

I would like company but not living here...they say it is not nice living on your own but sometimes when you are on your own like in here, me, I know there is no one else here and I can do just what I like, you know...you can say that there is a little bit of freedom there that I never had (Mr David, 84)

Mr David had recently been bereaved and was very emotional during the interview. He felt lost without his wife as, during the latter years of their married life, they had been together all the time; together on their own rather than socialising with other people:

We kept much to ourselves down here, I think everybody is the same, you know. We saw neighbours...we've had neighbours in at Christmas for drinks and a chat and [wife] always used to have a friend from round the corner for years...sitting here, playing Scrabble (Mr David, 84)

Living alone was, thus, similar to living 'alone together' but with added freedom, as well as the loss of a companion in the house. The expression of closeness to a spouse was a dominant theme. Although all of the men expressed satisfaction with their marriage prior to bereavement, they often talked of a limited social network as 'they had enough in each other'. Being so enmeshed in a dyadic relationship often meant that no room was left by the men for other close relationships once the men had lodged all their emotional investment with their partner (Davidson, et al., 2003a). This is similar to findings by Finch and Mason (1993) that many married men do not form close emotional attachments outside the marriage and rely on their wives to provide a key supportive role. It was not uncommon for the men to have had their emotional, physical and social needs met by one person, usually the spouse, maybe because of the lack of alternatives available to them. Mr McBeth explained how he was happy being with just his wife:

When she was there I didn't need friends...no I didn't need nobody...cause the last 15 years of her life we were together 24 hours a day, 7 days a week...never went out without each other and never went anywhere without each other, yeah, we were very, very close, we were (Mr McBeth, 86)

Becoming a man living alone had led him to feel deprived of the only companionship that he had in his home and despite living in a sheltered housing complex, he felt very much alone in his flat: 'Some days I think to myself that I wish I was dead out of it...I do honestly'. His relationship

with his second wife had been extremely close and, right at the end of the interview, he wanted to tell and show me how much his wife had loved him. He showed me a photograph of him and his wife holding hands:

I will tell you how much my wife loved me...when we used to drive to Yarmouth with my son, I would sit in the back and we would only go for a few miles but in that time she would have turned around four times to see if I was alright...that is how much she thought of me (Mr McBeth, 86)

The closeness to a spouse, felt by the men, is perhaps an indication of the type of marriage they had experienced. Chapter Five reviewed literature on attachment styles in pair-bonds and suggested that securely attached individuals experience relationships characterised by friendship, trust and happiness (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) which seems to be the case for several of the men as they recount their marriage experiences. Marriages which are close, intimate and mutually dependent were termed 'connected couples' by Dickson (1995). It is probably rare that unhappy marriages survive into old age and also unlikely that unhappy marriages, which nonetheless survive, become happy marriages in old age (Connidis, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that the men talked about their spouse-relationships with great affection.

Mr McBeth was unable to find anything positive about living alone or maybe more about being single:

Nothing, no good things at all...nothing at all, I would sooner be bossed over and have her here (Mr McBeth, 86)

He had lost his closest friend and companion and the mutual caring. Through daily interactions with his wife, he had come to know himself but now he had lost his source of validation, as well as the continuation of an accustomed way of life. This was despite regular, daily contact with his children but he explained that seeing family was just not the same as living with an intimate companion:

Oh yeah, but that ain't like your own...personal...loved one, is it? There is nothing like being loved and loving someone...there is nothing like that (Mr McBeth, 86)

Mr Young echoed Mr McBeth's response to living alone:

You have nobody to tell you what to do, nobody to argue with but no one to talk to either
(Mr Young, 86)

This also identified the sense of emptiness that could be experienced after having companionship within the home, and not having a special person to love was found difficult to come to terms with for Mr Bridge, even after twenty years alone:

Oh yeah...I...I have not got companionship, I believe actually the thing which isn't there is the fact that I haven't got anybody to love...do you know what I mean? To be loved...I think it is companionship (Mr Bridge, 89)

Having someone to love and being loved in a physical way was also expressed as important to some of the other men. Mr Rastus, who had never been married, felt that in a relationship 'sex does come into it' although he also acknowledged that due to his physical health, sexual relationships had become difficult to sustain and at the time of interview he did not have a sexual partner. During a visit to Mr McBeth in his sheltered housing complex, a discussion between him and his best friend was also about the need and desire for sexual relationships. Thus, for some men, becoming a man living alone had deprived them of sexual activity as well as companionship.

Many of the men had accepted their living arrangements and some were even able to see something positive in living alone, even if it was not an altogether desirable situation. Indeed, for many of the men, living alone was really just spending nights alone as they were busy during the day, either going out or having family dropping in to see them. Mr Dennis had been used to coming into an empty house during his childhood but for him, the nights were the worst time:

Actually I think...I suppose the negative side of it all, or to think of the negative side of life, is when you first get into bed at night...because you lay there and then your thoughts take over don't they? There is nothing physical that happens, it is just your thoughts and I find that...that sometimes that could be the worst time (Mr Dennis, 85)

Becoming an older man living alone was, thus, a continuation of a previous experience for some men but a new, and at times difficult, experience for others. But being alone in the home was different to acquiring single status although there are obvious overlaps when considering living alone and being single. Next, I will discuss the issue of being single rather than the specific household arrangement of living alone.

Being a single older man

A significant distinction can be made by researchers, although not always articulated by these men, between living alone and being single. Living alone is a household arrangement but being single signifies a person who is not in a relationship. Hence, the never-married men living alone in this study were not necessarily single. When talking about living alone, the men often reflected on being a single man, especially the men who had experienced being part of a couple. Bereavement, the cause of becoming single, is different from ongoing widowerhood. Reynolds and Wetherall (2003) have suggested that privileging marriage and long-term partnership has contributed to single women feeling marginalised. Although there is little previous research regarding the feelings of single men, the analysis here indicates that the men in this study, who have become single, feel out on a limb. This sentiment is expressed by Mr Swalds who has been a widower for 18 years and lived alone for the duration, although he had embarked on a couple of relationships which had not worked out:

I hate being on my own, I don't like being single...but it is too late now, I am an old man
(Mr Swalds, 87)

He emphasised the importance of being part of a couple. Although he coped well with living alone in a practical way, being single was more difficult to cope with. His role had changed from husband, and part of a couple, to single man or widower. It was not the living alone *per se* that caused the feeling of aloneness but the status of being a single man, especially the transition from being part of a couple to becoming single.

Routines of men who have always been single cannot be disrupted by the death of a spouse at a time when social networks may be shrinking. The qualitative significance of living alone will, therefore, depend on previous life experiences and relationships, as demonstrated by Mr Swalds above. As a divorced man, Mr Pollock was enjoying living alone after staying in a marriage until his children had grown up. He had felt trapped in an unhappy marriage and his current status as a single man was something he enjoyed, as was the freedom to do whatever he wished. He always found something to do:

I don't feel bored...no, no. A bit of music on, say, even if you just sit and daydream it is relaxing (Mr Pollock, 80)

His house was full of pieces of machinery and old engines and there was a very strong smell of oil in the kitchen where he worked on a table, tinkering and repairing various machines. It is likely that when living with his wife, that would not have been possible. He alerted me to his passion for engines and tinkering by taking a photograph of his car engine (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Mr Pollock's car engine

Having never married, Mr Brown was used to being a single man but he had always had company in the house. First he lived with both his parents but, after the death of his mother, he lived with his father and sister. His father died and then his sister unexpectedly died leaving him on his own. He had never liked his sister and they had led relatively separate lives. He was an extremely active man who had a busy social life outside the home. It was not being single that troubled him but the loss of company:

I have never lived in a house on my own but I have now been here 2 years on my own...they say time is a healer, don't they? The 30th of July 2007, just over 2 years I have been here and to a certain extent I feel that it is a healer and uhm I feel better now than I did a year ago, see what I mean? (Mr Brown, 80)

There are, of course, some men who live alone but are not single. However, in this study, only one participant was in a couple relationship. Mr Beejay had a friend, who he referred to as a

'lady friend', and who lived in Thailand. He travelled to see her at least twice a year, which he found adequate:

I wouldn't want to be with her full time...I have often thought about this because she is a very nice lady...of course we have our little differences now and again but she is a very pleasant woman... (Mr Beejay, 75)

In his home in a sheltered housing complex, he was considered a single man by the other residents and he was comfortable with that. He did not need to appear to be part of a couple because he knew that he was. He also enjoyed the freedom and advantages that came with living alone, as discussed above, and, to some extent, he still had that when he was visiting Thailand for extended periods, as his lady friend worked 'so I am free during the day [laughter]'. As he was used to living alone most of the year, he enjoyed the time when he was alone and viewed that time as 'freedom'.

Becoming single marked a big change for the previously married men. Even after eight years of living alone, Mr Delaney was finding it hard to accept his status as a single man and everywhere he went he focussed on couples:

Even now when I go shopping and I see people walking around together or I go into a café to have something to eat...you sit there, on your own and there are couples, all talking...all you want to do is eat quick and go (Mr Delaney, 78)

Being single in old age had come as a surprise to some men. Mr Bridge had lost his wife to cancer 20 years previously and explained that if he had known that he was going to live so long, he would have made more of an effort to find a new companion:

It never happened but now I think that having gone on for so long maybe it would have been a good idea [to have a companion]...with no disrespect to my wife (Mr Bridge, 89)

Mr Rastus had never married although he had always thought that he would. For him, caring responsibilities had got in the way of relationships and he had remained single:

I always thought I would be married with kids – I never thought I would be lumbered...with my mother. She was living in this 10 roomed house on her own when my father died, she was 69, kids were throwing bricks through her windows, trying to break

in and she asked me to come home, so I came home...I did that...as soon as you ask a girl out and she knows that you've got your mum living with you...it's the kiss of death (Mr Rastus, 76)

Experiences earlier in his life-course had influenced relationship outcomes for him later in life. Giving the men a chance to talk about their entire lives gave a better insight into their current situations.

One man who had never married but had, until recently, lived with his sister, who he had not got on with very well, was used to being single. He had been engaged to a girl earlier in his life but she had become ill and died. Since he had started living alone, he had been going out a great deal to pubs and restaurants, and had become very interested in a woman 50 years his junior but he was anxious about her intentions:

As I say...you know what I mean...I don't know whether I shall uhm...some younger women they take on elderly men...true you have got the company but uhm they more or less take them on for the money don't they? (Mr Brown, 80)

He found that there is a price attached to the termination of singleness for him and he is trying to weigh up the costs versus the possible benefits of having company later in life. Mr Beejay, who had a lady friend abroad, also felt that there was a financial price to pay for younger companionship but he was happy to accept that. He would leave his money to her because he felt that when a person gets older, they may be harder to love and he did not mind the idea of rewarding her for being good to him. He felt that money was important, even more so in Thailand, and it would be a great help to her if he left her some money. The anticipation of future benefits for his friend meant that he was able to enjoy the benefit of her company in the present.

Whereas living alone and feeling alone can be overcome by keeping busy, being single as such cannot always be easily overcome. Some men felt that they would be letting down their deceased spouse if they embarked on a relationship but they also felt the change in status, from being part of a couple to becoming single, the keenest. Friends who were happy to socialise with couples, usually because they were in couple relationships themselves, could suddenly disappear from a widower's network:

I think they don't really know how to handle it...and then you've got this factor as well...a man on his own so it becomes...a threat I suppose, if you like...that's my thought on it
(Mr Arbour, 75)

It appears that bereavement was not just the loss of a spouse within the household but it also changed the nature of other relationships within the social network. In trying to come to terms with and accept that he was now a single man, Mr Arbour had joined a Singles Club but he was finding it hard:

They started running a...Singles Club now...I think it is the wrong thing to call it but that's what they do...I don't think it should be called a Singles Club because then the impression is that they are trying to pair people up and so on...it should be given another name but that's what they call it (Mr Arbour, 75)

Despite being a single man, he did not find it appropriate to call a club for people in the same position as him, a Singles Club. Needing to be paired up appeared to him as wrong; the stigma of being single, i.e. not in a couple relationship, was too obvious by naming the club a Singles Club. The club's name, then, portrays him as relationally incompetent. Another issue for the men was the deliberate 'punishment', by way of a single supplement, if they wanted to travel. The only way to avoid the supplement was to travel with a company specifically for singles but often the men did not want to be labelled as single and some were unsure about the underlying assumptions of travelling with other single people:

You think...singles going like that...it is a sort of hunting ground. People who are there might think "If I go on that trip, I might end up with someone"...you never know (Mr Delaney, 78)

Being single carried a stigma in a cohort of men where the majority were partnered and, being an older man living alone, could also attract undesirable discourse. Mr Pollock was a divorced man who had lived alone for 26 years. He had granddaughters who lived over 100 miles away and was regretful that he was not able to see them often. Their parents were busy and they rarely came as a family to visit him. He would like them to come and stay with him so that he could show them around Norfolk but felt that it would not be possible:

That is the one drawback of being on your own...they [granddaughters] can't come and stay with me for holidays and that now...I don't think their mother would like it really...I

mean two little girls and me in a house it is not...it might not be acceptable to some people (Mr Pollock, 80)

He also feared that as they grew older the situation would be even more difficult, as having two teenage girls in his house would be even less acceptable.

Throughout the interviews, the widowed men rarely labelled themselves as widowers but instead used the term 'single'. In that way, being single, not widowed, was perceived as the opposite of being married. It may be that being a widower attracts a sympathy discourse from others whereas being single is more a sign of autonomy and independence. van den Hoonaard (2010) has suggested that there is no positive image of old widowers but negative images exist which often 'paint a picture of widowers as passive and socially marginal' (p. 20).

The practicalities of living alone

Living alone did not just mean making emotional adjustments for the men who had been used to living with others. All these men had to deal with the practicalities of living alone: housework, cooking, washing and gardening. For some, the housework had previously been shared with their wives but for others, running the house was now encountered as a new and challenging task. Cooking was a particular topic that many of the men talked about and some took photographs to alert me to their abilities or difficulties. Most of the men enjoyed cooking for themselves and some even cooked for others. Despite having been excluded from the cooking to a great extent when his wife was alive, Mr David was enjoying both the shopping for ingredients and the cooking. He is careful with the quality of meat that he buys and showed me, during an interview, the joint he was cooking for that day, which he had already prepared and placed in a roasting tin. He was a little concerned about his repertoire as he tended to cook roast meals every day:

I should go out in this weather and I could buy some ham and do a boiled egg or something and slice it up with tomatoes and lettuce...yeah, I should do but uhm...I come in and I do the potatoes either way uhm...parsnips, I love parsnips, I love vegetables...I have got a pot full of vegetables...swedes, parsnips...I like those, they have a lovely flavour (Mr David, 84)

He was very passionate and enthusiastic about the food he prepared and ate, usually accompanied by a glass of beer. Making an effort to sit at the table and eat was something that seemed important, even if the meals were provided by an outside service. Mr Smith had become quite frail and exhausted after caring for his wife who had subsequently moved to a care home. Although he was able to stew some fruit for his tea every afternoon, he received meals-on-wheels at lunchtime. He always sets the table with cutlery and a napkin and enjoys a glass of wine with the meal. His son took a photograph of that part of his daily routine.



Figure 7. Mr Smith eating his meals-on-wheels lunch

Cooking was very problematic for one of the men. He had taken a photograph of his microwave which he used occasionally:

I don't cook at all...I've got a microwave. Yes, I've got a microwave and also...I don't like too much microwave...I think really once a week for microwave ought to be enough (Mr Brown, 80)



Figure 8. Mr Brown's microwave

He was fortunate that he was able to afford to eat out several times every week, and mobile enough to do so. On days when he was not out, he could manage to boil some potatoes and have them with some ham or sausages from the local shop. Not being able to cook had meant that the entertaining he and his sister used to do in their home had stopped:

Ha, you see, I can't prepare really a tea on my own...I can make a cup of tea, you know, but not a proper tea...no, I can't do that (Mr Brown, 80)

For others, entertaining and cooking for others was an important part of socialising. Having family come and enjoy good food was important to Mr McBeth who felt very lonely and isolated in his sheltered housing flat, despite his large family. He even cooked soup for them to take home:

Yeah, everybody always come to me, yeah...always plenty of food for people. I do pea soup, beautiful pea soup...I cook a whole pot for my daughter to take home and the ham cut up in slices for sandwiches. I also gave my boy some last night for his tea (Mr McBeth, 86)

Cooking made him feel valued and kept him occupied when he was feeling bored. It was something that he had always enjoyed and he attributed his expertise to the traveller lifestyle that he had lived. He had also been alone with his children for a year, earlier in his life, and during that time he had greatly improved his culinary skills.

Cooking for one was seen as a problem by Mr Arbour, but one he had solved the by inviting friends for meals and had been delighted with the reception his meals had received. During his married life, he had spent most of the year overseas and had cooked for himself. He particularly liked curries and often invited his friend and her husband and daughter for dinner:

Cooking for one is another problem but I tend to cook for Laura's husband and daughter because they...they...she is a vegetarian and they like meat so I tend to once a week, once every 10 days, to cook a meal for them, you know, various things...they like curries. I learnt to do that in India and Sri Lanka and...when we were at that barbecue, Laura's daughter said to her friend that I am a jolly good cook 'He cooks marvellous curries, all different ones'...I just overheard that... (Mr Arbour, 75)

The act of cooking for others was important for him and made him feel useful and appreciated. It was also an enjoyable pastime. Thinking of things to cook, so that the menu was varied, meant keeping a list of potential meals for Mr Beejay. He, too, enjoyed cooking, especially Thai dishes. He was not keen on entertaining although he had done so in the past:

I have done it but I don't like it very much...it doesn't seem to go down all that well...not that I have got room here. I did have a little get together when I first got here but nobody does it here...no, nobody...they don't entertain each other in their rooms (Mr Beejay, 75)

Having space to cook was also a problem for another resident in the same sheltered housing complex. Using a wheelchair made it difficult for Mr Young to move around a very small kitchen although he did still regularly manage to cook Sunday lunch for his daughter. Eleven of the men were able to cook and some thoroughly enjoyed it, even if it was difficult at times, due to space restrictions or mobility issues. Two of the oldest and frailest men were in receipt of meals on wheels and although it might have been beneficial for the more reluctant cooks to have meals provided for them, the idea did not appeal to them. Generally, they wanted to be in control of what they ate, how much and when. Relinquishing the daily tasks of shopping for, preparing and cooking food would also remove the independence the men enjoyed.

Shopping for food was a routine the men enjoyed, if they were able to. If they were not able to shop themselves, others would sometimes help and one man ordered his groceries online from a large supermarket although he still insisted on travelling to the shops to choose his meat and fish. Shopping, as an opportunity to get out and about, will be considered in the next chapter.

There were many other chores that some men suddenly found that they had to do without the help of a spouse. For the men who had always lived alone, becoming older and often frailer and less mobile, the chores that they had been used to managing on their own had at times become more difficult and some had enlisted help, mainly with gardening and particularly with lawn mowing. Generally, gardening and pottering about outside was enjoyed as a meaningful activity by the men and greatly missed by those who were no longer able to do so. Mr Pollock was a keen gardener and grew enough vegetables to keep him going all winter by freezing his surplus crop. He was happy to do the weeding and managed to dig over the plot every winter. His father had been a self-employed market gardener and he had been expected to help with gardening as a child. He felt that many older men enjoyed gardening:

Well there are a lot of people garden really, don't they? There are loads of allotments...loads of allotments. Old boys working away there, hacking away there (Mr Pollock, 80)

Gardening, especially vegetable gardening, was portrayed as part of the male identity; most of the men had always kept the garden, even if the housework had been shared. The ability to garden was significant for them as a continuation of a role where other roles had been lost. For Mr Arbour, gardening was very much part of the 'busy ethic' (Ekerdt, 1986, p.239). He had spent his working life working 16 hours per day, six and a half days per week and although he was officially retired, he ran a property business from home. His garden was huge and extremely well kept despite extending to over four acres but he managed to do all the work himself. He even grew the plants from seed:

Well, it's busy but I find you don't have time to sort of uhm mope around so to speak if you get on and...busy and involved (Mr Arbour, 75)

He was so busy that he had even stopped going to the U3A gardening club. His wife had died two years previously and he admitted that he was making himself busier deliberately.

The growing of plants was enjoyed by many of the men, especially fruit and vegetables. Mr David was no longer able to mow his large lawn but he was still keen on growing tomatoes and grew them in abundance. He had grown other vegetables in the past:

Well, I've had the beans up there...look, see where the wigwam is? I am not going to do them anymore, I want to clear out that bit of ground but I'll do that when I am feeling right. What I'll do is...I'll split it into quarters and do one piece every day...pace myself...I'll do a quarter and dig it but the ground is very hard...and I'll get that done and go further next year...but tomatoes are easy to grow in the greenhouse...I water and feed them in the morning and evening...I think I am doing the right thing (Mr David, 84)

With his health deteriorating after the loss of his wife, he had developed strategies, both for keeping busy and establishing a routine, but also for coping despite not feeling well. He planned the work so that he was able to manage the load and in that way he felt successful rather than expecting too much of himself and failing. Regarding the cleaning, he had developed a strategy of getting the Hoover out when the house looked dirty:

I don't do an awful lot of cleaning...I do get the Hoover out occasionally but not all that much...when it starts getting a little grubby here and there I get it out (Mr David, 84)

Unlike cooking and gardening, cleaning did not interest him but he proudly demonstrated his sewing skills on a cardigan he had mended:

I have to get a new cardigan because Fred bought this one for me many moons ago [he fetches the cardigan to show me] and look it has got a hole, I repaired it here, I had a go but I have the wrong wool... (Mr David, 84)

Other men have also been able to adapt to their new circumstances, often by spreading out the work or using more suitable equipment:

I try to do a little every day. I have got one of those little electric carpet sweepers which is a godsend because you don't have to use the big heavy Hoover which is a struggle for me now (Mr Delaney, 78)

After several strokes, one man was finding the practicalities of living alone difficult although he still managed to do the chores without any outside help:

I don't do them on certain days, I don't do them when I feel like it because I don't feel like it at all...I know I have to do certain things so I do them, very slowly, not necessarily very well but I do them which is almost as good as doing the right thing at the right time (Mr Dickie, 75)

Five of the men employed a cleaner. One of those men was terminally ill and too frail to clean; another could manage light cleaning and employed a cleaner to do the more vigorous cleaning. The other three men were not interested in cleaning, despite being able to. For one man, having a cleaner coming into his home was a social occasion and what had started out as a professional relationship had become a close friendship:

Alice is a friend who also cleans for me. I have known her 11 years, since I came to Norfolk. She has had a lot of problems with a divorce and she has children who often cause her problems. I like it when she comes as if she has time, she will stay for lunch with me. I like the company of younger people; it is interesting to hear about their lives and the way they do things (Mr Swalds, 87)

The remainder of the men (eleven) all managed to clean their own homes although some had assistance from family members at times. It was noticeable how all of the men were disinterested in cleaning compared to their general interest, and often enthusiasm, for cooking and gardening. On numerous occasions I have commented in my field notes about the general state of the houses I visited. Although often tidy, many of the homes were dusty and dirty and some extremely smoky.

For some men, gardening had become impossible. Mr McBeth had moved into a sheltered housing complex and found that the small area of garden had only got room for one gardener and someone got there before him. During the interview, he showed me many photographs of his previous garden; it was full of flowers and extremely well kept. Having spent many years of his adult life with the traveller community, he was used to a life outdoors and with other people. When he moved into the sheltered housing flat, he insisted that he got a flat with a view of the road but he explained to me how he really missed the gardening and particularly his shed, where he used to potter about:

I miss my shed...I had a great big shed and I had every tool you can mention in there, my wife bought them for me brand new...I gave them to my son...I used to make all sorts of things...I just used to go out there if I had a bit of wood (Mr McBeth, 86)

Mr McBeth had not been able to compensate for his loss and seemed unable to adapt to his new situation. He was bored because he worked quickly and found that his jobs such as cleaning, washing and cooking took little time. His new environment did not feel like home:

No, it will never be home, no...I am here to die, that's all I am here for...yes that's how it feels...it don't feel like home (Mr McBeth, 86)

This was in stark contrast to the bungalow he had left behind which had felt like home to him because his wife had lived there with him. He also explained that although he lived alone in the bungalow after his wife died, he was never really alone:

Well, everybody came in to see me from day one but...I was never really on me own there...there was a man opposite who used to come to me a lot... (Mr McBeth, 86)

Overall, the men appeared to adapt well to many of their new roles in running their home and none reported major difficulties with this. The hardest role to adapt to, for the widowers, was that of being single. In order to cope with the new living arrangement, and change in relationship status for some, the men employed strategies to feel less alone.

Strategies to relieve loneliness

Most of the men talked of times when they felt alone, or even lonely, and many of them expressed that they sometimes felt bored and felt they needed to manage this. One strategy to keep busy was to do various chores around the house and outside, as discussed above. Mr Dennis had limited mobility due to severe arthritis and spent a lot of time alone in his bungalow. When he felt a bit down, he knew that he had to do something:

I mean, basically, I am lonely...obviously...I don't let it rule my life, if you follow me. If I feel a bit down, I think 'Well, do something', you know...I say to myself 'I haven't changed that bed in that back room' so I strip that...and that gives me a job to do a bit of ironing afterwards, so I just generally kind of motivate myself to do things (Mr Dennis, 85)

He did not want much help in the house as that would give him too little to do and, he felt, it would make him more likely to feel bored and lonely. However, he did enjoy the company of two ladies who came in to prepare his midday meal for him, something that his daughter had organised to make sure that he ate regular meals. Although they only stay for half an hour he excitedly explained:

I get all the local news from their mouths...they bring up, say, if there is a bit of a to-do in the village and everything (Mr Dennis, 85)

It had become an important daily event in his life and, during the winter months, when he was rarely able to go out, it was the only way for him to get any news while at home. He told me that once the weather improved again, he would be able to walk down to the local shop and have a chat with the people from the village.

Several of the men would telephone friends or family when being on their own became too overwhelming, something that often happened on a Sunday, and the men would talk about 'Black Sunday':

The worst day of the week is Sunday...it's always a black day...I would get up and be in a terrible mood or I just didn't want to know anything and just sort of phone people up for someone to talk to and they knew what it was...and they'll listen like, you know (Mr Delaney, 78)

Whereas some men managed to find something to do in the house when they felt down and alone, others would deliberately leave the house and go shopping, for a walk or on bus rides. Such strategies may be considered adaptive; they relieve the symptoms of boredom and loneliness for a while and the men appear to know just when those strategies need to be employed. However, for some, the strategies may not be adaptive. Mr Young, a widower, described his strategy when feeling lonely:

Get myself a drink, pour myself out a drink...uhm my drink is whiskey...I don't think I have missed a day having a drop of whiskey since I came out of the army and it hasn't done me any harm at all and I smoke like a chimney [laughter](Mr Young, 86)

Like many of the other men, he kept his television on all the time for company. Boredom was a big problem for him since moving into sheltered accommodation in an unfamiliar area. He had

moved, on the request of his daughter, so that she could better look after him although, apart from using a wheelchair, he was very capable of looking after himself. He had very little to do as his daughter visited daily and did all of his housework. He was also being treated for depression since the death of his partner and a daughter, within a short space of time. He missed his life near London which had been busy compared to the life he was now trying to adapt to in Norfolk. He found that he had lost interest in the things he used to do, like learning Italian and writing his life story. Mr Dickie also missed the busy social life that he had lost when his partner moved to France, and he had subsequently suffered several strokes which made walking and speaking very difficult for him. At times he would feel very alone:

Well, I am never lonely in that I feel deserted. I get to a stage where I feel there is nobody here and I think to myself 'Oh so and so will come on Tuesday' or something like that and you notice that I have Monday where I go shopping, Tuesday that is probably the day that the chiropodist comes, Wednesday the computer man comes, Thursday somebody else comes...they come their separate days so to me it is spread out (Mr Dickie, 75)

The strategy he had adapted worked well for him and made sure that most days he had some contact with other people, albeit brief at times. When arranging meetings with him, I found that he was quite particular about the days that he wanted to see me and he explained to me that he was using the same strategy to ensure that he did not 'waste' our meeting on a day when someone else was visiting.

Feeling bored and fed up is not just a condition of later life, a view expressed by one of the men:

Well I do get a bit fed up; everybody gets fed up, don't they? It is part of the human condition (Mr Beejay, 75)

It was clear that some of the men had always been able to fill their time with meaningful activities and growing old had meant adapting to their current situation through the use of various strategies. Many of the strategies these men employed involved interaction with others. They interacted with others in different ways, including going out and taking a bus ride, contacting friends and family via telephone and organising their week so that contact with others was spread out over different days, a strategy which appeared to be proactive. The men were therefore not passively accepting feelings of boredom or loneliness.

The meaning of home for older men

Home was often viewed as a secure base for the men. Many described it as also serving as a base from which to connect with others visually through windows and virtually through technology. Many men referred to a spiritual connection with a deceased spouse, through the home and spaces once shared. The meaning of home for these older men entailed four sub-categories: *physical space and spiritual connections, organising the home, reminiscing at home and home as an arena for virtual relationships*.

Physical space and spiritual connections

The majority of the widowers had remained in the marital home after their bereavement and that had given them a sense of continuity. Previous research has established that home is a meaningful and important place for older people (Haak, et al., 2007; Oswald & Wahl, 2005) although older women are thought to have stronger feelings of attachment to the home than older men, who have been found to be more pragmatic (Russell, 2007). For these men, the home had memories of married life and other relationships attached to it and outside the home they were able to connect with familiar environments. For one man, even the position of the furniture was significant for him. His wife had spent many hours bird watching from a chair in a conservatory; the chair remained in the exact same position, as did her binoculars and notebooks.



Figure 9. A tree in Mr David's garden which reminds him of his wife

Outside in the garden there was a special tree which they had planted together and he had taken a photograph of it in full bloom. It was the first time it had bloomed successfully:

Oh yeah...it was the first plant I put in there...that does...it upsets me that does...that [wife] has never seen that...that is the wig tree, that's what it's called... (Mr David, 84)

For one man, his marital home had become an undesirable place to live due to the changing neighbourhood. He did not feel the same attachment to place as Mr David and did not need a special place in order to feel connected to his wife:

No, I don't need it...I don't need it uhm I doubt that there is an hour that goes by that I don't think of her and I have...I have photographs of her around and some people might think that I am stupid or daft...but occasionally I do still talk to her (Mr Harris, 90)

He expressed a more spiritual connection rather than a need for physical objects to remind him. His wife's ashes had been scattered in a cemetery whereas Mr David still kept his wife's ashes in his bedroom. The difference in coping mechanism may be explained by the length of time that the men have had to come to terms with their loss. Mr Harris had been a widower for 11 years and Mr David for just 10 months. Although both men still felt the loss intensely, time had enabled Mr Harris to become used to the lack of his wife's physical presence, something that Mr

David was not yet able to do. Mr Delaney, who had been a widower for eight years, also needed a more physical connection to his wife. He was reluctant to close doors inside his home:

As I say, even now I don't shut doors because when it first happened I used to think 'she'll walk through that door' and the only two doors I make sure are locked are the front and back doors (Mr Delaney, 78)

As well as leaving doors open in his home, Mr Delaney visited his wife's grave regularly, as did several of the other widowers. Chapter Five suggested that the idea of retaining bonds to a deceased spouse has been recognised as adaptive during the grief process (Bonanno, Papa, et al., 2002; Klass, et al., 1996). Talking to the deceased has also been documented as a common aspect of bereavement, especially for men (Francis, Kellaher, & Neophytou, 2005). It represents a continuation of conversations that took place when the partner was alive. It can also be viewed as a result of their mutual interdependence and mutual identity, described by the social anthropologist, Catedra (1992, p.350), as 'what remains of the dead in us and what the dead have taken away that is ours'. The men have built their identity as being a partner, husband or a spouse and that is an identity which can no longer be sustained – it has disappeared along with the deceased. However, something of the deceased remained and that was felt by the men, as described above.

For some men, the deceased spouse acted as a moral guide. That is, the men continued to act in a way which they knew was the way their wives would have liked them to behave. Mr Dennis, for example, continued to wash his clothes just the way his wife had done:

My wife wasn't house proud or anything but she always had her own way of doing things, you know. I always remember, you know, that it was a regular change of shirt every day and whenever it was put in the washing machine always...I don't know why...but she had it in a bowl and she used to go all round it on the underarm before it went in the washing machine, you know...and I think...well, I suppose if she does it, I'll have to do it...I still do it [laughter]. It is little things like that (Mr Dennis, 85)

Mr Delaney also found that it was important to continue the routines he had shared with his wife but now he was finding it hard to sit and eat alone at the table:

I sit at the table sometimes but I usually sit with one of those trays on me lap. Somebody told me a long time ago that you should never do that, you should sit at the table properly rather than sit at the settee...taking the easy way out... (Mr Delaney, 78)

Memories of their previous lives were clearly numerous and the home environment provided a secure and familiar base where some of the men could confront their losses. In that way, the home provided continuity of relationships and local environments. For those men who had moved, here only a very small minority, the lack of tangible objects which could trigger memories and emotions was at times troublesome. However, for some, the physical associations were no longer important and their relationship with the deceased had become more spiritual.

Organising the home

Home becomes increasingly important in later life, especially for older people with deteriorating health and mobility, as they spend more time in it (Gilroy, 2008). The home was also a site for organising and re-organising space, objects and activities. Some of the men have had adaptations made to their homes to make it easier for them to perform their daily tasks. In some cases, the men needed special chairs or beds, others needed showers instead of baths or even bath lifts. Some of the less mobile men relied on rails and handles to move around the home safely. On one of my visits to his home, Mr Bridge took me on a tour of his home to show me how the rail that had been fitted to most of his walls had made it much easier for him to get around the house safely. Such practical adaptations meant that the men were able to remain in their homes and continue to perform their daily tasks.

During my visits to the men's homes, it was clear that the arrangement of the furniture in the rooms also had significance. Although many of the rooms in the owner-occupied bungalows enjoyed a view of the garden, the positioning of the furniture was nearly always so that they looked out towards a road or other communal land. During my visits, the men would follow the traffic of people and comment on the various comings and goings with 'that's the lady from down the road coming back with her shopping', 'that looks like the man who reads the meter' or 'that is my neighbour's son's car'. Using the home as a vantage point appeared to be important. One man suddenly got up to catch the attention of the postman passing his window, just to ask

if he was feeling better after a short illness. The ability to see others meant that the men felt connected and for the men who did not have a view, it was easy to feel isolated. Mr McBeth told me that he had insisted on a flat with a view of the road when he moved into sheltered accommodation and he was able to recount the activities of the people who lived in the road.

Mr Young, who was an amputee and used a wheelchair, did not have a view and he had no idea what was going on outside, or even along the corridor, in his sheltered housing complex. He was not able to position the furniture so that he could feel more involved as the only window looked onto an empty piece of land behind the complex. He asked me how many people I had seen on my way up to his flat and I had to admit that I had not seen a soul. He laughed:

The place is like a morgue, yeah (Mr Young, 86)

The designers of the sheltered housing complexes did not, generally, appear to consider access to a view for older residents, something that may be particularly important for the less mobile residents who tend to spend the majority of their time in their homes. It is easy for people to feel cut off or 'imprisoned' if there is no view of people or traffic. Mr Crosby also found the lack of a view difficult as he could not even see people walking by:

Yes, you wouldn't think there was anyone living in here would you? (Mr Crosby, 80)

He had suffered from depression in the past and found the feeling of isolation inside the home distressing. He was hoping to move into a flat on the ground floor and had already started imagining the change it would afford him:

I need to know...if I get number four and I find that I can just open the door and go out...I think that would be a difference...whereas I can just open the door and go out. I mean there would be a door like that down there wouldn't there? But that will be down there, won't it? So all I do is open the door and go out, won't I...if it were summer time...where here I can't... (Mr Crosby, 80)

As flats within sheltered housing tend to be small, there may be relatively little choice as to where furniture can be positioned. Mr McBeth had taken a photo of his living space which, compared to other sheltered housing flats that I visited, was relatively spacious.

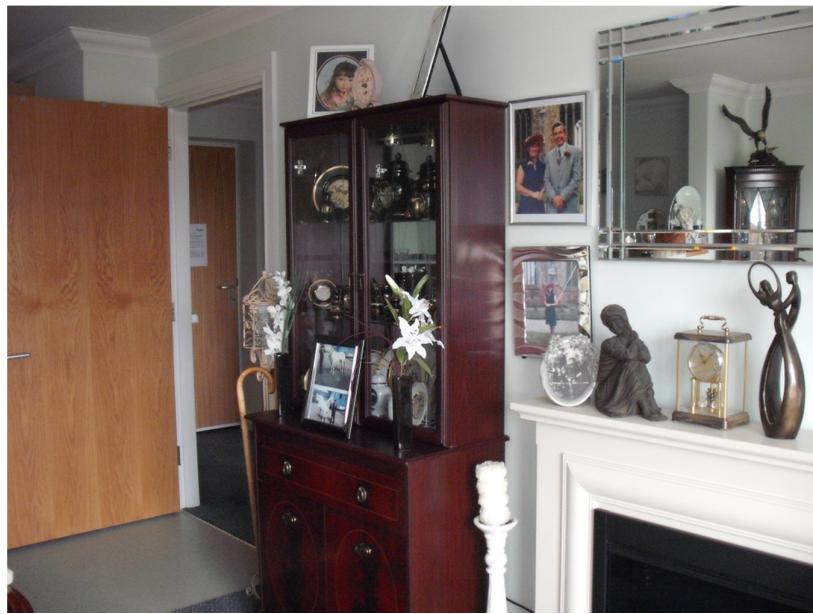


Figure 10. Mr McBeth's flat and some items he kept from his marital home

Nonetheless, moving had meant parting with a lot of precious things, collected during his married life:

I did part with a lot...a terrific lot when I moved here...we had great big chandelier lights, they were huge, great big things...one in each...two in the living room and landing and bedrooms, all crystal (Mr McBeth, 86)

Parting with items which had significance earlier in the men's lives had generally made them feel a sense of loss and discontinuity as such items had the capacity to trigger memories and emotions relating to the past. But one man had deliberately parted with all his old furniture which had been passed on to him after his mother's death:

It is like when I moved here, I got rid of all my other stuff, everything here now is mine
(Mr Rastus, 76)

He had resented caring for his mother for several years and a move to a new house had enabled him to let go of the past and start again on a life which he considered his own. He was not interested in evoking memories from his past life.

Downsizing, particularly to a sheltered housing flat, sometimes meant that there was no room for the men to continue hobbies. Mr McBeth found that he could no longer enjoy woodwork in his shed, as discussed above, but some men also found that a popular hobby, such as

photography, was no longer possible unless they became digital photographers. Digital photography often meant the use of a computer which could also take up a lot of space when combined with a printer. For Mr Crosby, who was a keen musician, the lack of space was critical. He owned two very large organs and an electric drum kit, as well as a huge amplifier and microphone which he used for practicing karaoke. In order to fit everything into his flat, he had moved some of the instruments into his bedroom. His other passion was tropical fish-keeping and the living area contained two sizeable fish tanks as well as an organ. The space that was left was only big enough for two chairs and a small table. Hence, Mr Crosby was limited to entertaining only one person in his flat. Mr Beejay also felt that there was not enough room to have visitors and whenever I visited, he would have to move a chair from the bedroom into his living area because if the chair was permanently in the living area, it would be very difficult to negotiate the space. Older people who spend more time in the home, a home which is not large enough to accommodate visitors, are likely to experience social isolation, particularly the less mobile older men.

Organising the home was important to these men as they made the most of their space, both in terms of preserving memories of important relationships inside the home, but also for making a connection with the world outside their homes. All of the men had experienced significant losses and for some, those losses were compounded by the loss of space and hobbies.

Reminiscing at home

The literature review (Chapter Five) suggested that reminiscing may be beneficial for psychosocial wellbeing throughout the life course (Butler, 1963). For older men living alone, the home was a special place for reminiscing and thinking about past events and relationships, particularly relationships with close ones such as a spouse, children and parents. Spending time thinking was at times viewed as undesirable as memories could be hard to cope with, even happy memories:

...it's the memories what hurt, isn't it...yeah...in here I have photos of all our travels...in Monaco, Yugoslavia...it took me a long while to have them photos on the wall...I put them up once and then took them all down (Mr McBeth, 86)

For Mr McBeth, photographs had triggered happy memories and initially he was not ready to

confront the loss of those happier times with his wife although he had eventually decided to hang photographs on the wall in his living room. Another man felt that reminiscing was a double-edged sword:

Well reminiscence is lovely in a way and then in another way, well it's gone, hasn't it...
(Mr Bridge, 89)

He felt that thinking about what he once had, and could no longer have, was too distressing. The days when he was active and involved in many things were gone and he was finding it difficult to accept that as his terminal illness progressed. The inability to attempt coherence of the past and present (integrative reminiscence) is perhaps an indication that Mr Bridge is not ageing successfully (Butler, 1963; Wong & Watt, 1991). However, in terms of social relationships and activity, he does appear to be as he sees many friends and acquaintances.

Despite the acknowledged reluctance to reminisce, many of the men became very animated when talking about the past and clearly enjoyed sharing memories of an earlier time in their lives:

I suppose I do a lot of thinking...about my life, what has happened, what could have happened...it all goes through your mind. I went to Cornwall in 1944 just after D-Day, I was in the fire service and at that time there were only 2 of us that could drive in the fire service here and that was in 1939 and we were on 12 hour shifts (Mr Smith, 97)

Sitting alone in his home most days, he found himself wondering about his life and the directions it had taken, which perhaps indicates that some men consciously spend time reminiscing and reflecting on their lives. Mr Pollock also spent time reflecting:

Things keep coming up, things keep going round and round my head but it is not a problem I suppose...wondering...Where did I go wrong there and should I have done this and shouldn't I have done that or whatever (Mr Pollock, 80)

Both men had gone through a divorce and emotional upheaval in their lives. They had made decisions which they were now evaluating with the benefit of hindsight. For men who had experienced long, uninterrupted, happy marriages, reminiscence served more to reinforce the happy times and the loss that they had suffered:

She was a lovely lady, believe me...lovely lady...my only regret really is that I didn't...well I couldn't really...because she had put on so much weight or I would have taken her out...dancing...we had been dancing and she was a good dancer, as big as she was, I didn't feel as though I had her, you know, she just followed, floated around...oh yeah, we used to enjoy our dancing (Mr David, 84)

During our meetings, Mr David always talked with great affection about his wife and the happy marriage they had enjoyed together. His narrative was about happy times shared rather than 'what if'.

When talking about their interests and hobbies that they enjoyed and participated in, the men regularly talked about things they had enjoyed in the past but were no longer able to do. They attempted to maintain integration in a variety of social worlds through symbolic participation as they appeared to be unwilling to abandon their old social worlds. Sometimes I found it hard, during interviews, to disentangle ideology from action. One man explained to me in great detail how he walked a considerable distance to a local mill and back again:

I walk all the way round the mill and home (Mr Rastus, 76)

He used the present tense but when we discussed it further it appeared that he was no longer able to do the long walk:

I couldn't do it now, my legs ache like mad now because I have got rheumatism but the doctor said that I have to live with it (Mr Rastus, 76)

During the entire interview he was always keen to put his life in context, as were most of the men. It was important that they made me aware of their previous lives, including work, relationships and social involvement. They needed to tell me things about themselves that were no longer visible in their daily lives so that I might understand them as whole people. Furthermore, the social worlds that once existed for the men, still had immense personal meaning. Identity was often derived from previous social worlds and reminiscing about an earlier time somehow eased the transition to a quieter life and, in many cases, meant that new social worlds were not required or desired, suggesting integrative reminiscence (Wong & Watt, 1991). For example, Mr Beejay talked about a bowls club that he used to belong to and earlier in the interview he had suggested that he had really enjoyed the game but it had become harder for him to play:

I used to play bowls...it's not a bad game...played bowls for a number of years for a couple of clubs...it's not a bad game bowls but I got fed up with that and there is a bowls club here that I thought about joining...I've got the kit here, I've got the bowls, bag and the shoes...crumbs and I still wear them and they are over 30 years old these shoes...I wear them now, I wear them [when I go] out. I thought the other day...crumbs...30 years old...anyway uhm I don't uhm...I don't bother...I don't want to, I don't want to...I can't be bothered with it (Mr Beejay, 75)

Despite the existence of a local club, he did not have the need to join as he still had the memories, and even the shoes, which connected him to a previous social world.

Mr David also defined himself by activities rooted in the past as he expressed his enjoyment of golf in his younger days. He had also been a keen dancer and he spoke of taking up dancing again as he reminisced about the dances he used to go to:

Yeah, they are usually in a row all round, all waiting for someone to say "Have a dance sweetheart!" [laughter] but I don't mind doing that, no, I don't mind doing that... would be nice but I have got to feel right...this neck as it is at the moment, I just don't feel right, I am hoping it will be abolished (Mr David, 84)

As he spent much of his time alone, Mr David had time to reminisce about the past and, in many ways, he was happy with his past social worlds and despite being lonely and isolated, he was able to draw on those past social worlds that he had participated in, from the comfort of his own home. There were positive and negative experiences of reminiscing. Some of the men enjoyed revisiting their past through memories which were often stimulated by items in the home. For other men, reminiscing was painful and they felt that it did not serve a useful purpose.

Technology and the home as an arena for virtual relationships

The home was useful as a space for connecting with others, both family and friends, via technology such as telephones and computers. All the men used a telephone to keep in touch with family and friends and in that way they were able to maintain those relationships. They seemed satisfied that many of their social encounters, particularly with family, were not face-to-

face, embodied encounters. In particular, they were aware that if they only had face-to-face contact with family members, then contact would be infrequent. Regular telephone conversations were common and appeared to be used as a monitoring process by some family members. Mr Swalds always had a call from a daughter on Tuesday evenings and when he had a brief call at an unusual time, he realised that she must be getting more worried about him:

[Daughter] phoned at about 8 p.m. for a brief chat to see that all was ok but that was a bit unusual as we normally have at least a 2 hour conversation each Tuesday evening
(Mr Swalds, 87)

They had recently been discussing his increasingly poor health and his daughter had suggested to him that he considered moving closer to her home in a different part of the country. Mobile telephones were also considered useful for texting and one man found that texting his sister and a lady friend in Thailand was an economical way of keeping in touch when the other party was not computer literate 'we are inclined to use the text, just a few words...' (Mr Beejay, 75). A common request when I was visiting the men in their homes was a quick tutorial on their mobile telephones.

Some of the men also managed to engage in new virtual social relationships. Nine of the sixteen men had a computer in the home and although several of those men had thought about using chat rooms, most were concerned about security online as well as the purpose of chat rooms. Therefore, they only used emails to stay in touch with friends and family, but even the use of emails was a successful way of keeping connections with friends from the past going. Mr Pollock had briefly considered using Skype so that he could keep in touch with an old school friend, who had moved to Spain but he had decided that emailing was adequate:

...my friend in Spain was on about it, I don't know whether he did get one but I said, 'No I am not having one, I don't want to look at your ugly mug!' So I didn't bother (Mr Pollock, 80)

Mr Swalds regularly chatted to a young man via an internet chat room. He had been introduced to him by his cleaner and would chat to him weekly. Unfortunately, he lived in the Philippines and the time difference often meant that Mr Swalds was not online when he had promised to be. He had formed a close relationship with the young man who had told Mr Swalds that he considered him his second father. It could be considered a benefit that an older man can speak

freely with a younger man from a different culture. Mr Swalds particularly enjoyed the company of younger people and the opportunity to develop a relationship, albeit a disembodied relationship, from his own home, gave him much pleasure.

Mr Beejay had also used chat rooms in the past but had burnt his fingers and had decided not to do so anymore. Although he was quick to tell me that he had not used chat rooms to look for romance, he had met a Canadian lady who he had got on well with as an email pal. Eventually she had come to visit:

It was a disaster! She was not very nice and I didn't enjoy having her staying here. I had organised a guest room in the [sheltered housing] block...she was awful...I have not used chat rooms since... (Mr Beejay, 75)

In his case, the disembodied experience had been fun and he had enjoyed the emailing but the reality of the relationship was very different when he finally met his virtual friend.

The above findings portray home as an important place for the majority of the men, particularly if they were in a home which they had previously shared with a spouse or partner. Home represented continuity in a time of change and losses. For some men, moving home had been a disappointing upheaval. The men were inventive about connecting with others, even from inside their homes. The arrangement of furniture could provide a vantage point from which the social world outside the home could be observed. They were aware of the regular traffic of people in their roads and recognised people by sight even if they did not know their names or where they lived. Watching others, who had become familiar by sight, helped the men feel connected. These men were mostly interested in connecting with others and used technology to do so. They were not passively accepting of their, at times, lonely lives. Instead they actively produced strategies to relieve loneliness or boredom. Some of those strategies involved leaving the house and the following chapter will explore 'Men out and about'.

Chapter 9

Men out and about

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a window on the world of older men within their home environments. It demonstrated some of the diversity among the men's lives and discourses as well as some strong similarities, particularly in valuing independence. The ability to live alone and manage the running of a household was determined by multiple issues and life experiences, particularly whether the arrangement presented continuity or a new situation. However, successfully managing the practicalities of living alone could be seen to be very different from managing life outside the home.

This chapter will present the men's social worlds outside the home. It considers the perceived barriers to participation as well as the activities and various relationships that the men valued and enjoyed.

Getting out and getting around

More than half of the men lived in rural locations and only three men self-reported their health as poor. One of these men was terminally ill, another had suffered two strokes and a third had severe arthritis. Disability or frailty had an influence on access to opportunities for social engagement available to the men. Half of the men were able to drive their own cars, four of the men were still riding short distances on bicycles and three men owned mobility scooters. The theme of getting out and about is covered in two interrelated sub-categories developed from the data analysis: *using a car for independence* and *bus travellers*.

Using a car for independence

The independence that owning a car afforded those men who did, was stark and had been brought home to Mr Delaney as he was undergoing investigations of a series of 'funny turns'. He

had been advised by his doctor not to drive until a cause had been established. Living in a rural village, he had come to depend on his car and his motorbike. Although the village was well served by buses to nearby towns, the bus stop was some distance from his house:

My health is the main thing at the moment...frustrated really because I can't drive. As you know when you are used to driving, you jump in the car...with shopping you don't care because you load it in the car, fetch it back. Yesterday I was walking round the supermarket, I was looking at the stuff thinking 'I can't take that because it is too heavy' and actually, I did overload myself a bit and coming up from the bus stop it was a bit of a struggle. It is a bit of a slope coming up the road, I never noticed before but now it is becoming like a hill for me. It is getting harder every day (Mr Delaney, 78)

He found it hard to manage the walk from the bus stop to his house without a rest on the way but there were no benches to sit on to have a rest, nor was there a bench at the bus stop. He could not contemplate the possibility that he may not be able to drive again as it would have such a huge impact on his quality of life:

All I am thinking of is whatever they do for me I will be back driving again. The doctor did say now that I can't drive and she was really adamant...all I am looking forward to is whatever happens now...that somehow I'll get back to driving and it will be a normal life again and I can go out in the car when I want, go shopping when I want. I just hope whatever they have got lined up will cure it. I just want to get back to a normal life, a reasonably normal life where I can walk round the village without worrying if I am going to get back or go on the motorbike even (Mr Delaney, 78)

Normality was viewed as a continuation of his previous circumstances. For Mr Delaney there was an added urgency to get back in the car as he made monthly visits to pick up his adult son who had severe learning disabilities and lived in a residential home over 100 miles away:

This is the hard part at the moment, you see, because I can't go down and collect him... a carer used to bring him up for the day and we would go out for a meal and then go to the cemetery come back for a cup of tea and then he would be gone. So they suggested that they came up overnight so that he can have a little longer because this is his home, he never accepts the other place as his home. This is home. He has his own room here, his own bedroom (Mr Delaney, 78)

His identity as father was very strong and he felt a responsibility for his son's wellbeing. His inability to continue the routine he had established with his son meant that he felt he was letting his son down – not fulfilling his fatherly role.

Some men had made the decision to give up driving because they no longer felt able to drive or felt that they were unsafe drivers. The cost of insurance for older people had put off one man and another was wondering if he would be able to afford to keep his car on the road for much longer:

The cost of my motoring is now too expensive. As I rely on my car for enjoyment and pleasure of getting around seeing family and friends, I think I must now downgrade to something cheap and small (Mr Swalds, 87)

For Mr Swalds, and for most of the other men who were able to drive, the car was necessary for visiting friends and family, especially if the friends and family did not live in places accessible by bus. Without transport, the men could only wait for friends and family to come to them. Many of the men had moved to Norfolk after their retirement to release capital as house prices were generally lower than in the London area, from where most of the men had originated. This meant that families and old friends had become geographically dispersed and visiting often required long journeys.

Feeling unsafe on the roads had prompted one man to give up driving. Mr Harris had passed his driving test at the age of 69, after he had retired from his job as a teacher. Now at the age of 90, he did not drive anymore as he did not want to be a danger on the road 'like a lot of other old people'. Another man had spent a short time in hospital after the death of his wife and had found that he had lost his nerve when he started driving again so he decided to give up his car. As he lived in a remote rural village, he had to rely on other people to give him lifts or walk to the small village shop. Visiting friends and family was no longer possible for him. The oldest man who was still able to drive was 97 years old and had owned his car for 43 years:

April 1966 I bought that. I am a DIY person... that was always my thing even as a school boy. I needed to do things with my hands, mending and making always made me happy...Well, now I don't do any maintenance, I'm past it...past the sell by date [laughter] (Mr Smith, 97)

Like most of the other men who were car owners, he had taken a photograph of his car.



Figure 11. Mr Smith's car which he still drives occasionally

Although he was still able to drive the car, his son was not keen on him driving and he found that he was using it less and less:

Just to go into town, that is all I use it for now because my son don't like me driving anyway so he takes me everywhere (Mr Smith, 97)

Being discouraged from driving made him more dependent on his son and had led to a role reversal where his son was looking after him, rather than the more usual relationship of the son being dependent on his father. For Mr Smith, the reversal of roles had not been gradual, the way it had been for most of the other men, as they slowly accepted more assistance from family. In Mr Smith's case, he had lost contact with his only son for 50 years and when they were reunited, they were both elderly. When I interviewed Mr Smith, he was 97 and his son was 77 years old and they had been reunited for just 15 years.

Although driving could make the men feel more independent, if driving was the only option for them, socialising and driving were hard to mix, particularly if social events involved drinking:

I could join the ex-serviceman club at [town] and you might say, well, I don't have to drink but I mean...if you have one or two...I have got to drive back here...that has put a

dampener on socialising a lot for some people...but I myself will be perfectly alright, I take extra care when doing any driving... (Mr David, 84)

Although he had not yet joined in any organised activities since the death of his wife just ten months previously, he reflected on the difficulties that could arise. He considered himself quite able to drive and unlikely to drink more than the legal limit but he felt that maybe others would not have his self-discipline. The town in question was six miles from his home and he was unsure about any available bus service. Mr Brown also lived on the outskirts of a rural village and relied on his car for socialising or at least to get him to the nearest bus stop. He regularly went to a town during the evenings and socialised in a pub. Although he liked to have a drink, he was aware that driving prohibited excessive drinking and using buses during the evening was not possible:

Well, I like a drink, you know...can't drink much and driving but...I still have a little drink, no spirits or nothing (Mr Brown, 80)

Of course, balancing socialising which involves drinking with driving is not just a problem for older men. However, this group of men were less likely to have other people to share lifts with or even share the cost of a taxi.

Older men who owned a car were able to get around without relying on others and driving was useful when shopping as it removed the need to carry heavy groceries. A car also allowed these men to visit family and friends more easily. For Mr David and Mr Smith, in particular, driving also appeared to speak of 'being capable'. The ability to continue to drive, even if they only drove very few miles, emphasised them as independent and capable at a time when many peers had to give up.

Bus travellers

The loss of independence was noted by several of the men who were no longer driving. However, the men who had decided to give up driving because of the cost of running a car but who were still able to catch the bus or use other forms of transport, still had a sense of independence. Those men were most likely to live in urban areas where bus services were frequent and the walking distance to a bus stop was manageable.

The men who owned cars would also use the buses, if available, as it was a cheap form of transport, especially for longer journeys. Free bus passes were available to all of the men and six of them made extensive use of a much appreciated lifeline. Interestingly, of the six men who used buses regularly, four were also car owners. Mr Rastus told me that he averaged ten miles per fortnight in his car, the rest of the time he used buses. Once on the bus, the journey was viewed as a social event:

Oh yeah, I mean the buses are quite good. I got the bus yesterday. I caught the 10 o'clock one, the 9 o'clock one is busy but I caught the 10 o'clock one and people are getting on there, they all know...they all know the drivers and the driver knows where to look for them, they pick them up other than at the bus stop and they drop them off the same with their shopping and that, you know...it is completely different to what I ever knew down in London. Sometimes you get some from here that I know and I talk to but then you go through all the villages all the way to [town]...but I mean, they are all quite nice and that, they are all friendly, surprisingly really...completely different to London [laughter] (Mr Delaney, 78)

Picking elderly people up in places other than official bus stops thus allowed many more individuals to continue to travel and enjoy the social and psychological benefits that getting out and about brought. The flexibility to stop almost anywhere is not likely to be available in more urban areas but for rural populations, it was a welcome opportunity to travel on the buses using the free bus pass.

Even the wait at the bus stop was an opportunity to speak to others and exchange information or news:

I have just been talking to a chap at the bus stop and he said that they are having an outing to [Town] on the 13th to have a meal (Mr Rastus, 76)

One man told me about the different bus routes he experimented with to get to the city:

The 21 or the 22 they go all the way round the housing estates...about 30 minutes or 40 on a bad day but I have nothing else to do...sometimes I walk down to a different stop and that takes a different route and it goes along the...goes straight over...I can't think what it is called...takes a different route round, into Castle Mall...makes a nice change [laughter]... it's adventurous [laughter] (Mr Beejay, 75)

He had given up driving, partly because of financial considerations, but also because he found the roads congested and parking difficult. He lived very close to a bus stop and used the bus every day. Bus rides had become an important part of his daily routine both in terms of the actual ride but also as a means to get out and see different things; he had taken a photograph of the bus to alert me to this:

I am often waking up in the morning and wonder what I am going to do today but there isn't a lot you can damn well do...yes...go for a bus ride, that's about it...that's adventurous (Mr Beejay, 75)



Figure 12. Mr Beejay enjoyed bus rides and regularly took trips to the nearby city

The actual ride was also enjoyable for Mr Rastus who regularly took trips some distance from his home:

I get the bus from Norwich to Lowestoft, do some shopping, have a meal and then back home and I will have been out for about 4 hours (Mr Rastus, 76)

The above demonstrates the use of buses mainly as a pastime, something to fill the day, as well as for shopping or appointments. However, on occasions, the bus was also used for visiting:

I went to visit her [sister] a week or so ago. I get there at 12 o'clock and leave at 4 so we wander around, go and have a drink, buy something to eat, we usually go and get something in the bakers and sit in the park and eat it, something like that (Mr Beejay, 75)

Mr Brown would sometimes travel with friends to see places. He had arranged to go on a boat trip with some friends the following day:

I go out a lot...like tomorrow I am out because a couple of friends are going to Yarmouth on the bus (Mr Brown, 80)

He would use the bus rather than his car for longer journeys:

If I go to Norwich or Lynn, since the bus pass has come out, I go on the bus...I take the car to the town and park and then catch the bus from the market place (Mr Brown, 80)

The men who never had the opportunity or inclination to use the buses did not have the potential source of local information exchanged at the bus stop or on the bus, available to them. One man who was using a wheelchair was convinced that the buses would not let him on:

Uhm...no, the buses don't cater for wheelchairs in Norwich, no (Mr Young, 86)

I investigated the policies for wheelchair users on the local buses and confirmed to him that the majority of the buses were able to take wheelchairs and this information had never been given to him. When I told him about the policy, he was surprised but still felt that his particular wheelchair was too large to be accommodated easily. He rarely left his flat, although he did have a mobility scooter, because his daughter was not keen on him driving it. He did most of his shopping on-line and had minimal interaction with other residents in the sheltered housing complex where he lived. The inability to get out and watch what other people were able to do, particularly in terms of getting around using independent and public transport, severely limited his horizons. For the majority of the time he was in his flat, smoking and watching television. He explained to me that when he lived in a town near London, he was able to get out and around in his wheelchair with some ease:

London was much easier, you know...within 100 yards or so you have shops and so on and people around you (Mr Young, 86)

Moving to the outskirts of a city had increased the distance to amenities and the lack of information about the services available to him meant that he had become very isolated.

Some men had moved from more urban areas to rural Norfolk and found that they had reduced opportunities for getting out and about but, for most of the men, that was not seen as

problematic as they did not express a desire to go out more than they were doing at the time of the interviews. Diversity in transport provision had an effect not just on the ability to go out and about but also on the chances of obtaining information about local activities. Furthermore, bus travel was viewed by these men as a sociable activity, especially when travel was at regular times and they met familiar people.

Neighbourhood and neighbouring

Although it is relatively easy to set objectively-defined or generally-shared boundaries around a neighbourhood, for some of the men, community was more important and a community could include several neighbourhoods. Thus, the boundaries were sometimes sharply demarcated but in other cases, neighbourhood boundaries were more fluid and resembled community rather than neighbourhood. For some, the neighbourhood was considered in terms of a sheltered housing complex and a few nearby shops. The local area, the immediate neighbours and neighbourhood were important places for the men who spent a lot of time in or near their homes. The literature (Chapters Two and Three) suggested that neighbourhoods are important for the accumulation of social capital and remaining active in the community. Getting to know neighbours and one's neighbourhood involved getting out of the home. Most of the men had some kind of routine, maybe daily, weekly or monthly, which meant that they saw people they recognised and who recognised them. Sometimes family and neighbourhood merged when family became part of the neighbourhood, which was the case for one man who lived in the same road as his brother. Neighbourhood was raised in the previous chapter when discussing the 'surveillance' the men undertook through the windows in their homes. Here, the wider neighbourhood is considered as an important place for those ordinary day to day interactions outside the home. This second category within 'Men out and about' contains the sub-categories: *transitions to new neighbourhoods, expectations and neighbourhood safety*.

Transitions to new neighbourhoods

Some men had moved home, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the reason for moving appeared to influence the satisfaction that they felt with that life transition. For some of these men, the transition to a new neighbourhood was described in very positive terms:

I think I have got more friends in the village here than I had down there, you know (Mr Delaney, 78)

Mr Delaney had moved from London eleven years ago where he had found that people rarely spoke to each other. He felt you were lucky to get a quick nod when you passed someone in the street. Contrary to life in London, the inhabitants in his rural Norfolk village were extremely welcoming and friendly. He recalled that as soon as he moved to the village with his wife 11 years previously, people came up to him to introduce themselves. Another man had also valued the transition from a flat in London to a cottage in a quiet village although he found that the village was almost too quiet:

I had noisy neighbours next door and noisy neighbours upstairs, they always played records till 2 or 3 in the morning...it is not noisy [here] and I am totally relaxed to a point of boredom (Mr Rastus, 76)

Both of the above men had planned to move to their current neighbourhood and eventually moved because they wanted to. Mr Delaney had moved with his wife and she may have been an influence in establishing the links with the community. Mr Rastus had never been married but he had found the transition to a new neighbourhood relatively easy and satisfying. Another man who had never married and lived in a city also enjoyed his new neighbourhood although he had found the transition difficult:

I was getting affected...it is not so easy to adjust, you feel a bit strange and it is more difficult to get used to it, to acclimatise to the area and I can remember I came...I was with somebody...I came out of the shop and I didn't know where I was...it was dark and I didn't know where I was...it was only a couple of yards down the road and I didn't know where I was and things like that (Mr Beejay, 75)

As well as feeling unsure about finding his way around a new area, he also felt that the local people were not keen on 'incomers':

Well yes, when you move to a place like this from the south there is no problem... moving here to Norwich, Norwich is a very nice city, I have never had any problems... the people are always very polite, well, they are in the majority of cases, like anywhere else there is the odd few but they are not all that keen on incomers here...they would rather keep

company with the Norfolk people, they like to stay with people they know... (Mr Beejay, 75)

The transition had been harder for the men who had moved reluctantly and who had left friends behind:

No...very difficult here, I think...I think uhm one of the reasons is that there are so many couples here...a lot of couples or single women...I get on with people alright, always have done but they don't appear as friendly as the people in [old town] (Mr Young, 86)

Mr Young had been encouraged to move by his daughter as she was finding it difficult to travel to see him. He had been active in his old town where he had lived his entire life. The move had left him isolated in a sheltered housing complex and he was struggling to get around outside his flat as he was using a wheelchair. He was resident in a suburban area and did not have access to the kind of places that he was used to frequent, such as a local pub.

The transition to a new neighbourhood is both positively and negatively articulated by these men and largely appears to depend on the reason for moving. Moving willingly, and perhaps portraying an active, independent decision, produced a better outcome with overwhelming feelings of satisfaction. If a move to a new neighbourhood was the result of others viewing the men as not coping, particularly after a loss, then these men felt increased dissatisfaction and disappointment with the move, as well as with the new neighbourhood.

Neighbours, neighbourliness and expectations

Neighbours, and expectations of good neighbourly behaviour, were linked to the men's accounts of their local area. They articulated fairly rigid rules as to the expected neighbourly behaviour. The men were always keen to point out that neighbours should 'be there for each other' but their accounts also expressed an emphasis on autonomy and the undesirability of 'living in each other's pockets'. Neighbours were a very important part of the men's social network. They were encountered to some degree every day, which was different to friends and family but similar to acquaintances, and they rarely knew their names or much about their lives. Although expectations from and towards neighbours were fairly specific, a continuum of neighbouring from negative encounters to very close friendships were articulated by the men.

Reciprocity was not voiced as important and many of the men relied on neighbours to do certain chores without indicating that they do something in return. Good neighbours were valued and bad neighbours were ignored.

After the loss of his wife, one man had become quite dependent on neighbours for companionship. One couple, in particular, who lived a few houses away from him, had made sure that he came to them for breakfast every day except Sunday:

When my wife died she said "You come in every morning for tea and toast because then I know that you are all right", and if I wasn't there by a certain time then she would be on the phone. I sit there for about half an hour and we read the paper and that, you know, and then her husband comes in and we have a chat - he doesn't get up all that early, you know. Yes, again, she is one I can turn to if I am in trouble. No, they are good really. So I am not really sort of on my own as such (Mr Delaney, 78)

That was an extreme case of neighbourliness but for many of the other men, the idea that neighbours were there for them in times of need, as well as for daily interactions, was reassuring. They placed particular emphasis on 'looking out for each other', something that all the men appreciated although for many of them, it was not reciprocated. Living in a small cul-de-sac with just four houses had encouraged a sense of community amongst the people living there as one man explained:

Yes, they are my neighbours on one side; they are retired but younger than me. I see them every day for a quick chat or coffee. I also have a neighbour on the other side, there are just 4 houses in this enclave but the fourth house always seems to have different people moving in and out but the two next to me have been here as long as me, since they were built. I also see the neighbour next door, Louise, she is a single lady and I have suggested many times that we go out for dinner but she is not interested. She was married for over 30 years and then one day her husband left and she has never been able to find him – she doesn't like men, I don't think [laugh]... I suppose she doesn't trust them, I don't know... but we have this funny thing...we all put our nightlights on in the evening and close the curtains but if the curtains are not open by a certain time in the morning there will be a knock on the door to check if you are OK (Mr Swalda, 87)

Looking out for each other had become a shared routine and generally appreciated although Mr Swalids sometimes found it annoying that the neighbour would knock on the door if he had decided to sleep late. The issue had been overcome by agreeing with the neighbour that a shout from him that all was OK was adequate. Having had any advances towards his neighbour rejected, Mr Swalids had resigned himself to the fact that his neighbour was happy to be neighbourly but not overly friendly.

It was a fine balancing act between being neighbourly and not being too involved with the neighbours. Mr David was sometimes unsure about the etiquette of neighbourliness:

If I go out I might see someone...I don't call on them although I suppose I could...but I don't know if they would want me to or not... (Mr David, 84)

This was probably due, in part, to an experience with his next door neighbour where he visited frequently. He got on well with the man who lived there but not so well with the neighbour's wife. He felt that he was probably going there too much and had been trying to cut down the number of visits:

When I said to her one day in the kitchen, "I hope you don't feel I am coming in too many times in the week, Doris" And all she done...she never even looked round...she said "A bit" [sighing]...never even looked round, just said "A bit" and carried on doing something in the sink (Mr David, 84)

He was clearly very sad when he recounted the incident and told me that he was visiting less as he did not want to feel unwelcome. Thus, he had to engage in what Morgan (2009, p.21) refers to as 'a teasing out of the informal norms and expectations of those who live next door or close by'. He also had a brother who lived in the same road but relations were not very good between them and again, the cause was perceived to be his sister-in-law. Whenever he went to visit his brother, his sister-in-law would talk over him as if he was invisible, deliberately not including him in any conversation she had with her husband:

Every time and I mean EVERY time I go in there to see my brother...he says "Are you coming up for a cup of coffee?" And I pop up but I know what to expect, every time it happens...I get up there, get a nice cup of coffee, sit in the lounge, there is Leo [brother] sitting there and...in comes Betty...[does talking action with hands]...I am just sitting there listening to her going on I am never in the conversation...vaccinated with a

gramophone needle that woman! It's so rude...I'll be talking, this is what irritates me more...this does irritate me, bad manners...I am talking to my brother Leo and while I am talking to him she keeps talking to Leo, straight in: "Leo do this and that" Every time, never misses, I don't think she has ever learned the word manners in her life at all...if people are talking...if I am talking to Leo and straight away she'll start her talking even while he is talking (Mr David, 84)

In order to avoid the situation, he had tried to invite his brother to come for coffee at his home but when he did, the phone never stopped ringing as his wife would want to know when he would be finished and return home.

Although Mr Delaney was very friendly with one neighbour in particular, as shown above, he found that sometimes the road he lived in could feel like a fish bowl. However, he chose to value the positive aspect of neighbourliness which was feeling confident that others looked out for him and noticed if things were not as they should be.

'Being there' as neighbours included being available as someone to talk to but also for practical help. A difficulty for several of the men was moving the wheelie bin out on bin collection days and returning it after collection. Neighbours were mostly helpful, especially if the men lived in a more age diverse community. Often they could be called upon to help with minor household problems:

I rang up next door and said "Paul, when you have a minute, I need a new bulb in the kitchen". I can't get up on steps...I wouldn't because I don't think it is right for me to even try. He came in and he brought his wife, you see, she said she would put the bulb in as Paul has a bad shoulder but I wouldn't let her...but she did it, she had brought folding steps (Mr Bridge, 89)

Mr Bridge knew that his neighbour would always help out but when he was not able to, he was somewhat reluctant to ask the neighbour's wife to change a bulb. Other men indicated that there were certain jobs or problems that they would ask neighbours to help out with, depending on their gender. Mr Delaney would always ask female neighbours to help with cooking or washing problems that he encountered whereas Mr David would ask his male neighbour to help out with car or gardening difficulties. This demonstrates the socialisation of the men and gender role expectations in this group of elderly men, something which also became apparent when

talking about gendered expectations from family members, as discussed in the following chapter.

The men were all involved, to various degrees, with at least some people in their neighbourhood. Some of the men relied heavily on support and favours from neighbours whereas others were happy to know that neighbours were available if needed. Neighbourhood was thus part of the men's social worlds.

Negative or ambivalent neighbour relationships and unsafe neighbourhoods

Within the neighbourhoods, these men talked about positive experiences but for some men, some neighbours were associated with negative relationships. In one case, the neighbours had originally been welcoming when Mr Dennis and his wife moved to the area 20 years previously. However, they soon became distant and ignored Mr Dennis and his wife at all times, even if they bumped into each other in the local town. Mr Dennis had become accustomed to their behaviour and accepted that they could not be relied upon for support of any kind. After the death of his wife, he had become very isolated and spent most of his time in his home. One day, he told me, he was in his garage looking for something and accidentally knocked his head on the garage door, hard enough to knock himself out for a brief period. When he came to, the neighbour was just 4 or 5 feet away from him on the other side of a low fence but he did not attempt to help Mr Dennis:

So I came to...there was a pool of blood there and I staggered across the road and they took me to hospital, sent for an ambulance and took me away (Mr Dennis, 85)

He did not appear surprised by the behaviour of his next door neighbour when he told me the story; he had become so used to their indifference towards him. He was, however, upset about a more recent occurrence where his neighbour's wife had stuck her tongue out at a lady who was visiting Mr Dennis. Although he had positive relationships with several people in the road where he lived, this one negative relationship was upsetting him a great deal and overshadowed other positive interactions.

For men who did not have families, or men who did not have regular face-to-face contact with family, the neighbourhood was extremely important and a major source of their daily social

interactions. When such interactions became a cause of anxiety, the men felt increasingly isolated, rejected and alone. Mr Young had attempted to befriend a neighbour in his sheltered housing complex when he first moved there:

Yes, I am a friendly sort of person, I mean, for example when I came here I heard about an old boy living in the flats and uhm and I was told his name so I thought I would go and introduce myself, you know, knocked on his door...Ernie I think he was called..."Hello Ernie", I said "I am Tom living upstairs", and instead of saying to me "Come in" or anything like that he just said "Oh I am just getting my dinner up". So I said "Oh alright" and I told him where I lived but he said that I would have to come down there if I wanted to see him so I didn't bother anymore [laughter] (Mr Young, 86)

Mr Young had, indeed, not bothered anymore and apart from the daily visits from his daughter, he did not interact with any of the people in the flats where he lived. He explained that the people in the flats were not neighbourly:

I saw somebody the other day [in the corridor] and asked if he lived here and he said "Yes" but it was the first time I had ever seen him and I have been here a couple of years (Mr Young, 86)

Although neither Mr Dennis nor Mr Young felt threatened by their neighbours, they did not feel the sense of security that people would notice if they were unwell or in some kind of need¹⁰. Nor did they feel a sense of belonging outside their homes. As older people are encouraged to, and usually prefer to, live in the community for as long as they can, neighbours become increasingly important to men who have little other social contact. They can potentially provide a sense of security, regular contact (even if fleeting) and information about local issues. One man was not provided with any of those by his closest neighbours. Mr Crosby lived in a sheltered housing complex in a rundown area on the outskirts of a city. He told me how he was not able to sit outside the block of flats during the day when the weather was fine as children and young people would throw things at him:

I mean...I have been, I am like a father...I ain't afraid of anyone. Do you know what I mean? And I was sitting out there in the summer time and they were throwing

¹⁰ I had contact with Mr Dennis some months after the final interview and he told me that he was becoming increasingly worried about living alone. He had on one occasion slept with a Stanley knife under his pillow and had subsequently accepted help and support from social services. In 2011 he moved to a residential care home.

something and it hit me and I had two pins to get up and thump them, you know, and I thought I had better not because I might catch them up the road but really I was going to go out there because I was getting raw... Oh I was itching to go and thump them (Mr Crosby, 80)

Mr Crosby seems to be using 'father' as a metaphor to explain the way he had always been a strong protector, not afraid of defending himself or others, but he was also aware of his age and abilities when it came to taking on a group of young people. Every morning he walked to the nearby bus stop to travel to the city and he was conscious that the young people may catch up with him one day. Instead, he had resigned himself to a life inside his flat when at home but he had also extended the boundaries of his neighbourhood. He spent every day in the city, mainly on the market where he was well known and had many friends and acquaintances. To him, that was his neighbourhood and as soon as he walked into the market he would be recognised:

I mean I make an atmosphere when I go on the market. As soon as I go on the stall I say "I'm here!"...No end of people talk to me on there (Mr Crosby, 80)

His photographs demonstrated his extensive social network in the city. This was in stark contrast to his local neighbourhood, of which he had not taken a single photograph.



Figure 13. Mr Crosby spent every day at the market where he felt a strong sense of belonging.

He always came back to his flat in the early afternoon and was never happy to go out after dark. Going out at night worried a small minority of the men and they tended to be the men who were least able to do so:

Well, I don't go out at night...I mean I might be lying in the middle of the road having collapsed and nobody would see me and run straight over me and that would be awful for their tyres (Mr Dickie, 75)

Mr Dickie was referring to a previous experience he had had when crossing the road outside his house:

Well the...not the first time but after my second stroke, I was walking across that road just to cross over to be on the sunny side and I fell over in the middle of the road...and there was just this jumbled mass of somebody which they [cars] avoided (Mr Dickie, 75)

He eventually managed to get up and walk back but while he was lying in the road, the cars had just skirted around him. It was not surprising that he could not risk going out in the dark but it was more to do with his ability to get around than feeling unsafe or threatened.

Between the extremes of excellent neighbourly relations and very negative relations were more ambivalent relationships with neighbours. The majority of the men did not have strong feelings either way about their neighbours and certainly had not experienced any negativity. Mr Brown lived in a road with a mixture of residents in terms of age and found that people tended to keep themselves to themselves and that was a typical response when talking about neighbourhood. Some speculated that if they needed help they may be able to call upon neighbours but the situation had not arisen and, therefore, had not been put to the test. 'Popping in' was not practiced by these men and not viewed as particularly desirable:

I suppose it might be pleasant for ten minutes now and again but they have sort of shown no inclination, you know (Mr Pollock, 80)

Socialising with neighbours was not a common occurrence as these men rarely initiated social contact through invitations to their homes:

I am friendly with them [neighbours] but I don't see them (Mr Harris)

No, I don't see any of them, the neighbours used to come, one came the other day...they came to see her [wife] (Mr Smith, 97)

Kate [wife] had her own friends, she...yeah she uhm her friend, a neighbour who used to come and play Scrabble, used to sit here, oh yeah and...but you see, I have never heard anything from anybody in this road other than by mouth, you know, close neighbours saying sorry about Kate...because you know, we've been here 25 years, strange isn't it? Everybody seem different here, you don't socialise like you might do in London in a road, you know, like the kids all playing in the street and they...you know (Mr David, 84)

Thus, these men articulated limits on neighbourliness and for Mr Smith and Mr David, neighbours had been involved with their wives which meant that once they lived alone, the neighbours stopped coming to visit.

Mr David lived in a road which was almost entirely inhabited by elderly people and therefore there was little going on in the road. Although he had lived in the same road for so many years, he was still comparing it to life in London where he had originated from and where he lived in a much more age diverse area. For some men, living in an age diverse area had its own issues of neighbourliness as many of the other residents would go to work and be away most of the day:

They are friendly but they seem to keep themselves to themselves. Now the bungalow next door they have been here for a...getting on for a year. I have never spoken to them [laughter]. I think the woman works at the hospital, I thinks so, yeah (Mr Brown, 80)

I know a lot [of neighbours] but then there are also a lot you don't know because it is different age groups and older people don't do things...they keep themselves to themselves, let's put it that way (Mr Pollock, 80)

Living in more age diverse neighbourhoods also meant that children and young people were around which sometimes led to noise and anti-social behaviour within the neighbourhood:

As soon as I see kids I think "Oh my God", I want to get away from them and also I have got...they vandalised my car when I parked it up the corner there, they put scratches all over it, "Fuck off" on the windscreen and a piece of paper tucked under the wiper to tell me to Fuck off (Mr Rastus, 76)

He also told me about an incident where a boy had run into his garden to hide:

I was sitting here resting and he turned around and saw me and stuck two fingers up at me and then he cleared off. I thought he was ill or something but...I think he was running away from the police and that was a hiding place, I don't know (Mr Rastus, 76)

Despite some trouble with some of the local children, he felt very safe and he had always been used to living in an age diverse neighbourhood. The men who lived within sheltered housing complexes only had elderly neighbours and for some men, that was not a stimulating community to live in. Mr Crosby was a very active and lively man and he felt totally out on a limb when he interacted with his elderly neighbours in the common lounge:

There are a few awkward people in here though. There is one who is crazy over helicopters. She come in with a photograph, she go "Isn't that a lovely boy, isn't it?" And that is only a helicopter [laughter]. Yes and she is sat there, she said "Oh, it's Uncle Bing". I said "How can I be Uncle Bing to a card?" She's a bit funny! (Mr Crosby, 80)

Diverse neighbourhoods, which allow for interaction with people of different ages, may be desirable for intergenerational contact and understanding. However, for some of these older men, the younger generation is not considered able to understand the situation of older people:

If I need anything, the neighbours are very good. They are all people who are getting on a bit in years so they understand the situation more than these young ones do (Mr Smith, 97)

Overall, these men preferred a homogenous neighbourhood with people 'like them' as generally, they felt other older people would understand their situation better. A neighbourhood without children and young adults was viewed by some of men as a safer environment. However, the suggestion that being with other older people was desirable was a view rarely expressed by these men when they talked about the activities they participated in or would like to participate in, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Barriers to opportunities for social interaction

I have already presented findings related to opportunities for social engagement through bus travel and congenial neighbourhoods. A lack of such opportunities can be viewed as barriers to social interaction, as I explore through a second category within 'Men out and about'. The three sub-categories within this category are: *accessing information, previous life experiences and personal views and the unspoken consequences of ageing, illness and disability*. I present the barriers as perceived by the men, before findings relating to participation and connecting with others (see below), as the men had to overcome those barriers before they were able to participate, or not, as was the case for some.

Accessing information

Access to information was clearly necessary in order to learn about bus travel, activities and other local services. Without information, some of these men felt left out and ignored. However, information is often acquired incidentally through relationships with others and that information can then in turn lead to more social interactions. The lack of access to information is, therefore, a barrier to opportunities for social interaction but it may also be a consequence of limited social interaction.

This section will elaborate on the importance of access to information about available services and local activities, as articulated by the men. Often the men were unclear about any official point of information but some guessed where they might go to access information formally, should they need to. Suggested access points for information included the internet, the library and council offices. Mr Beejay could not remember explicitly trying to find information for himself and, as he was living in sheltered accommodation, he may have had access to information incidentally from staff and other residents. He speculated as to how he would go about acquiring information:

I do use the internet...and uhm wonderful the internet, crumbs you can buy herbs from China if you want but even without the internet you can go to places, the council offices would be a good place to start, I should think and they have social places, don't they? I can't think of anything now or exactly where you would go but they have social services, that's what I am trying to think of, they have social services, don't they? And uhm ladies

working there know all about these things. I would have thought...go down there have a chat and they would only be too...if some older person lady or man went down there and said to some of these social workers "Oh dear I don't know what to do with myself is there anything?" They would fall over themselves, I am sure, telling them things they could do, I am sure they would (Mr Beejay, 75)

Of course, the men who were already going out and who were frequently involved with others, were able to access information informally, and sometimes by chance, from friends and acquaintances. There are many types of information that older people may need to access, including available services (for example housing, care, support and health), organised activities and financial advice. Being unable to access information can, in some cases, be detrimental to sustaining or initiating social relationships. Mr Young, above, was sure that the local buses were not able to accommodate wheelchairs which was in fact not the case. He had not sought information about bus access nor had he been exposed to information by chance. In Mr Young's case, it was surprising that he had not been able to gain such information as he lived in a sheltered housing complex, had a daughter who visited daily and was using a computer with access to the internet.

It is important to remember that the men who took part in this study were all living in the community and not in receipt of formal services, although some were getting meals delivered and all of the men used medical services. This meant that a potential route for information to filter through to the men from professionals, as identified by Mr Beejay above, was therefore not available to most of these men. The men who had networks devoid of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) could not access enough information about local opportunities and activities. Wenger (1989) has suggested that the family dependent network, which is characterised by a primary focus on local family ties with few peripheral friends or neighbours, is the least protective support network for older people, as discussed in the literature review.

Mr Young had what is best described as a family dependent network. Since moving to Norwich two years ago, and leaving friends behind in London, his life has been devoid of social contact other than visits from family:

Apart from my daughter I never see anybody (Mr Young, 86)

It appears that Mr Young's network was so restricted to family that he was not able to take

advantage of any weak ties which could potentially encourage him to participate in activities with others outside his home. He told me that when he lived further away from his daughter, he was far more integrated in the community as he went out on his own and that gave him opportunities to access information through weak ties:

Enfield was much easier, you know...within 100 yards or so you have shops and so and people around you (Mr Young, 86)

Even if information was actively given to the men, the information was not always clear and complete. During my initial meeting with Mr David, he showed me a flyer about a lunch club which had been posted through his letterbox. The information about a lunch club for men appealed to him but the flyer had no details about where the lunches were taking place nor did it have details about contacting the organisers. Perhaps the local organisers assumed that local people would already have some knowledge of potential venues (e.g. the village hall). Mr David was very unsure about what to do with himself after the death of his wife. He used to enjoy dancing and golf but he was unable to get started again, partly because he did not know where to start:

I never get any information about things. I wouldn't mind meeting other people but where do I go for that? Is there a luncheon club? (Mr David, 84)

It was early days for Mr David as he had only been on his own for ten months but he was keen to do something with other people although obviously anxious about starting again on his own. There appeared to be no information or support available for him or anyone to give him the nudge that he needed and despite having lived in the area for 27 years, he was not sure where to go for information as he had never needed to access it previously. More informal information was not readily available to him as he rarely went to places where he might meet people, neither did he appear to have set daily routines. Hence, he was not in a position to acquire information incidentally through set habits or routines (Wilson, 1977). Other men found it difficult to get started again and were at a loss as to where to go to initiate new friendships:

Well, I don't know...personally I don't know...I think really now my making friends is all finished...isn't it? I do make friends, very easily but uhm...it is too much trouble to go out and find them...I never used to be like that until just lately...I started neglecting myself and my food because I was right down in the dumps and I got really weak and started

falling all over the place because it was too much trouble for me to do it...what have I got to do it for...uhm...I would do something for my children but not for myself (Mr McBeth, 86)

Mr McBeth was finding it difficult to know where to start making friends despite living in a community of older people. The sheltered accommodation where he lived organised activities but he insisted that either he did not know about the activities or he was not interested in the kind of activities organised. Like Mr David, he needed clear information and a nudge to get him to join in. He, however, did get that nudge at times from some of the other residents with whom he appeared to be friendly. During one of my visits he had organised for some of the other residents to come to his flat and I was able to conduct an impromptu focus group. One man had brought along the list of activities available during the month which included knit/natter, Tai-Chi, exercise classes, bingo and coffee mornings. There were also trips to garden centres and other places of interest. It was a clearly presented list of activities with locations and times clearly shown and it was available to all of the residents. Despite this, Mr McBeth still felt that he would not know where to go to meet people. Although he did not explicitly say so, it was obvious during our meetings that he had difficulties with reading and writing and he talked about not being able to learn when he was at school. For Mr McBeth, therefore, one underlying cause of his inability to participate without his wife was perhaps his difficulty with literacy.

Most of these men did not actively look for information and some of the men had little access to incidental information through weak ties or bridging and linking social capital. The information that the men received was not always adequate in terms of clarity, excluding men with poor literacy skills.

Previous life experiences and personal views of organised activities

Views about group activities, and previous experiences of attempting to join in activities or clubs, could become a barrier to involvement with others. Some men said they had never been inclined to join in activities or clubs; they would explain that they had never been 'clubby' or 'groupies'. Growing older had not influenced the way they viewed such activities and despite some of the men being quite isolated, they would be adamant about their disinterest in such

social worlds. One man had belonged to a boxing club as a young man and a political organisation but he was too shy to go anywhere on his own after the death of his wife:

I haven't belonged to a club since I was 18 when I used to box in the Lad's club. Me and my wife belonged to the labour club and working men's club... I don't like going anywhere on me own (Mr McBeth, 86)

He told me that he had been very outgoing when he was married and used to be 'the life and soul of the party' but on his own he was shy and did not have any interest in joining clubs. However, he was interested in socialising generally and enjoyed the company of a small group of men in the sheltered housing complex where he lived.

The competitive aspect of some clubs had been off-putting for some men. Mr Delaney described how he had enjoyed playing bowls but the competition had become too much for him:

I enjoyed the bowls but one reason I left it was that it was getting too serious. I used to want to go and enjoy myself, you know, if they had missed a point or something like that there was a big discussion and I used to think "I don't want that". I also joined an indoor club and it was the same there: arguments especially between husband and wife. If you were bowling against a husband and wife, you knew there was going to be trouble. I used to think "It's only a game, what's going on?" [Laughter] (Mr Delaney, 78)

While his wife was still alive, they had a particularly unpleasant experience when they tried to join in a local social club:

We went in and said who we were and "Right, you can't sit there, that's somebody's seat" and I was ready to walk out and then they said that we could have two seats but if the people turned up we had to give them up. Well, we played bingo and I was terrified of winning [laughter]. When we walked out, I said "No more" It was a shame really because, you know, they wanted people to join but it was all "You can't sit there and you can't sit there". There were loads of empty seats (Mr Delaney, 78)

They never went back to the club and Mr Delaney had no intention of putting himself through that ordeal again, alone. Seeking the company of others and admitting to needing others was, thus, difficult for the men. Certainly, if they attempted to do so but failed, then they would give up completely.

Unspoken consequences of ageing, illness and disability

Many of the men had developed minor ailments, some of which were related to biological ageing but seemed to be rarely considered by organisers of activities for the elderly. Hearing loss could be particularly debilitating and reduced mobility limited the speed and ability to get around. Mr Young, who suffered from hearing loss, as well as mobility problems which meant that he was a wheelchair user, had resigned himself to a life in his flat although there were some activities, including coffee mornings, that he could attend within his sheltered housing complex:

They have coffee mornings on Monday, starting at 10.30 and I get up rather late and it takes me a long time to get moving and get washed and dressed and so on, that's the reason I don't go (Mr Young, 86)

As he was not able to sleep lying down due to pain in his leg and back, he slept in a chair in his sitting room all night. His difficulties in getting comfortable meant that he was often still awake at four or five o'clock in the morning and when he finally managed to sleep, he would sleep till 11 o'clock in the morning. Thus, he was never able to attend morning coffee sessions. When arranging meetings with the men, they would generally ask me to ring late morning and certainly they preferred visits late morning. Although the majority did not have extreme mobility problems, most of the men found that getting up and ready for the day had become a slow process and they would sometimes joke with me: "Don't call before 10 or I won't have my teeth in!"

Hearing loss was a common problem for all the participants although for some it was more severe and debilitating than for others. The majority of organised activities tended to involve a crowd of people and that was a particular challenge for the men who were hard of hearing:

Yeah...yeah but downstairs [in shared lounge] you can't hear nothing, there's too many people down there, they speak over each other, too much background noise, yeah and I just can't understand that and Harold [friend] can't either, no that's not a lot of good that ain't (Mr McBeth, 86)

One to one I am OK but at U3A I can't hear much of what goes on...I go to a little restaurant and there are juke boxes and several people talking, even with the car engine noise I can't hear what they are saying in the car when we go out...I used to have a good

natter when I went to Somerset [on the coach] now I sit there in my seat, I can't hear a word (Mr Rastus, 76)

The inability to hear what others were saying could be embarrassing and for some men it was better to stay away from group activities:

One reason I don't go...as you know, I am deaf, I am stone deaf in that ear and uhm partially in this one and with a crowd of people chattering it is very difficult, yeah (Mr Young, 86)

One man described himself as very gregarious before he suffered two strokes which had severely affected his speech. He also suffered from mobility problems which made it difficult for him to walk any distance, even with his stick. As his speech was slow and laboured, he felt that others would be intolerant of him:

You see, I feel that I would be a dead loss because I couldn't do anything...often I can't really talk properly, I mean...I hunt around for the right words, sometimes I can't pronounce them so I think to myself...any big group and they would say "Oh, Trickie is coming, you know what he is like" because I can't... (Mr Dickie, 75)

He thought that his ailment was more difficult to understand than an obvious physical disability:

Yes, but if you have got a broken leg or something like that you know they have got a broken leg but if I am just sat there like this and I try to talk and I can't get the right phrase...something like that, I feel totally inadequate (Mr Dickie, 75)

It was a common concern for many of the men that their disabilities were often not visible and they were embarrassed by those disabilities. Disabilities, then, were perceived as barriers to interaction with others both because the men were reluctant to attempt interactions and because organised activities did not carefully consider the potential problems with interactions, including the number of people in groups and the timings of meetings.

A potential route to social interaction is through volunteering which also has the ability to raise self-esteem through helping others (Musick & Wilson, 2003). Being a productive activity, it is likely to appeal to older men. However, only one man was an active volunteer through his

church but another had tried to get involved with volunteering through Age UK and had been rejected:

They didn't want to know, not really...because I can't hear properly (Mr Rastus, 76)

His disability not only prevented him from interacting confidently in crowds but it also prevented him from access to volunteering and the potential benefits that could bring to both himself and others.

These men perceived the barriers to participation to be lack of information, often caused by lack of participation, previous experiences which had been disappointing and disability. Most of the men were prepared to give clubs a chance but if they did not immediately like the set-up or feel integrated within the group, then they would readily give up. Unhappiness with an activity was also related to issues of access, sometimes to the venue, the time of the activity or the activity itself due to sensory disabilities. Thus, connecting with others outside the home was at times perceived to be too difficult.

Finding ways of connecting with others

In order to develop meaningful relationships, it is necessary to form specific and identifiable, although not always formalised, connections with other people both in the immediate neighbourhood and with others perhaps further afield. One way to regularly meet other people was to join in organised activities. Only five of the men took part in regular, organised activities. They included dancing, croquet, Singles club, ex-servicemen's club, the University of the Third Age (U3A) and bridge. The men who took part in one activity, rather than none, tended to belong to several different clubs and organisations. Although clubs and activities did not lead to the formation of close friendships, the men often talked about their acquaintances as being significant to them and described them as 'sort of friends'. They never met with those acquaintances outside the activity or club and showed no desire to do so. Although eleven of the men were not involved with clubs and activities, many of them had been involved in the past, with bowls in particular, but that activity had become hard to continue for the frailer men. Some men were not interested in joining in any activities or clubs and others had had negative experiences with clubs.

The category 'connecting with others' contains four sub-categories: *establishing routines*, *feminised spaces but gendered needs*, '*they are old but I am not*' and *religiosity and spiritual venues*.

Establishing routines

I have already suggested that neighbourhood boundaries were fluid and dynamic, depending on the individual man, his ability to get around and the type of neighbourhood. Routines established by the men, both within their immediate locality as well as further afield, meant that the men often saw and interacted with the same people. In some cases the men would call such relationships and interactions 'friendships' but for the majority of the men those routine interactions were referred to as acquaintanceships (Morgan, 2009). Whether routines are established in order to achieve certain goals every day, or to meet and interact with certain people, was hard to discern but it appeared that, at least consciously, routines served a purpose to give order to lives and ensure that certain things were done at the required time which in turn meant that the same people were encountered at those same times on a regular basis. For example, Mr Beejay went to the pub every Wednesday and saw other regulars there. He was not interested in striking up friendships but the other customers were familiar, as was the lady serving him, and they would exchange greetings but that was all:

I read the newspaper...yeah, I sit there reading the newspaper...some blokes...they chat about stuff...I am not particularly interested in football very much and they are all keen on...you know, that's one of the big pub conversations...football...but it doesn't do a lot for me, never has (Mr Beejay, 75)

He explained that the reason he went every Wednesday was not that he particularly liked drinking on a Wednesday but that he did not like drinking every day. As he always had a few drinks at home during the weekend, he liked to leave a couple of days free from drinking and therefore he would go to the pub on a Wednesday. He had also established routines associated with visits to a betting shop and a local newsagent.



Figure 14. Mr Beejay would visit the newsagent every day and engage in friendly banter

On days when he did not go far, he would always visit the newsagent to buy the daily paper so he always saw and spoke to someone:

...even if it is only that little fellow in the shop...I see him, call him Boss...say "Hello Boss, how are you doing today"? And he says "I'm alright, Boss" [laughter] (Mr Beejay, 75)

Regular, friendly banter was an important aspect of social interactions with others who were not friends but considered acquaintances:

I go down and get the paper and talk to people on the way, talk to the people in the shop, have a laugh with the women in the shop...you come out and you meet people on the way back and I pop into Doreen and from there I walk up the road and you talk to other people (Mr Delaney, 78)

Mr Delaney's daily routine allowed him to meet and greet many of the same people every time he went to the shop to buy the paper. The local shop was, thus, often a focal point for social interactions and acquaintanceships. Mr Delaney drew my attention to his motorbike by a photograph taken by a friend.



Figure 15. Mr Delaney was a keen biker

He explained that being a biker connected him with others and gave him a sense of belonging:

Yeah, well you are not on your own with a motorbike, this is it, because people wave to you, if you stop in a lay-by they'll talk to you, if ever you had broken down or something they would always pull up and help. It's not like car drivers; they just drive past and ignore you. Oh, it's a completely different world... Yeah because you are a biker you are all one family, you can go into a café on your own, if they are in there you'll sit and talk with them, you know (Mr Delaney, 78)

During the summer months when the weather was favourable, Mr Dennis also enjoyed a walk to the shop or the cemetery and then he would sit on a bench for a while watching and greeting anyone passing by:

[T]hey have got a seat on the green down there so after visiting it I go and sit on the green on the seat and read the paper for an hour when the weather is permitting (Mr Dennis, 85)

Unfortunately, when I interviewed him, he had not been able to leave the house for many weeks as it was winter and he could not manage the walk on icy pavements but it was something that he looked forward to doing again once the spring arrived.

Routines were articulated as a productive way to increase social interaction and were part of these men's daily lives. They varied from regular interaction in a pub or just the odd interaction when walking to the shops.

Feminised spaces but gendered needs

A very dominant view was that, although the men liked the company of women, they did not want to frequent places which were dominated by women and a problem was that many activities aimed at older people are women's activities:

I used to go to the pensioners' club and I am still a member but I walk in and stand and look at a sea of white hair with the same blue rinse...they are nearly all ladies and they talk about the same thing: their medication. I have nothing against women but there are only four or five men and I don't want to listen to old people talking about their medication, all at the same time. I like women, particularly younger women (Mr Swalds, 87)

Older women were seen as 'other', with different behaviours, ideas and needs. The activities provided in clubs for the elderly tended to cater for the women. In one sheltered housing complex, the men had requested a snooker table but the table had been placed in a space viewed as the 'women's space':

One lady brought a snooker table in here and I thought she would put it in the room with all the glasses...us men...there's me, Ernie, Harold, Morris, Sunny and Peter and Henry and Tom and Phillip up there, all lads together, we could all play snooker, couldn't we? But no, they got it in the little room downstairs where the women do craft and we have to keep pulling it out when we want to use it...I ain't going in there to play it...well, all them ladies sit in there most of the day, I don't want to go in there with them, do I? (Mr McBeth, 86)

None of the men wanted to have anything to do with the snooker table as it was in the room with all the women and the opportunity for them all to get together and play snooker never materialised because of that. Instead, the men would sit in the main lounge playing dominos while the women stayed in their designated room, chatting and doing arts and crafts. On every

occasion that I visited the lounge, I observed that there was not a single man involved with the organised craft activities. The men explained that they did not join in the coffee morning or bingo either as that was perceived to be for the women. An attempt had also been made by the men to get a dart board hung up but by the end of my visits, it had still not been hung up. Mr McBeth explained that the men were disappointed as they had visualised a room with a snooker table for the men that could also have the dart board on the wall and even a bar; a recreation of a pub environment:

They [sheltered housing management] say that it will cost hundreds of pounds to learn somebody to take care of the bar plus they have got no licence but my neighbour next door spent years as a barman, he could do it, yeah...it would be nice for the men...they can all get there and they can all mix... (Mr McBeth, 86)

The lack of a masculinised space meant that many of the men did not want to go to the shared lounge, especially not alone. Mr McBeth told me that he would always go with another man if he went in as there was safety in numbers. Yet, he very much enjoyed the company of women and enjoyed talking to them if he had the opportunity on more neutral territory. The lack of suitable activities to join in meant that Mr McBeth spent a lot of time in his flat and he felt bored and lonely, despite the daily visits from members of his family.

Feminisation of services, such as bereavement groups, was also a problem. Mr Delaney had attended a bereavement group after the death of his wife and had initially found it extremely supportive in the all-male group as the other three men in the group had experienced the same kind of bereavement. He felt that they were a support to each other. However, the group started expanding:

The only thing I found was that as it got bigger, it was getting bigger with women rather than with men and there were only four of us [men] and it was a branch of the Women's Institute, you know. They were all talking about women's things like knitting and cooking and we were sort of...felt that we were pushed out (Mr Delaney, 78)

The final straw for him was when he had been asked by the other men to give a talk about his motorcycle trip to Scotland but the women did not want to listen to a talk about motor biking:

...they were far more interested in needlework and painting plates...and they used to fetch craft stuff in where they could make Christmas or birthday cards and boxes and things like that...oh, no [laughter] (Mr Delaney, 78)

For a while he attempted to take part in the craft activities as he felt excluded just sitting there but eventually, he decided to stop going to the bereavement group. He felt that if there had been a more even number of men and women, the group would have functioned better as there would have been enough men to talk to about 'men's thing':

We sort of ended up chatting on our own because we were sort of talking men's things, you know...you talk about what sort of work you did, what you did in the services, what car you drove and things like that, you know...and you talk about football and all sorts of things like that (Mr Delaney, 78)

The U3A was also seen by some as a feminised space and many of the monthly talks were aimed at the female majority:

They have meetings in the Assembly House...quite a nice place...there was a talk about royal jewels and things like that...I didn't find it very interesting. There were a lot of ladies there again, you see...these sort of things are more or less dominated, well not dominated but it is mostly women there and they were absolutely enthralled with this stuff and I wasn't particularly interested (Mr Beejay, 75)

He never returned and did not participate in any other clubs or organisations.

These men did not enjoy feminised spaces as they felt excluded and outnumbered. Within the feminised spaces, the men formed their own groups and rarely integrated with the women. However, for some of the men, it was not just the presence of women that put them off joining in, but the presence of other older people.

'They are old but I am not'

Mixing with other older people was viewed as undesirable by most of these men as they rarely felt that they themselves were old in spirit and, as pointed out to me by one man, old is relative:

I don't want to be with all those old people. Well, old is relative isn't it? I mean you, I don't wish to be rude, but you would be old to a teenager (Mr Harris, 90)

Mr Harris was a retired teacher and spent much of the interview talking about his studying and working life. His identity was not that of an old man but of a teacher, albeit a retired teacher, and he told me that he still did lesson plans in his head for the seven year olds that he used to teach. Mr Dennis also used his working background as an engineer to calculate distances between objects and his identity was work based, not based on his age. He had gone to a local day centre a few times but had not enjoyed the experience:

Well, to be quite honest, I usually go to this day centre and they have the lunches there and quite honestly it is not very nice sitting down having a meal against somebody who can't help themselves...and they are using a spoon, trying to get it in their mouth and it is all running down their front...it is not really the type of atmosphere you want to have your own meal in, you know (Mr Dennis, 85)

Although he had limitations with his own mobility which restricted his ability to get around, mentally he felt that he was fine and he longed for conversation with others, something that the local day centre could not offer. He commented, after the final interview that, we had had 'a good discussion', a rare treat for him to have someone to talk to for any length of time.

Watching other older people who were less able to cope was disturbing for the men and a reminder of what may be in store for them:

I went in one [day centre] on one occasion and they all sit round the walls, nodding off, only come to life when the tea trolley comes round or it's feeding time. Is that living? You know some of these poor old souls with Alzheimer they don't know what time of the day it is but the doctors feel that it is incumbent upon them to keep them alive...why not let them die with dignity? (Mr Harris)

Another man commented on the people who came for lunch at the sheltered housing complex where he lived:

...there could be up to 20 come in here every day but half of them...well, I don't know...half of them aren't there, if you know what I mean... (Mr McBeth, 86)

He said that when he had a look around the sheltered housing complex with his daughter, before he moved in, he felt that he was too young to be there:

To be quite honest, I feel about 21, yeah, I only feel 21...I have always felt like that and that is why I like the company of younger people, younger people yeah...not just mixing with old people (Mr McBeth, 86)

During one of my visits, he showed me a new leather jacket he had purchased. It was black and very modern and he wanted my opinion on how young it made him look. Other men also discussed fashion and dress during our meetings. Mr Crosby always wore a cowboy outfit which he considered his 'trademark' (Figure 16). Mr Pollock showed me a new blazer he had bought and Mr Bridge always commented on the clothes he wore in the photographs. For example, 'that is my favourite jumper'. The dissonance between chronological age and the age the men were feeling was thus a recurrent topic.



Figure 16. Mr Crosby in his cowboy outfit for which he was well known at the market.

As the men had all experienced National Service, one age diverse club potentially available to them was the ex-servicemen's clubs but their views on those clubs differed somewhat. For some, they still objected to being with old people and displayed a very stereotypical and ageist attitude towards older men:

A sea of old boys, all 70 and 80 and singing all those old songs...no thanks very much (Mr Harris, 90)

No well, quite honestly, you get fed up talking about the Services, you do really. I mean...because you are only hearing what you have already experienced yourself actually (Mr Dennis, 85)

Others acknowledged that clubs for ex-service men could present an opportunity to mix with younger people:

The ex-service club is anyone who is ex-service but a lot of the younger ones don't want to belong to them because there are too many old fogies...and I have to include myself in that group now (Mr Rastus, 76)

Mr Rastus actually attended the club, unlike the above men who held very negative attitudes towards the club despite never attending. Mr Rastus was also one of the youngest men in the study and it was surprising that he felt he should be included in the category 'old'. He talked about his working life, when I interviewed him, and described how it had come to a very unpleasant end when he was attacked by a client. He had retired immediately afterwards and was still struggling to feel safe when in a crowd. The protective attitude towards the elderly may have reassured him and mixing with other older people may have given him a sense of security. Earlier, he had expressed his dislike of young people so it was not surprising that he was happy to include himself in 'the old fogies' group.

Mr Swalds found that the ex-service men's club was a good place to attend as there were younger people to interact with:

Sometimes I go to the Services Club. I go probably once a month...it used to be the British Legion. I can't drink so I find it hard as there is a lot of drinking going on but it is quite nice because there are younger people there, too (Mr Swalds, 87)

His view of the Services Club was in stark contrast to the view expressed by him when discussing the pensioners club (see above). He told me that he much preferred the company of people younger than himself and often found it difficult to find something to talk about with people his own age. He said that when the day came when he could not appreciate a pretty young woman, he would dig a hole for himself and die. He also explained to me how he managed to interact

with younger people by talking to them in supermarkets. He would go when people were on their way home from work and judge from their trolleys if they were single. He would strike up conversation with young women by asking advice regarding certain items on the shelves. Although the interactions were only brief and took place in a supermarket, he valued the opportunity to speak to younger women. Many of the men were keen to interact with younger women but many were also aware that young women would not necessarily be interested in interacting with them:

Well, that's the problem...young people think that you are a silly old fool and you look at young people and "Oh she's nice" [laughter]. I prefer younger people really, certainly do because they are brighter, you know, not necessarily sharper because the old people they are not dim but uhm...I don't know...they are more or less fixed in their way and they are not so cheerful, young people are inclined to be a little bit more cheerful, older people are more miserable (Mr Beejay, 75)

These men's pervasive, negative attitudes, towards older people, may well be a reflection of society's attitudes towards people who are no longer of working age. Old is equated to being of no use and these men expressed their reluctance to accept that they were ageing and hung on to their identity as workers. Attitudes towards older people also mean that there is little intergenerational contact apart from contact with family members. Sports clubs could be a place where different age groups interact but for older men who are frail or have mobility problems, sport is often not an option open to them. Reluctant to join in with activities seen as feminised, as well as groups and activities geared towards older people, the men are often left with little choice in terms of organised activities. The lack of interaction with others can, in turn, make the men feel isolated and bored.

One man, who identified himself as gay, found that there was a lack of provision for older gay men. He was no longer able to attend gay bars as they were predominantly frequented by younger men who were sexually active:

It is like any other club really except that it's there because you are after sex, let's not beat about the bush...sex is first and then friendship and with an ordinary couple it's friendship first and then sex with a man or a woman, whatever...but it is different with gays (Mr Dickie, 75)

His difficulties were not just with his age but with his single status and his frailty after suffering two strokes. He felt that going to a gay bar was pointless as he was not able to be sexually active:

That is a big disadvantage, if you have got a partner that is OK if you both go together but there would be no point in going to a gay club if you couldn't perform or anything like that (Mr Dickie, 75)

He had spent his working life as a stage manager and was very keen on the arts and theatre. However, as he was no longer able to get around easily, he was not able to visit the theatre. He had been to a day centre on one occasion but had not enjoyed the experience:

I know there are places for the over sixties although most of them...I have been once to them...most of them needed trolleys or something like that. I don't know...I prefer to be ignored and not so that people are fussing around you saying "Can I get you so and so?" I can't do with all that (Mr Dickie, 75)

Although he was very derogative about older people with walking aids, he used a stick himself and walked with great difficulty. He did not want to be 'looked after' but he would like company. A day centre did not fulfil his need for stimulating conversation. The paradox is thus, that these older men do not want to participate in activities with older people but the kinds of activities which attract younger people are not always accessible for frailer older men. One place which some of the men turned to for social interaction was the local church.

Religiosity and spiritual venues

A religious community has the potential to provide a social world which encompasses all generations. The local vicar, particularly in rural areas, was often in a position to look in on people living alone and possibly keep them informed about village activities. However, overall, the men had not experienced the church community favourably. Mr Dennis told me that he would have liked the local vicar to call after he had lost his wife. He was not a religious man but in the rural community where he lived, the vicar was seen as someone who should be interested, care about others and offer guidance:

The lady is...the lady down there who actually runs the church, she was aware of my loss, I mean my wife lays in her churchyard but sometimes I think that would be lovely if she just visited just that once...but as I say...the times I have been to church, she has been up to me and put her arms around me as if to say "Thank you for coming", type of thing but maybe I am misjudging her...maybe her time is full up anyway, you don't really know do you? (Mr Dennis, 85)

Mr Bridge had also found that the local vicar was illusive but he still had contact with the minister from the parish where he had lived over 20 years previously:

... the minister comes and sees me but the one from where I used to live, not the one from here (Mr Bridge, 89)

He did not come regularly and Mr Bridge was never sure when he would come: 'He don't announce himself at all'. Mr Bridge was embedded within a large, close family and also remained socially active within his home, despite his terminal illness. Therefore, he had access to news and other information from informal sources but Mr Dennis was very isolated and only had a daughter who lived a great distance from him. The need for and access to information was very different for the two men.

The church community was important to several of the men but most had not had positive experiences. Mr Harris had moved from London to Norfolk to be nearer his daughter after the death of his wife. He was a very religious man and explained to me that he had thought the move would be a way for him to make a new life:

Well, I believe that I thought it was an opportunity to make a new life because I joined the local Baptist church when I came up here although I couldn't join...because it was what is called a closed community...I couldn't become a member of the church because within the closed community of the Baptist church, you can only be a member if you are baptised Baptist whereas I was brought up in the Anglican church. I was christened and confirmed in the Anglican Church and uhm I saw no reason why I should be baptised into this church so I am classified as a friend but that never really took off (Mr Harris, 90)

Despite being very understanding about the workings of the church, the exclusion from a community that mattered to him had affected him and he had not attempted to join any other organisations. He told me that he was still a religious person and he still said his prayers at

home, on his own. The idea that the church could provide companionship and support was not realised by the men and although Mr Swalds looked to the church after the death of his wife, he, too, was disappointed:

I don't think I am religious. After my wife died I went to church and I was quite religious...I think it was probably just the sense of belonging, the company...I don't think I am religious... (Mr Swalds, 87)

He had gone to church on a few occasions:

I have tried a couple of times but the church is always empty so it is a solitary experience. I liked the company the church gave me after my wife died but here...they don't even shake hands after the service. Maybe I should try one of these clapping churches, I might like that... (Mr Swalds, 87)

The continued support and company he had expected was not forthcoming and he no longer went to church.

Only one man had mostly positive experiences with the church but even he had initially experienced difficulties when he joined the church community with his wife:

Yes and uhm we joined the local church and for about 5 years it really...I don't know how to put it...not to be detrimental but there was a sort of cliquishness about it in as much as if you were part of, say, the medical...there are 2, 3, 4 doctors go there and the nurses and so on...they would group together and the people from the school would all be together because they had a common denominator so that they talked to one another...which is absolutely normal...they discuss work related things which is absolutely normal... (Mr Arbour, 75)

He started attending an Alpha course¹¹ at a church in a neighbouring village and found that he much preferred the atmosphere of the church there. Belonging to the church had been a great support for him after the death of his wife but he was keen to clarify that it was the people, as opposed to the church, who had been supportive:

¹¹ A course which explores the Christian faith

Certain people...people who you didn't expect, if you like, those are the ones that have come and helped me...that's life, that's what happens, isn't it? (Mr Arbour, 75)

The church had continued to be an important part of his life and it was through the church that he had started volunteering in a local residential home.

The church and religion was seen by many of the men, even if they had not previously considered themselves believers, as a place to seek support and company after the loss of a spouse or, in later life, when other networks were reducing. However, only one of the men had a positive experience to talk about. Many of the other men felt let down, especially in small rural communities where the church was often central to the life of that community and neighbourhood. The difference in their experiences with the religious community may well have been influenced by the men's involvement and contribution to the church. Hence, Mr Arbour, who contributed by volunteering for the church, eventually settled into a religious community whereas the rest of the men did not contribute anything to the community yet expected the church to contribute to their lives.

Connecting with others is important at any time of life but particularly later in life when opportunities may be reduced and networks shrink due to the death of peers. All of the men had found that their networks had shrunk as they had become older. For some, it was due to their change in marital status but for all of them, there were losses associated with age and having ageing friends. Becoming a widower had sabotaged certain friendships, particularly those with couples. Prolonged illness of a spouse had at times reduced the ability to keep in touch with network members. For one man, his wife's dementia had eventually led to her living in a nursing home but not before most of their friends had deserted them:

Well, we lost a lot of them [friends], you see, they became embarrassed because she didn't know who they were and it seemed they didn't want to come and see her (Mr Smith, 97)

Initially Mr Smith had entered the nursing home with his wife as he had suffered from exhaustion after caring for her for many months. However, once he was better he had to leave the home as the fees were more than he could afford. He went back to live in his bungalow on the outskirts of a small town and spent most of his time alone. As he did not attend any clubs or activities, he was not able to initiate new social relationships. He rarely visited his wife as she no

longer recognised him and he found the ordeal too upsetting. In many ways he appeared to consider that the marriage had ended. He had lost his wife's companionship but not his love for her. 'Marriage as a memory' or 'the illusory marriage' probably best describes his view of the marriage (Gladstone, 1995, p.55). Although he felt a sense of duty towards his wife, he did not recognise the person she had become and in many ways felt like a widower and was treated like a widower by others. There was no indication of any effort being made by family or the nursing home staff to keep the spousal relationship going.

Previous life experiences and expectations influenced the kind of social network the men enjoyed, as demonstrated above. For some, friendships had never played a big part in their lives and they were not able to name a close friend other than a childhood friend. They had often been married from an early age to their first sweetheart and had remained married for many years until the death of their loved one. These men had not felt the need for friendships outside the marital relationships. Now that they were on their own, they still did not express a great need for friendships although they generally enjoyed very casual relationships or acquaintanceships, as illustrated above. When talking about close friendships, the men would often refer to friendships they had experienced while at school or in the services, friendships which were no longer available for the majority of the men. Thus, fleeting but regular encounters with people only known to them by sight, provided a meaningful part of their daily social interactions. Although, for most of the men, family was not part of daily social interactions, family members often constituted a significant part of these men's social worlds, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 10

Men in families

Introduction

In this chapter, I present findings related to family and family-type relationships. Family was central in the lives of many of the men although face-to-face interaction with family members was sometimes rare. As traditional male breadwinners, the men often emphasised independence and autonomy within family relationships. There were certain expectations when discussing family particularly that family should 'care'. Caring was interpreted in different ways and boundaries between caring and taking over were sometimes blurred. Expectations were therefore explored, both regarding the type of connections the men desired from family and the way men perceived the wishes of the family to be involved.

The literature review has discussed the ageing trends and the likelihood of several generations coexisting for longer. Therefore, grandchildren and great grandchildren were often available to these men in addition to adult children. However, men in this study, who were not fathers, had to look to siblings, nieces and nephews if they wanted to experience family interactions in later life. Viewing family as merely a support network was not the focus of this study, rather, family was explored in terms of its potential for generating social interactions although, as the findings will illustrate, these could lead to some tension when it came to the difference between family members' presence in the men's social interactions and taking over.

Ageing masculinities and dependency

Ageing masculinities refers to the socialisation of males, particularly the generation of men in this study, which values independence and coping under stress as desirable masculine traits. For these men, traditional breadwinner roles were deep-rooted and they would rarely express views which made them appear dependent on family or others. That would have been a reversal of their situation earlier in life when they were the providers and the family dependent on their provisions. Preserving masculinity was at times hard in the midst of frailty and emotional

upheaval. From the analysis of the data, three interrelated sub-categories were constructed: *asserting masculinity through independence, soldiering on and becoming a burden.*

Asserting masculinity through independence

There are numerous forms of masculinity and ways of expressing it, according to the historical and cultural contexts in which they are expressed. Gender ideals for men are thus socially constructed and, in Western society, the general traits of hegemonic masculinity may often emphasise power, independence and self-reliance (Connell, 2005). The literature review (Chapter Five) suggested that adhering to such norms may become increasingly difficult later in life and requires individual negotiations by men when considering relationships in later life. The men found that family relationships, in particular, changed as adult children sought to 'look after' and organise them. One way of asserting masculinity was through the demonstration of independence. The men always appeared to be happy to interact with family but, at times, they were unhappy about interference in their daily lives and did not approve of suggestions that they may not be coping on their own. They articulated a fine line between helpful assistance by family and attempts to control their behaviour and daily lives.

Some men had unhappy memories and experiences of their early family life which had made them very independent and unwilling to rely on others for any kind of support. As Mr Harris commented:

I...had a very lonely childhood, I had a very lonely childhood uhm...my father [sighing], I didn't know my father, at all...never met him...my mother married in December 1918 which was a month after the armistice of the first world war...when she was pregnant with me, apparently, my father started having an affair and she wouldn't have him back
(Mr Harris, 90)

Throughout all our meetings, he emphasised the importance to him of remaining independent and the difficulties he had with asking for help or assistance. One of our meetings took place during a particularly cold and snowy period and both the road and pavement to his house were covered with thick, compacted ice. As his only form of transport was his mobility scooter, he had not been able to get out at all. He had plenty of food and other provisions in the house but he needed to collect some eye drops from his local surgery. When I arrived, he was anxious about

running out of drops as they were critical for his deteriorating sight. I offered to collect the drops for him which he initially flatly refused. However, eventually he did allow me to collect them and was extremely grateful when I did but it was only by reasoning that he was helping me by talking to me about his life and therefore I was merely reciprocating. Reciprocity was thus much preferred to the idea of dependency. At the following interview, he reiterated his desire for independence:

Oh I prefer being independent...if someone offers help then I will accept it with thanks and be grateful but I prefer to be independent... Yes, I am very independent because as a child, remember, I grew up independently. I found that if I built a wall around myself...nobody could hurt me unless I allowed them to (Mr Harris, 90)

Although Mr Swalds had experienced his childhood positively, he still felt the need to be independent, something that had been instilled into this generation of men through their upbringing:

I was brought up to be a 'man'. My own father would die for King and Country and we were expected to get stuck in and behave like men. He was a lovely father but I find it hard to be dependent on others (Mr Swalds, 87)

Like Mr Harris, Mr Dennis had felt like an unwanted child and had also learnt early on in life that independence protected him from getting hurt:

I was often said to be an unwanted child, I mean, that was very obvious from an early age. I came very soon after my sister and it didn't take long to bring it home to me that they really had no time for me whatsoever (Mr Dennis, 85)

He only had one daughter, who lived many miles away, and he was not able to become dependent on her even if he so desired. The demonstration of independence thus protected him from the reality that he had nobody to depend on. He was very reluctant to ask anybody for help which he conveyed by taking photographs of chores that he was no longer able to manage, for example, changing a light bulb in the ceiling (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Mr Dennis could no longer change a light bulb in the ceiling

He would instead wait for a visit from his daughter and son-in-law and ask them to help. Although he would ask them to help with minor things during their visits, he said that he would never ask them to come specifically to assist him. Despite suffering from severe arthritis, he managed to live alone and looked after himself with minimal help, something which he was proud of:

But, I suppose, no, I suppose I am a person that thinks, in my younger days I looked after myself and I think that has helped me a lot in my old age (Mr Dennis, 85)

Although his earlier experiences had allowed him to cope practically, and perhaps even emotionally with life living alone, it had not equipped him with an extensive social world but that was viewed as secondary to independence. At the end of the interview, he suggested that I told other older men about him so that they, too, might learn to cope on their own and remain independent rather than ask for help.

At times, being so determined to remain independent could backfire as with one man who did not have enough money to renew his driving licence and would not ask his children for help. As he was not able to find the money, he had to give up his car which in turn made him dependent on others:

Well, to be quite honest, I think I was 80...and I didn't have enough money to renew my licence...that was only when we got ill that we had enough money to live. We was getting £84 a week and uhm then I worked till I was 70, for a builder, we couldn't have managed otherwise...I had a slack time and I didn't have £3 to renew my licence, that's the truth but they all [children] said to me "Why didn't you ask us?" But I wouldn't ask for favours from no one...if I can't do it myself then I won't do it (Mr McBeth, 86)

Even as he spoke about the incident, he could not acknowledge the undesired effect that his striving for independence had caused but, instead, he highlighted his enormous self-reliance.

The overwhelming discourse of these men around independence was that independence was good and any kind of dependence was bad and that was also reflected in their talk about 'getting on' with life despite practical and emotional setbacks. During my visits, I observed some consequences of independence as some men were living a life in which they were very much in control, but at the same time, could be further excluded from social interactions as they would not ask for help with transport or other assistance. In her research with married couples, Rubin (1984) asked both men and women what came into their minds when she said the word 'independence'. For women it had associations with loneliness and lack of care by others. In contrast, the men all associated independence with control, power, happiness and freedom. Independence was 'a statement about himself in the world outside marriage and family- a statement about the kind of person he was or wanted to be' (Rubin, 1984, p.121). That sense of independence as a statement about themselves, as men, was very much echoed by the men in this study.

Soldiering on – the stoic male

Whatever life threw at these men, they would try to keep going, alone. Despite losses, especially of a spouse, friends and family, the men displayed stoicism during our interactions. One man had lost both his partner and daughter to cancer within a few months of each other. He had also been seriously ill himself which had led to the amputation of one of his legs. Despite his experiences, he talked, like so many of the men, about 'just getting on with life'. Whatever happened, it was necessary to just keep going:

I have been the sort of bloke...anything happened to me...well, I have just accepted it, I just accept it and get on with it. It has happened, so it has happened and there is nothing I can do about it (Mr Young, 86)

Mr McBeth had also experienced several losses and changes but he found it difficult to get over the losses and became very emotional during the interview. He was particularly upset during one of our meetings as he had only recently been told that the man who he had thought of as his father had not been his biological father:

I have never been told this but uhm I was told the other day, at nearly 87, that my father who is on there [photograph], who I call my father...is not my father. My father was a travelling showman...yeah (Mr McBeth, 86)

He was visibly upset by the news, which had been given to him by his daughter-in-law, but he still asserted his masculinity by explaining how he would have used physical force against his biological father, had he ever met him, and maybe that was the reason that his son had never told him:

I said "What do you want to tell me that now for?" All I have had...my daughter just died, I have lost my son, lost my wife and come and tell me that he weren't my father...I think why my mother never told me is because she was afraid I might have gone and found him...not to know him but to beat him to death...that's what I would have done...because I think it is a nasty thing to do to a 15 year old girl...she was just 16 when I was born...just 16 and she went one night to see his mother and she said "It's no good you coming here after him, he has gone travelling" and she never saw him again...apparently what they said...my mother loved him greatly, yeah, yeah (Mr McBeth, 86)

For Mr McBeth, soldiering on was difficult despite the support of a large family. Without his wife, he was lost and he did not have the desire to live much longer.

For some men, deteriorating health or mobility could make life increasingly difficult. One man described becoming ill with a cold and a terrible cough. His local surgery was some distance away so he walked to his daughter's house and she took him to the surgery. He explained in detail how ill he had felt but despite that, he still made the walk across the city as his daughter would not pick him up from his home:

I had to walk all the way over to there. Nice isn't it? Cruel a bit isn't it? (Mr Crosby, 80)

Although he had little contact with all but one of his daughters, and lived very independently, he wanted on this occasion to be able to depend on someone for help as he was feeling very unwell. Reluctance on the part of his daughter, even when he was prepared to accept help, would make him more determined to manage on his own next time, he felt.

Some men told me stories of their past which demonstrated great endurance and stoicism:

Well...uhm, I come from a working class background, my parents were working class and we...remember that the 30s was the time of the great depression so of course my father was unemployed and I suppose it was very, very difficult to even to try to provide food...I can remember as a boy walking a mile to the bakers in order to get yesterday's loaf and perhaps 4 or 5 rolls as well, for the price of a new loaf...I mean they talk about deprivation and poor families nowadays but I think one needed to experience what was happening in the 30s in order to appreciate it...I mean, I left school at 14, I went to elementary school, I left school at 14 but...I was 14 in the October and you were allowed to leave at the end of term but before I actually left school, I started evening classes, I did evening classes 3 nights a week, it cost me sixpence for the whole year, I was very, very keen on learning (Mr Harris, 90)

Stoicism in later life was thus a continuation of an earlier attitude for Mr Harris.

Events from the past served to emphasise their ageing masculinities. Although no longer able to endure as much, it was made clear by Mr Harris what kind of man I was talking to. Despite being very frail and unsteady on his feet, he told me that he always tried to walk 'properly' and not give in to a way of walking which may be easier and, also for him, a characteristic walk of old people:

Occasionally I'll find myself shuffling...don't shuffle, walk! (Mr Harris, 90)

The importance of portraying their masculine selves was clear and the men would resort to past events for emphasis if they felt it necessary. However, some men portrayed a more sensitive, interdependent side. Mr Delaney was particularly sensitive and caring. He was also very open about his feelings, especially his grief after the death of his wife. Perhaps having a disabled son, for whom he cared a great deal, had influenced him. He contacted his son every day and

frequently had him home for weekends. When his wife was still alive, they shared that caring role. Mr Dickie, also, did not need to display his masculinity. He identified himself as gay and expressed his views with sensitivity and reflection. However, he also demonstrated great stoicism when he talked about his on-going recovery from two strokes. Despite his disabilities, he still managed to do his own shopping and housework which was a very slow process for him.

On one occasion when we met, we went to a coffee shop to talk. He had expressed a desire to leave his tiny flat for a bit as it was a hot, sunny day and his flat was very stuffy. I was able to watch how difficult it was for him to get ready to leave the flat, even locking the door whilst using sticks, was challenging for him. On another occasion, when I interviewed him in his flat, I watched him prepare mugs of tea for us both which again was a laborious process. He was determined to do things for himself and the only concession he would make was to allow me to carry the mugs into the living room. The entire process of his recovery was a test of endurance as he slowly learnt to speak and walk again. He was not worried about being 'manly' but he was worried about appearances:

It doesn't stop me wanting to meet people and talk to people, it would be very nice if I could do something with people but I can't. I mean apart from Mia [friend], for example, we go out for lunch and that is fine because she knows the situation but I mean I couldn't go to a dinner, a proper dinner, because I couldn't eat it as quickly as some people could. I don't know what would happen for example if something ridiculous happened and I couldn't cope with it, that is what worries me, the appearance (Mr Dickie, 75)

The need to display independence and stoicism varied between the men although most of the men felt that independence was important to them. Past experiences and current situations influenced the degree to which the men felt a need to assert their masculinity and, to some extent, deny the physical consequences of ageing. Associated with the wish for independence was the worry of becoming a burden or dependent on others, particularly family.

Becoming a burden - the last resort

The worry that they may become a burden to family was evident in the men's narratives. Becoming a burden meant that they were no longer self-reliant and it was also seen as the beginning of the road to dependency. There were variations in views about being a burden to

family. For example, Mr Harris, who was extremely proud to be managing alone at the age of 90, had portrayed a fierce independence throughout the interview which he associated with his upbringing. Becoming a burden to family was unacceptable to him:

No, I wouldn't want to be a burden to my daughter or son, they have their own lives to lead and I certainly wouldn't want to go into one of these old folks home (Mr Harris, 90)

He questioned the need for doctors to keep older people alive when, as he saw it, their quality of life was poor and they were not able to stay in their own homes. As he would not be prepared to rely on family to look after him, and he was determined not to enter any kind of residential care home, he had made other plans for if or when the time came that he could no longer look after himself:

No, I wouldn't want to get to the stage where an 18 year old has to feed me, wash me and take me to the toilet...no, no, I have considered that...I would take an overdose, oh yeah (Mr Harris, 90)

At our second meeting, he had explained to me how he had kept back drugs for the particular purpose. Perhaps the drastic action which he was prepared to take was further indication of the need to stay in control of his own life, including the end of his life. Taking an overdose was a practical solution to the dilemma. Although not as extreme as the example of Mr Harris, other men were very clear that they would not become a burden to their families. Mr Swalds had seen the effect that looking after elderly parents could have on the life of an adult child:

I had an older sister who was getting married but then my father became ill and she cancelled the wedding and helped my mother look after my father. When he died, my mother became ill and she then spent years looking after her. Her whole life was wasted, the way I see it. She never married...I would not want to be a burden to my family or friends...I suppose I see family as one thing, friends as another and carers as something different, maybe I shouldn't but I do (Mr Swalds, 87)

He made a distinction between carers, family and friends and did not feel that family should be responsible for care. One of his daughters had suggested that he move to live with her in an

annexe and he was in the process of considering her offer when I interviewed him¹². Although the idea seemed attractive, he was still worried about becoming a burden:

They will build an extension so that I have my own small flat but I worry about being a burden to her. I have told her that I will only do it on the condition that if I need care, like become senile or incontinent or maybe have a stroke, then she has got to put me in a home. I don't want to be a burden to her or anyone else (Mr Swalds, 87)

He did not feel that as an old, dependent man he could be of any use or interest to anyone:

No, I am an old man and I can't see that people will get anything out of me. What if I am incontinent and all that? [Shivering] (Mr Swalds, 87)

Although the majority of the men talked about not wanting to be a burden, some men were already accepting help and practical support from family members. Mr Bridge, who was terminally ill, had come to depend on his daughter for assistance with daily living. He was very fond of his daughter and did not talk about feeling as if he was a burden. In his case, relying on family during old age was expected. Perhaps it was because he had a large extended family living close by. He was also used to accepting help from more formal carers and attended a palliative care session every week. However, he was by no means sitting back and accepting his decline. Instead, he was still arranging bridge games in his home and attending meetings in a holiday club that he had founded some years earlier. He was grateful that his family were so willing to help him and he in turn did what he could to help them. He regularly gave them cheques and, as a retired lecturer, he was still able to assist his grandchildren with various projects and job applications. It was clear that he felt that he was still able to contribute something to his family which was quite different from Mr Swalds' attitude of older men being of no use to anyone. Reciprocity appeared to mediate the feeling of dependency or 'being a burden' for Mr Bridge.

Being a burden was more of an issue for the men who did not have family close by and perhaps that was because there was little opportunity for reciprocity. Geographically dispersed families often spent longer together when they met up. The men would visit their adult children and stay for a weekend or even a week, and their adult children would do the same when visiting their

¹² By the end of the study he had decided to take up the offer and he eventually moved. I did not have further contact with him.

fathers. Therefore, interactions were longer but less frequent and often involved more practical tasks, such as helping with certain difficult household chores. However, without frequent interactions, it was not possible to exchange support on a regular basis.

Three of the men had a network of adult children who lived close by and they were less likely to talk about being a burden to their families although they still stressed the importance of independence but also of interdependence. They had opportunities to assist adult children and grandchildren and minor exchanges were common. In particular, they would assist with small financial gifts on a regular basis. The feeling that they were giving something in return for any care and support provided by their adult children meant that those men were less likely to feel like a burden. Although some of the men who did not have children living close by also helped their adult children and grandchildren, they tended to do so out of necessity and expectation rather than gestures of appreciation.

The men were generally reluctant to share problems or worries with family as that was also seen as 'being a burden' because they felt that there was usually nothing the family could do. One man felt that his daughter already had enough to worry about:

I mean, she has got enough trouble as it is, you know... but I don't worry about much to be honest with you...what goes wrong goes wrong and you just accept it...get on with it
(Mr Young, 86)

Even Mr Bridge, who was cared for by his daughter, was reluctant to talk to her about the way he was feeling due to his illness. When talking about the terminal nature of his illness, he talked initially in practical terms but on further probing, he also considered the more emotional aspect of his illness:

Mr Bridge: *Well, if I am down on the ground I have this button for emergencies*

PS: *Yes but say you just didn't feel well or you were upset about something?*

Mr Bridge: *I don't usually do anything...*

PS: *You wouldn't call anyone?*

Mr Bridge: *No, I don't...I feel that they can't do anything really, it's all, it's all...it's an emotional thing really*

Accepting practical help was easier for him than discussing his emotional state. As the family could not do anything about his illness other than offer practical assistance, he felt that talking about it would be burdening them and that was the overwhelming view expressed by the men.

Although Mr Bridge was the only terminally ill man, the men who were fit and well were also reluctant to talk to family about worries and problems as they generally felt that there was no need to worry others about their personal problems. Mr Brown, who had never married, did not want to confide in his sister although they were close, for the same reasons that other men did not confide in their adult children. He did not have any close family other than a nephew who lived in Denmark and 'he won't be a lot of cop', he explained. He had a lot of 'mates' and acquaintances but he did not give the impression that he discussed any personal worries with them. During our meetings, he often asked me questions about personal matters. For example, he wanted my opinion on a relationship he was pursuing with a 30 year old woman, as he was worried that she was just after his money. Confiding in me was, perhaps, an indication of his lack of family or close friends available for consultation and inability to confide in the more peripheral relationships with 'mates' which he engaged in.

Although the men were keen to avoid being a burden and that often meant not sharing any worries or problems, they were generally willing to consult family on more practical matters. One man felt that a time would come in the near future when he might not be able to manage on his own but he would want to have a discussion with his sons before he made any decisions:

It has sort of wavered at me you know...when it comes to the point, I don't really know, quite frankly, I'll have to see what the boys think as well (Mr David, 84)

Another man hinted that any consultation might be more one-sided, with his sons making decisions about his welfare, perhaps suggesting some acceptance of his impending dependency:

Well there isn't a plan, I suppose it would be up to them [sons]...what they think about it...I don't know, there isn't a plan, well, as far as I know there isn't a plan anyway (Mr Pollock, 80)

Overall, it appeared that family was there to call upon in emergencies but not a resource which could be overburdened. Practical support was the most acceptable kind of support and all the men were reluctant to use family members for emotional support, supporting their masculine ideals of self-reliance.

The themes within ageing masculinities all reflect aspects concerned with the men's endeavour to remain independent and to keep going, even in times of adversity. Although portrayed mainly as a masculine trait, the need to remain independent may also reflect the dominant discourse of successful ageing for all older people (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Managing daily life in an active and productive manner is viewed as managing ageing in a positive way whereas giving in and becoming a burden to others (including the much publicised burden to society) is an undesirable way to age. The balance between accepting help and managing alone was sometimes hard to strike and some men would rather go without help and support than appear dependent, even if that meant going without company and social interactions.

The fear of dependency and the thought of becoming a burden meant that some of the men were unable to plan for the future. Being unwilling to discuss the future meant that they made no plan of action in case of a crisis. Paradoxically, that also meant that they had little control over what would happen to them should they become unable to cope. Such lack of control and autonomy was counter to their expressions of independence at all cost. Striving for independence was, at times, articulated as causing tensions within family relationships and there was little explicit recognition by the men that interdependence may be more desirable.

Negotiating family expectations

A second category within 'Men in families' is *negotiating family expectations*. Family relationships were not one-sided and required constant negotiations in order to function. Relationships involved certain expectations by the men and of the men i.e. how family should behave and how the men should behave. Reluctance to intrude on their children's lives, by burdening them, has been discussed but the men also expressed some irritation with being intruded upon by their children. Expectations were often gendered, with different expectations from sons and daughters, as well as different expectations from grandchildren. Sub-categories within this category are: *intrusive family*, *gendered expectations* and *intergenerational contact*.

Intrusive family

Family members, although well meaning, could at times be seen by the men as intrusive and as

expecting to provide more 'care' than the men actually needed or wanted. Daily interactions with family were experienced by three of the men. Mr Bridge relied on a daily visit to allow him to stay in his home but other men found the constant visiting difficult and limiting at times. For Mr McBeth, in particular, the visits from family had stopped him from participating in other activities and socialising with other residents in his sheltered accommodation. He had seven living children and six of them visited regularly which meant that he had visitors every day and sometimes several times a day. The family visited at times convenient to them and did not always consider Mr McBeth's routines and other activities. He had taken photos of the family visits (Figure 18) and explained how frequently just one of his sons used to come and see him after his wife died:

My son, he used to come...when my wife died, he used to come Monday, Wednesday, Friday and all day Saturday...but he has got to retire soon because he is 60 and he has got a lot to do to his bungalow so he said that he would only see me Wednesday and Saturday and that's alright... (Mr McBeth, 86)



Figure 18. Mr McBeth and his family during a regular weekend evening visit

Another daughter would come every day except Saturday:

Well she come, she usually come...Monday she come 9 on the dot to take me down to Morrison [supermarket], we have a bit of dinner and a wander round and buy one or two things and then she'll come perhaps quarter to 12 one day, 1 o'clock next...that varies, the time...but she is always there until 3 o'clock in the afternoon and then she goes and cleans the offices at the airport at 3 o'clock (Mr McBeth, 86)

As most of the activities that took place in the shared lounge tended to start after lunch, he would often miss them. He was particularly interested in country and western music and told me that on one occasion when there was a band playing, he had hinted to his daughter that he would like to go and listen:

That is the thing...she knew that I wanted to go down there yesterday because there was a country and western band so she said to me [sighing] at about half past one, "Well, I've got something to do Dad so I'll be off" so I could go down there for 2 o'clock when it started...I was in there 2 hours listening to country and western, yeah (Mr McBeth, 86)

Although nothing was said explicitly, Mr McBeth and his daughter managed to negotiate an arrangement without confrontation because, as he told me, he knew that she meant well and he did not want to upset her. He found it more difficult to negotiate with his sons and had come to accept that he could not enjoy a social life outside his flat:

Well, I see two sons on Sunday morning, one come here just after 8 and the other one come about 9 and they both stay here until half past 11 in the morning but that is a little bit too late for me to go anywhere then...so sometimes I wished they wouldn't come, you know. The man next door he goes to the social club on City Road and he keeps begging me to go up there but uhm...but I said to him that my children come Saturday so I can't go Saturday night and I don't like to say to them that they can't come because I want to go to the social club, can I? So uhm... (Mr McBeth, 86)

By the time his sons had left it was too late to join in with anything else and it meant that he spent the rest of Sunday 'just sitting here, looking out of the window...there is nobody about here'. Paradoxically, the frequent contact with his family meant that he was extremely lonely and bored as it was preventing any other social interactions, limiting his social worlds to that of family.

The role of family was mainly articulated as that of support but in terms of meaningful and companionable relationships, often lacking this quality and the men who did not have extensive family contact generally fared better in terms of meaningful relationships outside the family. Perhaps families who were too intrusive or enmeshed unintentionally reduced their opportunities to connect with others outside the kin network.

Another man did not find that the frequent visits from his daughter prevented him from socialising as he mainly relied on family for company. However, he did find the constant monitoring between visits intrusive. He had moved to sheltered accommodation at the request of his daughter because she had found it difficult to visit him where he used to live as it involved a long journey. When he arrived in his new home, he found that his estranged wife was living just a few flats down the corridor. His daughter was caring for his estranged wife, her mother, and as she also wanted to look after her father, she had engineered the convenient arrangement. As she visited and stayed with her mother every day, she was also able to look in on her father:

Every day, I see her every day, yeah. For example now uhm my light is normally on at night, you know and uhm...I tried to get to bed early last night, turned the lights out and Jo [daughter] saw it from her mother's flat so she came tearing round to see if I was alright, you know (Mr Young, 86)

He found it hard to be monitored constantly, particularly because he was very able to manage on his own:

Oh Lord, yes, oh yes...actually she drives me barmy worrying about me. The way she came tearing round last night because the lights were out...I am sitting here nearly asleep and I suddenly see her [laughing] (Mr Young, 86)

Although he found the constant monitoring intrusive, like Mr McBeth, he was aware that it probably had to be all or nothing. Alienating his daughter would have left him even more isolated.

The men who did not have frequent face-to-face interactions with their adult children were sometimes monitored from a distance. That was partly achieved through regular telephone contact but also through others who might be relied upon to look in on the men. Mr Dennis had one daughter who lived some distance away from him but she was able to arrange for a lady to

look in on her father and make sure he was eating properly:

I mean basically it is something I could manage myself but as my daughter said, you have got to have somebody come in and tempt you sometimes (Mr Dennis, 85)

He relied heavily on his daughter for social interaction as his social world had shrunk and he very much looked forward to her visits every six weeks. He did not want to upset his only child and therefore played along with the idea that the lady who came in to help prepare his lunch was there more to tempt him to eat. That the lady would also keep an eye on him generally, and feed back to his daughter, was not discussed. He was aware that his daughter was monitoring him from a distance and he had chosen to accept it.

'Gendering' expectations of support and interaction

Despite the intrusive nature of some family relationships, these men valued social interaction with family and, at times, depended on family support. The men articulated differences in expectations of sons and daughters, reflecting social norms of children's obligations to their parents, with daughters carrying the greatest filial responsibility (Silverstein, Gans, & Yang, 2006). Mr David only had sons but he felt that if he had a daughter, his life in old age would be very different as he perceived daughters to be more caring. He told me about his sister who did have a daughter and, therefore, had a better life:

Oh, I have a sister, yes, but she is up at uhm...Cumbria. She is on her own, she lost her husband but she has got a daughter and her husband living only a matter of 4 or 5 miles away from her in Cumbria so they take her all over the place...Oh, she is being looked after...wouldn't it just have been different if I had had a daughter? (Mr David, 84)

Although he had regular contact with his sons, he felt that there was some caring element missing, something unique to a father-daughter relationship:

Yeah but unfortunately we never had a little girl. I would have liked that as well because, you know, it's more of a fatherly...you know, you get a fatherly sort of touch on it...it's...no it is sad that we never had a girl but there you are, that's life. Some people

have all girls and wow, are they in trouble with all the boys coming round [laughter] (Mr David, 84)

Talking about the frequent visits he had from his family, Mr Bridge made a distinction between his expectations of his sons and daughter. He expected his daughter to come at certain times as she provided intimate care for him, such as bathing, and took him shopping (Figure 19) but his sons could come whenever they had time, often on their way home from work:

I mean, Sally [daughter] has fairly regular times but by and large the boys don't have regular times; I wouldn't want them to have regular times. I don't want to be hanging on "Is somebody coming or not?" But Sally always come in on a Monday and give me a bath. She'll come in the door, down the corridor; turn the taps on and "In the bath!" (Mr Bridge, 89)

On one occasion when his daughter was away, he had to rely on a son to do his shopping and his expectations of his son differed from those of his daughter:

There is a permanent [shopping] list in the kitchen where I just add things...mind you when I was out with Andy [son] last Thursday...he took me out to lunch and we went to the pub, that was because Sally was away for a few days and he got a some shopping for me, I just gave him an abridged list really (Mr Bridge, 89)

He felt that it was unreasonable to expect his son to do all the shopping on the list and he told me that his daughter would be able to buy the rest when she got back from her holiday.



Figure 19. Mr Bridge doing his weekly shopping with his daughter who took the photograph

The arrangements with his sons were, therefore, very casual and they would pop in, mainly for a chat or to watch the football with him, whereas with his daughter, the visits were more business-like and practical, something which might have been expected from his sons. One reason for the apparent unusual roles his children had assumed was that the practical help that Mr Bridge required was of an intimate nature or related to general housekeeping and viewed as tasks for a woman. He felt that the person most important to him was his daughter because of all the practical support she offered him:

I think I would be very unfair to the two boys if I say Sally [is the most important person in my life] but I am urging on that. I think mainly because she is a female and I don't see the boys handling the business of bathing me...in the way Sally does it... she is so good at it, Penny, and the way she does it all... (Mr Bridge, 89)

All of the men who had children articulated the traditional gender roles for men and women. Therefore, if they had daughters and sons, they expected their daughters to wash, clean and care whereas their sons were expected to help with DIY. Expectations of relationships and

contact with grandchildren was something that the men who had grandchildren also commented on and is explored below.

Intergenerational contact

Contact with other generations has the potential to increase older men's social worlds and may provide interest and information. An understanding of other generations may also reduce stereotyping and ageism (Chapter Two) which was identified in the literature as a barrier to social engagement. Eleven of the men in this study had grandchildren but only four men had regular contact with their grandchildren, partly because grandchildren often lived in other parts of the country or abroad but also because expectations of interactions were low in this group of men. When Mr Dennis gave up driving, he gave his car to a granddaughter but he still did not have much contact with her or his other granddaughter:

I had a card from one of them, I think from the part of the world she is in at the moment. Her husband is an airline pilot so he gets a few perks. And the other one she has been with a farmer for donkey's years now and I have never seen him...she has never brought him to see me. I don't know the ins and outs of it, I don't know if he is married and he can't get a divorce or something like that but they won't go into it with me and I never pry so I wish them well (Mr Dennis, 85)

He was left very much on the periphery of his granddaughter's lives and did not feel that he could ask questions about them without being perceived as prying. Being unable to travel to visit his granddaughters made it more difficult to sustain meaningful relationships with them. Mr Bridge, on the other hand, lived in the same city as all of his grandchildren which made it easier for him to have lasting and meaningful relationships with them all. Despite being in the same situation as Mr Dennis regarding transport and mobility, he was very involved in all their lives. Most Sundays, his daughter would have a barbecue at her house and all of the extended family would attend, if they were able. During those lunches, Mr Bridge was able to catch up on his grandchildren's lives and he told me about them in great detail during our talks, demonstrating a keen interest in them. He was pro-active in remaining involved with them and told me about a trip he organised for the entire family to see a show in London. He also went to a pub for lunch with his daughter every Thursday and let it be known to all of his family that he

was there and anyone who was available would join him 'they usually come as they get a free meal!'

Mr Harris also had local grandchildren who visited regularly. He was particularly fond of one granddaughter and had taken a photograph of her:

That's my granddaughter, she is 33 now, she is not married...I think she is very picky, I think she is looking for somebody like her grandfather [laughter]. She says I spoil her rotten (Mr Harris, 90)

He appeared to spoil all his children and grandchildren and would often give them money and items for their homes. He felt that he was well off and was happy to share his fortune with his grandchildren who were starting out. He had one granddaughter, who was adopted, and he constantly referred to her as 'my adopted granddaughter', to make the distinction clear. He had found it very difficult to get on with her initially and explained the circumstances of her adoption and his difficulties to me:

That is Petra's daughter, Sarah, her adopted daughter...they adopted her when she was nearly eight. She had a very, very unfortunate childhood uhm...she was physically and sexually abused and her mother was a drunkard, an alcoholic and she would sit on the bed with her mother, watching horror movies at night because...I don't say she wanted to but she did...and her father didn't want her at all and she had a rotten time in foster homes. Petra and her husband adopted her when she was nearly eight... but anyway, I didn't like Sarah [adopted granddaughter]. Uhm...it wasn't because she was adopted, it was because of her attitude...I thought she was rude and...by my attitude I made it clear that I didn't approve of her...I could understand her background but she was forever attention-seeking, I realise now what that kid needed was love and attention but...on one occasion Petra did have the gumption to confront me about this and she said something about why I didn't like Sarah and why didn't I accept her as a granddaughter...and I told her that I found her very rude and objected to it and she said that she would have a word with Sarah. She came back to me and told me that Sarah had not meant to be rude but she had just been joking...now I partly blame myself because with my own 2 grandchildren, Freddie and Rosie, had they been what I thought was rude, I would have pulled them up straight away and given them a chance to say sorry but with Sarah, the distance between us was so that I didn't bother to check her because I didn't want to

offend my daughter, Petra or my son in law...in a way I was very childish, I allowed the resentment to grow and then I think it was a year or 18 months ago when Petra said that Sarah was only joking...I decided, I made a conscious decision, to change my attitude...and when she came the next time I said, "Oh hello Sarah, how nice to see you, give me a hug" and from that day onwards my attitude has changed towards her completely (Mr Harris, 90)

Intergenerational relationships require negotiations, too. Here, Mr Harris negotiates the relationships with his granddaughter via his daughter, demonstrating the interconnections between the generations. He had made an effort to resolve his difficulties with his granddaughter, partly because she was his daughter's daughter and he was very fond of his daughter and son-in-law and valued the company their visits brought. His granddaughter was due to marry and as a wedding gift, he told me, he was buying a fridge, freezer, washing machine, cooker and microwave. He was also paying for her wedding dress and wedding cake. The generosity was a result of his changed attitude and he was trying to treat her in the same way that he treated the rest of his grandchildren although he was finding it difficult:

Well, what you have to remember...is that uhm with my biological grandchildren, I have known them virtually from the day they were born (Mr Harris, 90)

This sense of *knowing* his grandchildren was what kept the relationships close and meaningful; a kind of knowing that was easier to achieve if the grandchildren lived close by and had been known to the men from birth.

A man, who had recently lost his daughter and his partner, often had visits from a granddaughter and her partner and he had taken a photograph of them. He felt very close to her as she was the daughter of his deceased daughter and when I interviewed him, he became very emotional as he told me that his granddaughter had also been diagnosed with cancer:

Yes, that's her daughter...my granddaughter...now awful thing is...she's...got cancer now...she's only 30. And...and you know...I have had a really bad two years in actual fact...I have had a terrible couple of years. My granddaughter has had an operation and uhm...what do they call it...on the stomach...what do they call it...what on her do they call it...the cancer was in her stomach, they called it uhm cervical cancer (Mr Young, 86)

Another man, who particularly enjoyed the company of younger people, rarely had face-to-face

contact with his grandchildren. However, he did talk to them on the telephone and he would sometimes consult them if he had problems of a more contemporary nature, such as computer problems:

James, my grandson works in the aircraft industry. I don't often see him but I contact him via telephone and he knows a lot about computers. I don't think you can expect to see your grandchildren much but I do talk to them on the telephone sometimes (Mr Swalds, 87)

The view that one could not expect to see much of grandchildren, especially as they grew older and led their own lives, was also expressed by other men:

They don't do [visiting] today do they, when they grow up, do they? Well they have got their own life I suppose (Mr Crosby, 80)

For one man, the divorce of his son and daughter-in-law had led to the alienation of his granddaughter:

She [granddaughter] is set against her father and she has sort of sided with her mother and left her mother and they said she was living with someone but I have sent her Christmas cards and birthday cards, I don't hear anything, she never says thank you or nothing. I mean the other boy [grandson], he makes a fuss of you sort of thing but she...she's completely blanked us. She might come round in time when she realises that, you know, with anything that there is two sides with every story (Mr Delaney, 78)

Another man, who had lost contact with his son for 50 years, found that although he had established a relationship with his son again, he had not managed to do so with his grandsons:

He has got two sons, you see, which are my grandsons, of course, but they are well in their 40s. I don't see them very often, they are busy. One is a builder, he is building his own place and the other one takes after me, I think, he is into everything, he is always busy. They are married but there are no children and they don't intend to have any so that will be the end of my side of the family when they go (Mr Smith, 97)

After divorcing his first wife, Mr Smith had moved away and his ex-wife had not allowed their son to see any of the letters he had sent to him. Previous life experiences and transitions, such

as separation and divorce had, thus, influenced the relationships with children, as well as grandchildren.

Differing values and lifestyles, accepted as the norm within each generation, could sometimes challenge relationships. Issues such as laziness and getting up late were mentioned by some of the men as typical of their grandchildren:

Yes, her daughter [his granddaughter] and her boyfriend stop in bed all day and that doesn't go down with me. That isn't the way of life is it? (Mr Crosby, 80)

The younger generation was also seen as living beyond their means:

Young people don't move out until they are older now...it has all changed. When they live beyond their means and their houses are repossessed then they move home rather than rent one of my flats or houses...we have had the same with our fourth son, he lost his flat through repossession and we bought a house and he has lived there for the last 12-13 years (Mr Arbour, 75)

One man found a fictive grandson difficult to understand, particularly his behaviour towards his parents:

On one occasion when he was young, he called his father a bastard and he was only 9 or 10 at the time and I could have smacked his face. I went on holiday to Spain with them once...so we were all there and Andrew [fictive grandson] was playing up one day so I went for a walk otherwise I would have hit him (Mr Rastus, 76)

The men found it difficult to accept what they considered as poor behaviour from their grandchildren towards their adult children and that could, at times, cause tension between the generations but for the majority of the men, those issues were accepted as 'changing times' and 'the way of the world today'. Tensions simmered beneath the surface of relationships at times but many of the men found the younger generation interesting and a source of knowledge about contemporary issues and technology.

There were also differences in approved values and lifestyle between these men and their adult children. Although Mr David did have regular visits from his sons, they were infrequent, partly due to Mr David's attitudes. He explained to me how he found it very difficult to accept that

unmarried adults slept together and therefore, his sons would never stay long as they did not bring their partners:

I spoke to him [son] last night, yeah. I said that I would like to meet his girlfriend sometime...it would be nice and I told him to bring her down but...they never bring them down, of course, you know what...they are probably sleeping together, you see and it...ok, I'll just let it go, you know, but it's all against my...mine and my wife would never had sort of gone along with that in any way...not that I would have any designs in that way because I myself was not like that...we was like two old fashioned people (Mr David, 84)

His moral stance thus had consequences as he had been deprived of involvement with his son's partners and a potential source of access to others through them and their families.

One man had a family marred by conflict. He had four children, three sons and a daughter but he only had friendly interactions with two of the sons. His daughter was an alcoholic and her children had all been taken into care; some had later been adopted. His daughter was either in rehabilitation or living a lifestyle of which he did not approve. Another son had married a woman who refused to have anything to do with Mr Arbour and who he described as 'a daughter-in-law from hell'. The third son, with whom Mr Arbour was in regular touch, was living virtually rent free in one of Mr Arbour's properties:

You look after your own as much as possible, that's the name of the game, isn't it? All parents, well most of them, tend to do that...it is all protectionism from the woman and the man, that's how it goes (Mr Arbour, 75)

Mr Arbour was the youngest collaborator in the research project and although he had only been widowed for two years, he felt that his adult children were not concerned for his welfare or interested in supporting him emotionally. Instead, they depended on him, particularly financially, and family negotiations centred on financial issues. He was a wealthy man and owned hundreds of properties throughout England. His children would contact him if they needed something:

The second one [son], he is flying with Thomas Cook, he will contact me at least once a month. My eldest son called me last night for the first time in three months because he was made redundant yesterday, that was the first time...and it's uhm...the fourth son is

very similar. Unless there is anything wrong with the house, something want doing, boiler servicing, then they will call...the daughter...I haven't heard from her for months, I don't know where she is...all I know is somewhere around the west of the country. When she is in hospital then the phone will ring...and two or three days later after she has been admitted then she will call (Mr Arbour, 75)

Expectations were different for Mr Arbour, compared to all of the other men. He was expected to support his adult children, as well as his grandchildren, and did not appear to get much support in return. Interestingly, when asked during the interview about his children, he would usually reply with reference to his grandchildren. Perhaps he was happy to skip a generation as he was clearly disappointed by his children's behaviour towards him.

Mr Dickie had separated from his wife after 25 years of marriage when he finally accepted his sexuality. However, it had been difficult for his children to accept that their father was gay and he had lost contact with them all:

No I mean my oldest boy apparently has died, I don't know – I learned that...can't remember... it was something to do with the solicitors down here...oh I know what it was, I got a letter from a solicitor saying "Please contact us", they didn't know if it was the same person or not and I did contact the solicitor and I said that there were three children and he contacted another solicitor who said that the eldest one had died. I don't know exactly but I think it was something to do with drink. He had a girlfriend...he might have been married by the time he died and the daughter... the middle one, that is the one I delivered and she was a teacher, well she trained as a teacher. The youngest one, Martin, he was the one who was always talking about poofs and things like that and when it transpired that I was gay, I was most surprised that he was the one who couldn't care less, you know (Mr Dickie, 75)

Although he thought about the possibility of meeting them again, he did not want to be reunited just because he was older and frailer and needed practical support:

I have a vision that one day somebody will come knocking on the door saying "I am your daughter" or something like that and I will think "Oh!" I mean she was a pretty little girl with curly hair...I think she would be nothing like that now obviously but it is difficult to imagine what they [children] are like. I don't think it would be fair after this length of

time to try and make contact because they are totally separate so why should I say "I'm your father let's be friends", that, I think, is totally wrong (Mr Dickie, 75)

He felt that as he got older, it had become more difficult to contact his children as he felt they would perceive it as him wanting pity. He blamed himself for breaking up what he described as 'a very loving close knit family group'. He knew that he had one grandchild but he had never met the child. During the interview, he broke his life into three parts: the life with his wife and children, his life with his partner as a gay man and his life in the theatre. It was only the first life that had room for children which, he felt, was the reason they had drifted apart. He had no expectations at all from family as he accepted that he was responsible for the breakdown of the bonds with his children through the dissolution of his marriage.

The awareness that they could not expect to see a lot of their adult children was expressed by most of the men and frequency of visits were negotiated constantly in an implicit manner. One man had moved to Norfolk so that he was positioned geographically halfway between his two sons. However, he had found that the distance between them all was still great. He had just celebrated his 80th birthday when I interviewed him and expressed some sadness that his sons had not come to see him:

I was half expecting the lads would do something but they didn't, you know...they just rang me up and I got a card and my phone call and that was it (Mr Pollock, 80)

Mr Pollock was still able to drive and would visit his sons a couple of times a year but they rarely came to see him:

I usually go down two or three times a year but I think...I don't want them thinking I am not safe to go on the roads so maybe twice a year. We have a little get-together down at their place, the whole family, in January or February and then we go to Scarborough later on in the year, you know (Mr Pollock, 80)

He was aware that his sons had their own lives and that he was not a significant part of those lives:

...they are busy, they have got their own way of going on and that is it (Mr Pollock, 80)

Negotiating family expectations was concerned with the expectations between the men and family members. During times of crisis, such as bereavement, contact with family tended to increase, especially face-to-face contact, as support was offered to the men, which is consistent with other research (Utz, Carr, Nesse, & Wortman, 2002). However, during the recovery period, these men would try to re-establish routines but that was often found to be hindered by continuous and, at times, excessive monitoring and intrusion by family members. Trying to maintain or establish new relationships with friends was therefore difficult at times if the men had to fit in with the family member's schedules. Striking a balance was important for the men but they were also wary of upsetting the family and generally found it easier to comply, even if it meant losing out on other social interactions.

Gender roles were apparent in the various interactions and activities that both the adult children and the men expected their sons or daughters to perform. That was even applicable to grandchildren, where grandsons were seen as resources for technical and practical issues, whereas granddaughters were available for chats and more domestic duties. Intergenerational relationships were sometimes marred by tension due to differences in perceived morals and lifestyle choices.

Extended family relationships

The third category within the 'Men in families' theme is *extended family relationships*. Such relationships could include friends who were considered family, as well as relationships with siblings. The sub-categories were *fictive and substitute kin* and *sibling relationships*. A relationship with a close friend was particularly significant for the men who did not have family or who had lost contact with their family. In some cases, therefore, the relationships were additional to family and in others they were substitute for family.

Fictive and substitute kin

It has been suggested that older people who live in unstable environments with unfavourable social and economic conditions may seek connections with relatives on the periphery (such as cousins or nieces and nephews) or even extend their kinship network by including friends as

fictive kin (Mac Rae, 1992). Although none of the men in this study was living under strained economic conditions, some experienced family conflict and one man found himself on the periphery of his social worlds due to his sexuality. Other men had little contact with family, or did not have any family, and would talk about close friends as 'like a son' or 'like a daughter'.

Mr Arbour had a close friend who was like a 'daughter'. Although he had a large family, the person Mr Arbour was closest to was a lady who he thought of as family (a daughter). He also thought of her daughter as his granddaughter:

She sort of...a granddaughter that I haven't got myself if you like and, you know...doing very well (Mr Arbour, 75)

Like Mr Arbour, Mr Rastus also had a close friend who he looked upon as a daughter. He did not have any children and had never married:

She...I look upon her as a daughter I never had, she is a big lump, I don't mean that nastily (Mr Rastus, 76)

Looking upon her as a daughter meant being part of her family which included her husband and her son:

Yes, then she had a son who is now 15 and he had no grandparents so she said, "Would you mind being his adopted granddad?" And she said that it would be a long term relationship...I have known her now for 23 years, I knew her when she was young. If I start saying that I look upon her as a daughter she gets upset, she starts crying. She gets very upset (Mr Rastus, 76)

He explained that she got upset because she had not had a good relationship with her own father and told me that 'describing him as a bastard I think would be too kind, he was worse than that'. When they went out, she would often introduce Mr Rastus as her father:

Well some..., we go out sometimes and she will say, "Oh this is my father" and I think...I don't think it is a Freudian slip, I think she does [mean it] (Mr Rastus, 76)

In his will, he had decided to leave a small amount of money to his nieces and nephews but the rest of his estate would go to his 'daughter' and her husband who were 'as close as we can be without being actually related'. They would see each other several times a week and often have

trips out during the weekend with her husband as well. As well as providing emotional support for each other, she would also help him with practical matters relating to the running of his home, such as cleaning and shopping. The symbolic act of naming her in his will served to confirm the family-like relationship and displayed family (Finch, 2007).

Although he never explicitly talked about his close friend as 'like a daughter', Mr Delaney had a similar relationship with a friend. He had known her for around ten years and had been friendly with her even when his wife was alive. She used to work in his local doctor's surgery and that was how they had got to know each other. They provided emotional support to each other and she also helped him with more practical chores in the home. They had outings and trips to the shops together. When Mr Delaney had to go into hospital, she visited him:

When I was in hospital she was down as my carer because then she could phone up or come in and see me (Mr Delaney, 78)

Calling his close, female friend a carer was perhaps a more socially acceptable position for her as there appeared to be no social space for fictive kin. There was no indication of an intimate relationship, rather that of a father-daughter relationship. He was included in his friend's family and attended her family parties but although his relationship with her was close, he did not really consider her extended family as his family:

I am not really looking forward to this party on Saturday...it will probably be good, I'll probably end up enjoying myself and be glad I went but at the moment I think to myself...but they make a fuss of me, as far as they are concerned I am part of the family but then you are not (Mr Delaney, 78)

The majority of the men who indicated, either explicitly or implicitly, that they had a close friend who they looked upon like kin, had a female friend who was like a daughter rather than a male friend who was like a son. In only one case did I hear about a friend who was like a son and that was Mr Crosby's relationship with a friend who was in his fifties. He had originally met him in a pub where he used to drink. The friendship had developed from there and, during our talks, he frequently referred to him as his son:

He treats me like a son should...I mean, last Christmas I went to Normandy with him on a boat. Yeah, I have been to a lot of places with him. I have been to London with him, went in that big museum (Mr Crosby, 80)

Mr Crosby had four daughters but he was only close to his youngest daughter although they all lived in the same city. Perhaps he enjoyed having a relationship with a younger man as he had never experienced a relationship with a son. He has an idea of how a son should behave towards his father despite not having any sons himself. However, he is able to draw on the experience of being a son to his own father who he had been very fond of.

One man who was estranged from his children, and who had difficulties getting out much, told me about one particular friend. Mia had been a friend for many years and kept in regular contact with Mr Dickie by telephone and by visiting. He had come to rely on her for emotional exchanges and they would often go out when she visited. He explained to me how she had become a friend:

Well, we both met her at the same time because we went to the Eye Theatre and she was there and Colin [ex-partner] was asked to speak to her because she was French and he knew French and Colin was very adept at speaking French and English. And particularly since he moved to France, Mia has become my friend although Colin and I were also friends of hers but now it is her and me (Mr Dickie, 75)

Mr Dickie's partner had moved to France a few years previously which had left him very isolated but had intensified his friendship with Mia. However, after the loss of his partner and the estrangement of his children, he worried a great deal about losing Mia, too:

Yes and I get terribly worried about Mia. I am not worried about Mia, you know, her health or anything like that...I just worry that I am going to be left with nobody... (Mr Dickie, 75)

There is some evidence of substitution of family for friends when viewing the findings above. Several of the men, who did not have kin, or a certain kind of kin, had substituted those missing kin with close friends. Thus, Mr Rastus converted his close friend into a 'daughter' and Mr Crosby looked upon his friend as the son he never had. Mr Dickie had lost contact with all of his children and his relationship with Mia had some of the characteristics of family. For all of the men, relationships with fictive kin were a salient component of their social networks. Interestingly, fictive kin also tended to live fairly close to the men and they had frequent face-to-face interactions whereas family often lived further away and contact with family was often by telephone or email. Although fictive kin often behaved in a way one would expect family to

behave, expectations did not appear as fixed as with family members and there was more emphasis on 'doing things together' rather than 'having things done to you'. When talking about fictive kin, there was never an undertone of irritation at being 'checked up on', unlike the narratives of family as well-meaning but sometimes intrusive. Negotiating fictive kin relationships, therefore, was different to negotiating family relationships. Although fictive kin was *like* family, obligations and rights were different. Fictive kin were seen as more obligated to be sociable whereas family tended to focus on care and practical needs. Furthermore, men's accounts never gave any hint of fictive kin being intrusive or monitoring the men so although the men viewed those close friends as kin, they were essentially friends.

Sibling relationships – sustaining, rekindling and loosening

Intergenerational relationships represented vertical associations, that is, relationships up and down the family lineage which entailed certain expectations of roles. However, the men also discussed their horizontal relationships i.e. with siblings (De Jong Gierveld, 2008) which were more likely to entail friendship, but also rivalry, rather than obligation. There were complex sibling relationships involving step-siblings and siblings which were almost a generation older or younger than the men. Several men had regular contact with their siblings, mainly by telephone although some had regular face-to-face contact. In theory, siblings are individuals known to the men for the longest time but with large age differences. Siblings were at times seen to occupy another world:

The younger brother is 20 years younger than me, he is the youngest and he has never been here, never. I have seen him a couple of times at funerals...he comes here [to town], he plays bowls...and he never comes here. You see, there were 20 years between us, we were on different planes. He is...bowls is his full-time occupation (Mr Smith, 97)

My half-brother was born in 1931...the gap between us was too wide...we got on well together but there was no close relationship. I was 11 when he was born and sometimes I was sent out to take him for a walk in the pram and I used to push him along with one hand as though we had nothing to do with each other [laughter] (Mr Harris, 90)

Mr Harris still had telephone contact with his step-brother but they did not see each other. Contact was sustained in most cases and the men would talk about keeping in touch with

siblings but, for the majority, siblings did not feature in their day-to-day social interactions. As well as lack of closeness in the relationships due to age, geographic distance was a problem for meeting up on a regular basis, as was reduced mobility:

I don't see him [younger brother] very much now because he is in his eighties now and it is difficult for him to come and see me now and I can't go to see him not very well... (Mr Young, 86)

The men kept in touch with some siblings and not others which reflected the relationships that they had had earlier in their lives. Mr Dennis had never got on with any of his siblings apart from one sister:

I still keep in touch with that one [sister] but not the elderly one, she is...well, I have been here 20 years and she has never thought of ever ringing me up. I have rung her up several times (Mr Dennis, 85)

Mr David had a similar experience with his brothers. He had one brother who he had adored but who died young. Another brother currently lived in the same road as Mr David but they had never got on and still found it difficult to sustain their relationship. It was partly due to his sister-in-law and her attitude towards him, he felt. He had not taken any photographs of his brother, despite being neighbours, and when I asked him why that might be, he told me that his brother had a 'peculiar attitude'. He tolerated his brother but they did not get on. A sibling's partner could, therefore, be the cause of deteriorating relationships. Another man had lost his brother a few years previously and explained that he was not really close to him before he died because of his wife:

Not really close to him [brother], we didn't like his wife. We worshipped the ground that was coming to her...if you understand that? (Mr Rastus, 76)

Although not close to his brother, Mr Rastus was close to his brother's children, his nieces and nephews, and having no children of his own, he valued interactions with the younger generation through them.

Mr Brown had lived with his sister until her recent death but he had never really got on with her:

Well, if you want to know, the problem with sisters and brothers is that they don't get on too well ([laughter], they don't...no they don't [laughter]) (Mr Brown, 80)

Despite that, he admitted to missing her company in the house. Only one man described how his relationship with his sister had become closer as they had both grown older. She was his step-sister from a family which he described as 'a bit of a disaster'. Mr Beejay had never married and had always lived alone. His sister had been married but had divorced and he felt that the break-up of her marriage had brought them closer. She was sixteen years younger than him and he appeared to be protective towards her. He had also considered that she might become a travel companion:

I asked her if she wanted to go to Rome, not that I particularly yearn for her company, I told her that, "I am not particularly yearning for your company don't misunderstand me!" [Laughter] It would be nice to share the experience, you know, anyway, I have mentioned it to her; it would be nice for her, I would like to take her (Mr Beejay, 75)

For Mr Beejay, his sister and her family were his only living close kin and that may have encouraged him to rekindle their relationship once she, too, was living alone. Although the majority of the men did not have very close relationships with their siblings, they mostly kept in touch, particularly with favourites. Close relationships, established during childhood, appeared to endure and likewise, ambivalent or acrimonious relationships persisted into old age.

In this chapter, I have presented descriptive and analytical data in relation to older men's experiences within families and the experiences of men without close kin. Negotiating family relationships is a useful way to understand the family interactions as the men can be seen to evaluate their place within the family and navigate a sometimes treacherous route through the various expectations of family members. The men characterised responsibilities between family members as reciprocal. They were also aware that family expected them to behave in a certain way. For example, they ought to be at home when family members were likely to drop in for visits and they ought to accept their limitations by giving up driving and leaving difficult chores to others. Morgan (1996) has suggested the term 'family practices' is helpful when viewing behaviour within families and these men have demonstrated the constructed quality of interactions with kin. A blurring of the boundaries between family and non-family was demonstrated by the relationships with friends who were like family but the active process of family practices extended to interactions with fictive kin.

There was also evidence of displaying family and again, that included the display of family with fictive kin. Displaying families (Finch, 2007) builds on the idea of family practices and is an interesting concept for this study, in relation to the expectations of family members. Finch (2007) defined it as:

[T]he process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute 'doing family things' and thereby confirm that these relationships are 'family' relationships (p.67)

Thus, adult children can be seen as displaying family when they excessively monitor their fathers. Older men also display family by accepting their role as at times passive but mainly receivers of negotiated attention. To an outsider, the caring behaviour of a son or daughter who visits regularly can throw a positive light on the whole family.

Sibling relationships did not provide a source of regular social interaction for most of the men in this study although several men were in touch with their siblings. One man had a relationship with his sister that had been neglected during mid-life but ignited during later life but for most of the men, relationship quality with siblings was a continuation of the kind of relationship they had experienced during early life, particularly during childhood. Brother-brother relationships have been reported to have the least contact when compared to mixed gender sibling relationships; sister-sister relationships have the greatest contact (L. K. White & Riedmann, 1992). The findings in this study appear to support that. Close brother-brother relationships were almost non-existent, perhaps indicating the contrastingly, enduring role of women as kin-keepers (Dykstra & de Jong Gierveld, 2004).

For relationships with a caring and supportive focus, family was mostly a reliable source and, for some men, the only source of support. For other men, family was not available and they had sometimes substituted kin with friends. Family, at times, provided social interaction through adult children, grandchildren, siblings, nieces and nephews and in-laws.

The photographs taken by the men indicated that family was often marginal in the men's daily lives and interactions. Furthermore, analysis of the data revealed that family was not central in providing social interactions for the men. This is contrary to the dominant discourse which stresses the importance of family for older men but perhaps this is not surprising as women are generally characterised as the kin-keepers (Finch & Mason, 1993). The findings have suggested

that there were gendered expectations as to the roles family members performed, with daughters involved with more domestic tasks and sons involved in house maintenance.

Summary

The findings chapters have exposed important interactions rarely considered in social network research. The men in this study experienced living alone as mainly positive and generally managed the running of the home with little assistance. Home had significance in terms of continuity and memories. Home provided, for some of the men, a means to stay visually connected with the world outside the home through organisation of furniture and established routines. Within the neighbourhood, routines allowed the men to interact with others on a more informal basis which required little emotional investment, reciprocity or obligation. In order to interact with others, suitable housing, neighbourhoods and access to transport was essential. The men encountered barriers to more formal interactions due to lack of information, masculine ideals and unsuitability of organised activities. Finally, family relationships were important to the men who were part of families but mostly, they did not provide daily social interactions and family members were sometimes intrusive. Overall, the men faced challenges in performing the role of maintaining social interactions but they were adaptable and inventive as they managed their daily lives as older men living alone.

Chapter 11

Discussion and conclusions

Introduction

This study sought to understand the world from the perspective of older men, focussing on contextualised social processes and meanings rather than on statistical generalisations. It set out to explore older men's subjective experiences of living alone, with a special emphasis on their social worlds, in order to answer the following research questions:

- How do older men experience living alone?
- What role does social interaction play in older men's lives?

The focus was not on establishing objective facts but on exploring how these men understand their lives, relationships and social worlds and the subjective meanings they attached to the experiences they shared with me. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as a framework, I have explored these men's lives in context, both temporal and spatial, to shed light on the interaction of various systems which influence the experience of living alone later in life and the social interactions which are meaningful to individual men.

One aim of the study was to engage older men in the research so that they had some control over issues meaningful to them and so to avoid stereotyping this group of men as problematic or deficient in their social relationships. Using a visual methodology enabled me to reveal the daily lives and the more hidden social worlds of these men living alone in later life. I did not seek to quantify the extent or intensity of relationships but to identify meaningful interactions, with the men defining relationships in their own terms, acknowledging that definitions of relationships are not just the terrain of academics. A second aim was to understand men's subjective experiences of living alone and their social interactions.

The aims have been achieved to the extent of producing an in-depth description and analysis of self-accounts of experiences of older men living alone and how they value social interactions. Furthermore, challenges as to what a social relationship entails were exposed by the men through their descriptions of valued interactions.

Older men's subjective experiences of living alone in later life

The men's accounts demonstrated that the route to solo living has an influence on the subsequent experience. The knowledge that someone lives alone is meaningless without knowing how they got there, for understanding how that particular living arrangement may be subjectively experienced.

Chapter Eight presented the findings relating to living alone and explored the strategies the men used, not only to manage day to day living but also to remain connected with others. The interviews allowed the men to talk about a time before they lived alone or a life always lived alone, the process of becoming an older man living alone and a future of living alone. There were many complex routes into solo living and all but one man had, at some point during his adult life, lived with someone else (e.g. sibling, elderly parent, partner or spouse). Previous life experiences had influenced the men's perceptions of what or who they had become. A continuation of previous living arrangements into old age still posed challenges as being an older single man brought losses of, for example, relationships and mobility. The route taken into solo living clearly matters, as reported by other studies (Victor, 2005).

The loss of a companion within the home had struck some men hard and severely reduced their social worlds as their networks' composition changed once they were no longer in a couple relationship. Earlier research evidenced the widowed elderly as more likely to experience emotional loneliness than the married or never-married (Connidis, 2010; Gubrium, 1975). Here, the never-married Mr Beejay did not express an increase in emotional loneliness, although he recognised that living alone can be socially isolating but, as other research indicates, not necessarily entailing feelings of loneliness (Meeuwesen, 2006; Van Baarsen, et al., 2001). Being used to companionship within the home and having lost it was, therefore, more likely to lead to emotional loneliness although loneliness was rarely explicitly mentioned. Men who had experienced several life-transitions and losses appeared to fare better than the men who had been in the same couple relationship since their younger days, suggesting that it was not only the route to solo living which influenced the experience of that living arrangement but also resilience built up during the life-course. The potential protective effect of resilience lies in the successful management of risk and stressors, rather than evasion of risk, and therefore requires some exposure to adversity (Rutter, 1987).

Some men had experienced much adversity earlier in life without demonstrating resilience when coping with the loss of a spouse. Instead, they attempted to demonstrate extreme independence and stoicism, often at great cost to building social engagement. Resilient men seemed able to continue their lives and bounce back after losses whereas stoicism manifested itself as indifference. For example, Mr Bridge managed to continue a relatively full social life despite the loss of his wife and coping with terminal cancer. Mr Dennis, on the other hand, although having suffered deprivation and adversity earlier in his life, could not find the resources to bounce back. However, he appeared stoic in accepting his life and circumstances. The difference between them may lie in their social networks. Mr Dennis's network was extremely limited whereas Mr Bridge was surrounded by extended family and many friends. It is important to remember, as the literature reminds us, that successful coping is not guaranteed in all situations as resilience is not a fixed attribute of an individual (Rutter, 1987). It has also been suggested that the capacity for resilience is not found within the individual alone but also within the primary network of family and friends and even the neighbourhood (Zautra, et al., 2010), which fits well with the findings here. Men who were living alone but had more extensive networks of family and friends were, therefore, more likely to be resilient, as were men who lived in neighbourhoods perceived to be friendly and safe, providing opportunities for social interactions. In other words, they were rich in social capital.

Although most men had not entered the living arrangement willingly, some men found living alone a happy release, as did Mr Rastus, who had cared for his mother and Mr Brown, who had lived with a sister with whom he did not get on very well. For both of them, living alone was a positive experience. Most of the men were able to find some positive aspects to living alone which included a sense of freedom and autonomy. However, for some men, living alone had come after a sad loss and settling into single status was difficult. For just one man, living alone was a continuation of his lifelong living arrangement and for another man, living alone had put him in a state of limbo as his wife was still living but in a nursing home. With such diverse experiences, the term living alone, although useful for demographers, is not useful for predicting individual experiences. It is essential to look at lives in a more holistic way, as this visual study has been able to do.

The study found a continuum of levels of satisfaction with living alone, with location on that continuum influenced by individual differences, appropriateness of the accommodation, local neighbourhood and policies which made access to others easier, as with availability of transport.

In that way, the need to look across all of the systems in Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) ecological model was highlighted such that changes in one system had the capacity to influence other systems. Temporal considerations were also valuable as the time lived alone also influenced the subsequent experience. Mr Young, for instance, had been managing living alone for four years quite well until persuaded by his daughter to move from his usual city neighbourhood and into sheltered accommodation in a suburb over 100 miles away. Moving influenced his wellbeing as he was no longer able to get around as easily and he no longer had his established informal support network and familiar social interactions. He still managed the practical aspects of living alone but had become socially isolated. It was not the living arrangement *per se* that caused the isolation but the move from existing support and the new environment.

Many of the men emphasised their capabilities within the home, particularly their interest in and ability to cook. They particularly enjoyed shopping for ingredients and cooking meals even if their repertoires were sometimes limited. This is an interesting finding as previous research has found that older men tend to rely on luncheon clubs and ready meals (K. Bennett, Hughes, & Smith, 2003). One reason may be that the men in this study were older, on average, than in Bennett et al's (2003) study and therefore, most of them had participated in National Service which had involved cooking and other domestic tasks, at some level. Cooking and other household chores were not seen as feminine tasks and for many of the men, those tasks had been shared when they were in couple relationships.

Sometimes, the men had to adapt previous ways of doing those chores, which could include doing just a little every day or accepting that a little dust did not matter. This very much reflects the principle of selective optimisation with compensation (P. Baltes & Baltes, 1990). They could change their level of aspirations and goals to more manageable ideals which then allowed for self-efficacy and growth and demonstrated the resilience of the self. However, if they reduced or changed their aspirations, this could sometimes worry their family who might step in to do the tasks if they felt the men were no longer managing which then reduced the benefits to the men who were managing by setting themselves more achievable goals

Bennett (1998) found, from a longitudinal study, that after bereavement the increase in domestic activity within the home, reduced activity outside the home, including social engagement, as men simply did not have as much time to socialise. The findings here also

suggest increased domestic activity but in talking with the men, they did not appear to lack time for social engagement. Mr Dennis even found that he had so much time on his hands that he deliberately cleaned his spare room even though it had already been done. Thus, the men actively employed strategies to fill their time and to relieve boredom or loneliness, including going out, talking to others on the telephone, watching television and reminiscing. Hence, lack of time was not a barrier for social engagement and the men mostly managed the chores within the home, adapting to a new life living alone or a continuation of living alone, albeit as an older man.

The ability to manage tasks within the home is an indicator of successful ageing (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Most of these men were actively able to do this, although many of their activities were low-key and, for various reasons, they were not equally able to be active. Some men were discouraged by family from being 'too active', perhaps a reflection of the construction of a risk discourse in relation to older people (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) which influenced family members. Other men had poor health or lacked information which restricted their opportunities for remaining active (Tulle-Winton, 2000). It may be that information about help which could be enabling, such as learning to cook, can increase older men's activities in the home.

The home itself was a place of significance to many of the men, particularly the previously married men, as indicated by the number of photographs the men had taken of their homes. It enabled a sense of belonging and familiarity and was a source of memories. Furthermore, attachment to place underpinned various aspects of their identity, as found in previous studies (e.g. Sixsmith & Sixsmith, 1991). They often expressed a sense of spiritual connection with their deceased spouse and some told me that they kept doors open for her or talked to her. Such continuing bonds to the deceased were reassuring for the men and are thought to be adaptive from previous research (Bonanno, Papa, et al., 2002). Reminiscing was also a source of comfort for some men as they spent time thinking about happy times with significant others. However, some men found it hard to come to terms with losses of time, opportunities and people and preferred not to think about the past, often wondering how their lives might have been different.

For some men, however, the home had little significance. Mr Harris, although a widower, did not need any physical reminders of his deceased wife as he had enough in a spiritual connection. This may have been due to the length of time that he had been bereaved and also

his religious beliefs. Other men viewed their homes as just a place to live, mainly because they had moved after the death of a spouse or they had never been married. Thus, the meaning of the living arrangement, as well as the meaning of place, was influenced by access to previous relationships. Living alone was not a negative arrangement for most of the men as they articulated their feeling of freedom and autonomy, as well as the interest in doing many of the chores in the home. Attachment to home often meant a sense of security and continuation, rather than isolation or loneliness.

Older men asserting their masculinities

Woven within the narratives, and expressed throughout the research collaboration, were questions of masculinity and identity. Although older, the men were still asserting their masculinity and the style in which they did, again reflected previous life experiences and marked an attempt to sustain previous gendered behaviour (K. Bennett, 2007; Calasanti, 2004; Smith, et al., 2007; Spector-Mersel, 2006). Their claims to maintain their independence were made paramount as a means of asserting masculine ideals. Hence, soldiering on and avoiding becoming a burden were expressed as important issues for the men. Across all systems in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, there was an emphasis by the men on maintaining independence. Emphasising how they were remaining in their own homes and managing the running of the home, gave a clear signal that they were independent, self-reliant men. Getting out and around was achieved by many of the men by their own independent use of a car or bus travel. The absence of a close friend in most of the men's networks may also indicate independence as most of the men mainly preferred relationships with fewer obligations and little or no reciprocity. However, some of the men also stated the wish for a more intimate relationship with one other person. Such a relationship would be likely to reinstate the couple status and allow them to act as provider and protector.

Those men who had been widowed never referred to themselves as 'widowers'. Instead, they talked about being 'single'. This study was not about widowerhood but about subjective experiences of living alone and social interactions in later life, and the men were not approached to collaborate as widowers but as men living alone. However, although the interviews were mainly directed by the men through their photographs, there was an emphasis, by me, on their previous life histories, including relationship histories. Therefore, the lack of

reference to themselves as widowers is perhaps surprising but suggests that the bereaved men actively took on the identity of single male rather than an identity as widower. Bereavement and subsequent widowhood can evoke images of emotions and dependency, something which most of the men appeared emphatically not to want to be associated with and, therefore, they seemed to prefer to view themselves as single, independent men. Van den Hoonaard (2010) similarly found in her study with widowers that older men saw the identity of widower as a weak identity and as undesirable. Despite rejecting the image of a bereaved widower, the men in my study often became emotional during the interviews when recalling painful memories and past experiences and freely talked to me about their losses and grief. They appeared to conceive of and articulate a private, more sensitive image of themselves and a public image as a capable, independent single male. It may be that within the interview setting (where I became an audience) they felt able to articulate a more sensitive and reflective self but in other, more public situations, they did not express that as an option for public presentation and portrayed a different front when talking about activities outside the home (Goffman, 1990).

These men did not express feeling old or un-gendered and could mostly be seen to negotiate their masculine ageing identities through behaviour and some through dress. Although dominant constructions of masculinity perceive dress and fashion as effeminate, several men were deliberately dressing to look younger or to support their masculine images. Although research has explored the importance of dress for older women (e.g. Twigg, 2007), the importance of dress and fashion for older men has been solely neglected, reinforcing the invisibility of older men and the lack of attention to the diversity of personal tastes amongst this cohort of older men.

Older men's experiences of family relationships

The kind of relationships the men experienced with family were not always given meaning in the sense that they were often not experienced as 'social' relationships. Instead of an emphasis on socialising, family interactions were often presented as based on support or obligation. The men seemed generally accepting of this style of relationship and did not articulate that they ever openly complained to family members or rejected available family relationships but, at times, expressed attempts to negotiate their interactions with family. Such negotiations were

expressed as being related to intrusiveness, visiting (too much or too little) and suitable behaviour, mainly related to perceived risks by the family.

As the men viewed independence as paramount, becoming a burden to family was seen very much as a last resort, as reported in Chapter Ten. Practical support and relationships were negotiated and although an important part of many of the men's lives, family could sometimes be perceived as overly intrusive. This relates to Wenger's (1989) development of support network typologies. She found that family dependent networks could be oppressive as older people were confined to interactions with family alone. Here, some of the men appeared to have been drawn into that type of network, sometimes unwillingly and not perceiving themselves to have a choice if they did not want to upset their family. It had to be all or nothing and therefore the men saw themselves as either accepting the type of relationships or risk completely losing valued relationships with family members. It appeared that their status as widower made family members assume that they had become more vulnerable and unable to manage on their own, even if they had always been able to cook or clean when living with a spouse.

Although the relationships were evidently negotiated, negotiations were rarely explicit. Family practices are considered to continuously develop throughout the life of the family (P. Chambers, et al., 2009; Morgan, 2011) but old age required different kinds of interactions, roles and relationships for both older men and their families and were rarely just a continuation of previous roles. Indeed, many of the men found that there were sometimes, mostly unwanted, reversals of roles. Men who had family were notably having to continuously negotiate these relationships, particularly if they had become frailer and called on some informal care or support from family members. Judging the felt requirements of the men was also subject to negotiation with a frequent dissonance between what the men felt they needed and what family members felt they should provide. In the more conflicted cases, family could appear intrusive, with the men describing their resentment of 'pushy' involvement. Mr McBeth's situation exemplified a mismatch. Although he clearly articulated that his family 'meant well', he was overwhelmed by their constant visiting which prevented him from going out. When needs and assistance were better harmonised, the men could feel secure in the knowledge that help and support was available, if required. That was the case for Mr Bridge, who needed daily assistance, and he articulated that his family were able and willing to provide that in an appropriate manner which suited both parties.

The men expressed feeling in a very difficult position with regards to family as they were unwilling to upset family members, perhaps knowing that at some point they may not be able to manage without some assistance and for many of the men there were no other sources of informal support. That acknowledgement appeared to be made despite their also seeming overwhelmingly reluctant to look ahead and plan for the future in terms of care and support. They expressed great faith that somehow, someone would sort it all out and took no responsibility themselves for actively making their own plans for the future. The unwillingness to delineate a future of increased dependency, paradoxically means that at some point in the future, they would probably have very little control over what happens to them. However, even if unable to manage in the future, many of the men expressed the desire to be cared for by more formal carers. For example, Mr Swalds suggested that different people in his life will serve different functions and so distinguished between friends, family and carers. One man, Mr Harris, was so reluctant to become dependent or to be cared for, even by formal carers, that he had made arrangements to end his own life should that situation arise.

Apart from their very peripheral relationships and family relationships, the men had close relationships which I termed 'fictive kin' (Mac Rae, 1992). Such fictive kin were sometimes treated by the men as substitute kin, who they valued enormously for their company and regular interactions. They were always younger than the men and mostly 'like daughters', perhaps supporting the men's fatherly and provider roles, which were often reported as being eroded by biological family. Although fictive kin sometimes helped out in practical ways, they always emphasised how here they would be doing things together rather than having things done for them or to them. They articulated a sense of mutuality rather than obligation or patronising support and in that way fictive kin had similarities in what was valued about friendships and acquaintanceships. For example, the mutual sharing of petrol costs or paying for meals in pubs thus led to greater satisfaction with relationships involving fictive kin as they were not passive recipients of care but active agents in defining their relationships.

Family interactions included some interactions with grandchildren and siblings but most of the men had very little contact with grandchildren, which contradicts more recent research with married grandfathers and suggests that the spouse may be the main instigator of contact with grandchildren (Sorensen & Cooper, 2010).

Family was usually, perhaps surprisingly, not presented as their major source of emotional support. The independence displayed through the men's talk suggested that they did not require relationships for emotional support as they perceived themselves as managers of their own emotions. However, they also made the point that relationships with fictive kin were a source of mutual emotional support.

Older men and their social interactions

Chapter Nine went on to present the men's social worlds outside the home. Most of the men described how they sometimes encountered barriers to their wider participation. One barrier was a lack of information and they simply did not know what kind of services and provisions were available locally or where they might find information about such services. Therefore, not only did they articulate barriers simply to participation but also barriers to information, particularly incidental information which will be discovered by chance through social interactions (Williamson, 1998). Although incidental information often follows from weak ties within the social network, the kind of social interactions that many of the men valued were not able to provide even weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). That is not to say that these men did not participate socially. There were many interactions and relationships that the men valued and those were mainly non-kin relationships.

These men expressed enjoyment at seeing the same people regularly, albeit briefly, as they sat in their homes looking through the window or travelled around the neighbourhood, often by bus. Acquaintances were very much a valued part of their social worlds and provided the kind of contact that the men found meaningful and enjoyable without requiring much emotional investment or obligatory maintenance, other than just a greeting or nod of the head.

Acquaintanceships were more public relationships and the men expressed preference for those to more private relationships. Far from being anonymous social relationships, they appeared to provide familiarity and the men had more than categorical knowledge of those acquaintances. However, such relationships lacked intimacy in the sense that the men did not exchange much personal information (Blokland, 2003).

Those men who described a robust and reliable network of regular interactions with acquaintances, appeared to find that their social needs were well catered for. They still

expressed more intimate desires, like missing a close companion and sexual relationships, but those requirements appeared to be better managed if their everyday social needs were felt to be more or less fulfilled. As Chapter Eight suggested, it was not the household arrangement and practicalities involved in running a home that was challenging, but the loss of companionship within the home.

The kinds of relationships that the men mentioned as being able to take part in were linked to their environment, in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. Thus, environments could be seen to be more or less conducive to forming and maintaining social relationships and interactions. I expected that sheltered accommodation would provide for increased social interaction but found that that was not the case from these men's experiences. Sheltered accommodation could provide some organised activities in female dominated spaces but could not provide the more informal acquaintanceship-type relationships that the men most enjoyed. Although promoted as providing a more social setting (Best, 2010), none of the men was interested in participating in the activities, formally and informally offered in such housing situations, and actually found that type of housing isolating and unable to support their social needs.

These men expressed great reluctance to join any activities which included older people or women. Much previous research has explored older men's reluctance to join in organised activities because of the dominant female membership and the perceived lack of suitable activities for males. In the early 2000s, Davidson et al (2003) found, in relation to men's participation in organised activities, that 'clubs which catered for "women and old people"' were viewed as a last resort or, more commonly, a place they "wouldn't be seen dead in" (p.88). I also found that older men did not want to join in activities as they were perceived as suitable only for older, frail, women and not independent, self-reliant men.

Changes in the provision of appropriate activities for men appear to be slow, perhaps because of the scant attention to masculinity in old age which influences the behaviour of older men yet remains ignored by most organisers of activities (Davidson, 2004; Davidson, et al., 2003b; J. Sixsmith & Boneham, 2003; Sopp, et al., 2007). This study adds to the need to look beyond one size fits all approaches and the framework of forced interaction and activities which were not of interest to most men when younger and still not of interest as they age. Instead, these men

articulated a desire for doing 'manly' things, such as pottering about in gardens and relationships which were of a more public nature.

Expanding the space between intimates and strangers

The kind of interactions described to me, and visually represented by the men as meaningful to them, comprised surprisingly brief encounters with others and would appear to completely lack substance in terms of support or reciprocity. Some may best be described as occupying a space between acquaintances and strangers (Morgan, 2009), certainly in terms of their irregularity and, often, obvious lack of physical interaction.

Yet, in Chapter Eight, we saw the importance given to seeing the same people or even any people. Mr Dennis, for example, gained much pleasure from seeing the same woman walking past his window to the local shop and back again, but on the other side of the road, never even noticing that he was watching her. He was not aware of who she was personally, or even where she lived, but he placed considerable importance on the visual interactions and the interactions may hardly even qualify as an acquaintanceship. However, the individuals that the men interact with in that way cannot be classed as complete strangers but perhaps 'consequential strangers', as well-described by Fingerman (2009), in having clear consequences for the men and their sense of belonging. Although it is hard to name the interactions described, it is important to stress that the men themselves used various terms and viewed the interactions in various ways. Terms such as 'friends', 'mates' and 'acquaintances' were all used in connection with the described fleeting interactions. They never used the word 'stranger'.

The identified visual aspect to the interactions they described, suggests that the space between acquaintances and strangers may be a more sensory space, where interactions are visual but, possibly, we may also use our senses of smell and hearing in those interactions. We may sometimes interact in a meaningful way with others through our senses, although the interactions may not best be described as relationships. Indeed, Fingerman (2004) suggests that if the interactions are to be recognised as relationships, they have to involve some degree of mutual recognition. It is not clear if these interactions involve mutual recognition. However, through observations of others, it may be possible to know them enough to establish respective social positions which may at least indicate familiarity, even if it is not reciprocal. Of course,

from this study, we do not know if the interaction is in some way reciprocal. When I visited Mr Dennis and saw him watching the woman, there was no hint of acknowledgement from either party but we cannot be sure that she did not know that he was watching. Other men described similar others who they watched through their windows or from a bench outside and the lack of opportunities for that kind of interaction, even if they had other social relationships, appeared as a form of exclusion experienced by the men. Mr Young and Mr Crosby felt particularly excluded from such visual interactions due to the position of their flats and windows.

It is hard to name such interactions or place them within the social networks of individuals, as I found in the pilot studies when attempting to use a mapping technique. Indeed, some may suggest that they have no place in a social network as there is little substantially 'social' about them and that might explain the lack of examination of such peripheral ties. It is clear that using a lack of personal network members as an indicator for social isolation (van Tilburg, 1998) would not be useful in this study of older men's social relationships if we cannot easily place the fleeting interactions within the social network.

However, the fleeting interactions cannot be ignored due to their obvious significance in these older men's lives. It may be that the boundary between acquaintances and strangers needs to be expanded to include these unexplored relationships. Morgan (2009) suggests a spectrum of social relationships, with no hierarchy implied in terms of value, which could include the interactions described here: not quite acquaintances but not strangers either. That may contradict Fingerman who does not allow such a space when she argues that a lack of mutual recognition 'serves as a demarcation between peripheral partners and true strangers' (Fingerman, 2004, p.187).

It is important to emphasise that the analysis suggests that all of these men were exposed to various opportunities to form other closer relationships and friendships. Thus, they sometimes described making a choice not to do so, indicating that the relationships or interactions that they chose to engage in were deliberate and meaningful, not just the only types of interactions available to them. In that way, they actively rejected more 'conventional' relationships of the kind that the literature suggests that older women might enjoy. They do not portray an image of desperate old men, grasping at any chance for a close relationship. Instead, they were circumspect and choosy as to the types of interactions which they felt were worthwhile pursuing. Such relationship types were often a continuation of the type of interactions that they

had enjoyed earlier in their lives. It was, therefore, not the case that these men have no meaningful relationships, nor can their relationships be considered inferior compared to women's relationships, but they are clearly different in terms of mutuality and intimacy, to the reported meaningful relationships that women enjoy (Powers & Bultena, 1976).

Most of the interactions articulated as meaningful by these men, were not going to be supportive in a practical sense, should the men require support, but a consideration of ways in which those brief interactions, some of which appeared as regular, could be encouraged to become more than interactions is apposite. However, it may be that if the 'social' content of those relationships were increased, the men will no longer want to engage with them. It is clear, from this study, that older men were not interested in participating in activities which were irrelevant and meaningless to them. Several men had tried and rejected such activities and there may be a need for organisers to look to other ways of encouraging interactions which they do enjoy.

Reflections on the research process

The men engaged with the research process and were able to produce photographs which represented issues or concerns in their daily lives. Their enthusiasm and willingness to tell their individual stories was unwavering throughout this process. Discussing the photographs within photo-elicitation interviews, facilitated an insight into the lives of this group of men. It is not possible to say if the same insights could have been generated by the use of an alternative research methodology. Banks (2007) claims that visual methods are distinctive rather than unique and here, the method clearly allowed me to explore areas of older men's lives in discussion with them and to particularise relationships which have been commonly overlooked or discounted.

I engaged in relationships with the men which were, at times, emotional for both parties, due to the nature of the research topic. They all expressed interest in the company of women younger than themselves and seemed relaxed and comfortable in my company as they viewed it as a congenial arrangement, suggesting that my age and gender worked to my advantage within this research project. However, the loss of my company was clearly felt by some of the men as they

initiated contact after the research process had been completed. I, too, felt the loss of their company as I had greatly enjoyed and valued listening to their life stories.

Initially, I was open to interviewing the men in a place suitable to them but all the men preferred for me to come to their homes. It was fortunate that that was the case as my observations of the men within their homes provided useful data, particularly in relation to the fleeting visual encounters through the strategic positioning of the furniture. Although I dismissed observation as a useful method for data collection in this study, observing the men for longer within their homes might have revealed even more about the contribution of those fleeting interactions to their life worlds.

Limitations

There are some limitations which should be considered. In order to collaborate in the study, the men had to be able to use a digital camera. I tried to adapt when difficulties were encountered. For example, Mr Dickie only had use of his left arm and was not able to hold the camera and depress the exposure button with his left hand but the use of a tripod allowed him to do so. Mr Brown's eyesight was extremely poor but he was able to use a digital camera with a large screen. The men who volunteered were probably less isolated than the ones I was not able to reach. This was a self-selected group of generally well-functioning men but despite this, they were mostly not very socially engaged and maybe they present just the tip of the iceberg, with the majority of isolated men being hidden in the community.

There are likely to be significant differences between cohorts of older men. This group of men included six divorced (or separated) men and one man who had experienced a gay union but future cohorts are likely to have been involved in more complex family arrangements. That will have implications for accessible family but could potentially provide access to a larger pool of diverse and more peripheral family members, including step-relationships. Although over half of these men used computers and other technology, future cohorts will be more used to online and virtual communities which will influence and potentially expand their social worlds.

The men who collaborated in this study gave no indication of financial difficulties. Men with fewer economic resources may find it harder to interact socially with others due to unsafe

neighbourhoods, lack of transport and lack of money to participate in society. Likewise, men with physical disabilities may find it harder to engage socially than this relatively fit sample.

This study was able to provide a snapshot of interactions which these older men articulated as meaningful but it is not clear if older men would continue to value such interactions. Despite relatively prolonged contact with them in generating these snapshots, due to the methodology employed, I was not able to evaluate the likely continuity of any interactions or the potential for those interactions to evolve into more than interactions, which could have been better achieved with a longitudinal study. Peripheral relationships have been shown to reduce in number as older people age (Lang, 2004) but at the same time, older people are thought to have a greater variety of attachment figures (Cicirelli, 2010). A longitudinal study would better establish if the observed interactions are a continuation of meaningful interactions earlier in men's lives.

Future directions and implications for policy and practice

We may need to look to other disciplines for inspiration as to how the interactions that these older men described as having meaning and value for them, can best be supported and possibly further developed, whilst still remaining meaningful. At the same time, we must remain cautious if it is proposed to develop such relationships as it is clear that the men do not actively seek supportive relationships in the sense that they want emotional or practical support, perhaps signalling a reduction in their independence, as an outcome of the interaction. However, the interactions appear as a means to help support their masculine identities, through their work-like and non-obligatory nature, and in that way to have the potential to increase their psychological wellbeing in ways that relationships with close partners might not be able to. This may be because such close partners already have established ideas of who the men are (e.g. old, alone, vulnerable, in need of help and care). If the intensity of the interactions cannot be increased without rendering the interactions less meaningful to the men, then increasing the frequency of opportunities to interact may be possible. While it may not be possible to promote change easily on the individual-family or socio-cultural level, developments in policy or provision at the service level should be possible to support more meaningful and acceptable participation for these older men.

One discipline which considers the interaction of older individuals and their environments is environmental gerontology. Environmental gerontology can provide an interdisciplinary understanding of the inter-relations between ageing individuals and their physical-social environment (Wahl & Gitlin, 2007). Drawing on disciplines such as sociology, psychology, social geography, architecture, urban planning and occupational therapy, it places emphasis upon day-to-day contexts of older people in their natural settings (Wahl & Oswald, 2010). Observational studies of older men in their local environments may throw more light on the interactions articulated by the men in this study and enable further exploration of the processes involved in such interactions. Environmental adaptations may increase the frequency and likelihood of interactions taking place, through benches placed in relevant places, meeting hubs or other facilities which can encourage brief encounters. Recent research looking at age-friendly cities (WHO, 2007) may be able to inform us about suitable layouts for increased social interactions. Age-friendly cities consider different domains, including physical environments, transport options, housing and information which can all encourage opportunities for participation (Menec, Means, Keating, Parkhurst, & Eales, 2011).

Family relationships were important, although not usually for daily social interactions. The unwelcome intrusions articulated by the men could be further explored through research with older men's families. What the men themselves may consider intrusive may be considered usual and acceptable family practices by the family members. This study focused on the voices and experiences of older men and, therefore, did not consider the experiences of other family members.

It is important to remember that social relationships have to precede their provision of informal support. Through social relationships, older men can accumulate social capital which can in turn produce social support. Attention therefore needs to be placed on the opportunities to increase social interactions if older men are to be able to draw on social support in later life. Information about available services (e.g. housing, transport, activities) has the potential to increase social interactions but currently, there is no single point of information for older men to access. Offering an information point in GP surgeries may be one way to reach the majority of older people, at a local level, who are not already in touch with social care services. However, supplying and connecting such a single information point would require joined-up action from many agencies and organisations.

There is a need to expand the space between acquaintances and strangers to accommodate the interactions described by the men in this study. It is not possible to generalise from this exploratory study, undertaken with a distinct group of men, but this has nonetheless exposed new and often surprising terrain, which could clearly be usefully studied further with other groups. For example, we do not know if these types of interactions, or the value given to them, are unique to older men or whether they have not yet been recognised as important for older women or indeed, younger people. It is likely that they will increasingly feature in younger people's lives as they engage with virtual relationships.

The analysis has clearly shown that these older men do not want to be presumed to want to participate in organised activities, artificially produced as suitable for 'older people' and 'older women' at that. If more men are to be encouraged to become more socially engaged with others, then the organised activities need to change dramatically in quality and diversity. Men wanted licenced clubs, darts, snooker, interesting talks and a pub environment. They were not anti-women and the heterosexual men did express interest in women, particularly younger women, but they did not want to participate in female-dominated spaces. They did not want to be with old people either, therefore, intergenerational and men-only activities are more likely to encourage engagement. Such activities could include community Men's Sheds which are available in some parts of the UK. Men's Sheds can be considered third places (Oldenburg, 1999), providing a space outside the home and an anchor to social and community life (Golding & Foley, 2008). There are currently no Men's Sheds in Norfolk, UK.

Conclusions

This study is distinct from previous work on men's relationships in focusing on all meaningful interactions described by these older men rather than focusing on specific relationships or interactions or prioritising relationships with kin. Its approach enabled beginning from the assumption that older men are capable and enjoy diverse and meaningful lives and relationships, rather than problematising living alone in later life. Previous social network research has often sought to explore relationships in a rather narrowly instrumental way, in terms of their potential and usefulness for support, whereas the constructionist approach of this study enabled identification of the potential of men to actively build support for their well-being and identity through interactions they saw as meaningful. Using a visual method enabled the

men to indicate their meaningful relationships and interactions, initially by themselves and non-verbally through photography, and thence to discuss the entirety of their lives during interview. This has produced a more complete perspective of life as an older man living alone, in building a more complex understanding of older men's social worlds. It has uncovered relationships which have meaning and value to older men but rarely considered in social network research narrowly conceived in terms of social support in later life, as they are less likely to be or become instrumentally supportive relationships. However, the fleeting interactions described by the men are more likely to provide 'stimulation and novelty', as suggested by Fingerman (2009, p.81) in relation to acquaintances, supporting identity and producing a sense of belonging. It would be wrong to suggest that family relationships are not important to older men but for most of these older men, they did not provide meaningful daily interactions. Instead, family was found to be intrusive at times through their monitoring of these men.

The older men who collaborated in this study managed to use strategies which enabled them to live alone although for most, it was not an arrangement they had chosen or explicitly preferred. Social interactions played a big role in their lives but the interactions described by the men are types which have rarely been considered in previous research with older men. These men were not interested in participating in organised activities and did not value them. They preferred to interact more fleetingly with others, mostly valuing interactions which did not require obligation or reciprocity. Perhaps this was because such brief interactions did not entail the established ideas of who the men are, as engaging with family often does. Thus, the more valued visual interactions seemed to better support their identity as men, despite not also offering instrumental support.

The findings of this thesis therefore challenge common presumptions about the loneliness of older men who live alone. It highlights their engagement with their social worlds and those relationships they found meaningful and up-ends those presumptions. This study indicates there is much more to explore regarding the interactions articulated and observed, particularly the need to attend to the importance of that space between acquaintanceship and strangerhood. The revision of ideas about older men's relationship needs and wants suggests that rather different provision should be offered for this diverse and expanding group of men. Meeting their needs has to start with adequate and appropriate information, and continue through to developing activities and social interactions which are more meaningful. In austere times, providing activities which are unsuited to their needs makes little sense in terms of welfare and

psycho-social health or in supporting the independence notably valued by this group of men living alone. Furthermore, involving older men in the planning of suitable services and listening to their voices as active citizens, with clear ideas about what brings them satisfaction and well-being in later life, will benefit individual men as well as society as a whole.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide used with the photographs

Questions for interview

(In any order and only used if topic not already covered during interview)

Can you tell me about?

- What it is like to live alone
- If you got ill, who would care for you
- Member of clubs or organisations
- What do you worry about
- Who is your best friend – long standing friends, why important to you?
(6/7/09)
- Who can you confide in
- Where can you go to find new or more friendships
- Who do you like spending time with?
- Do you like getting to know new people?
- People who are most important in your life
- Where do you find information about activities, clubs etc in your area?
(25/08/09)
- Do you sometimes get bored?
- Tell me about any family/kin who is particularly important to you
(24/11/09)

Appendix B: Participant biographical information

Age

Occupation

Route to solo living – never married, cohabiting relationship/s, divorced, bereaved

Extended family – children, grandchildren, siblings, nieces, nephews etc.

Duration of solo living

Time lived in current neighbourhood

Transport

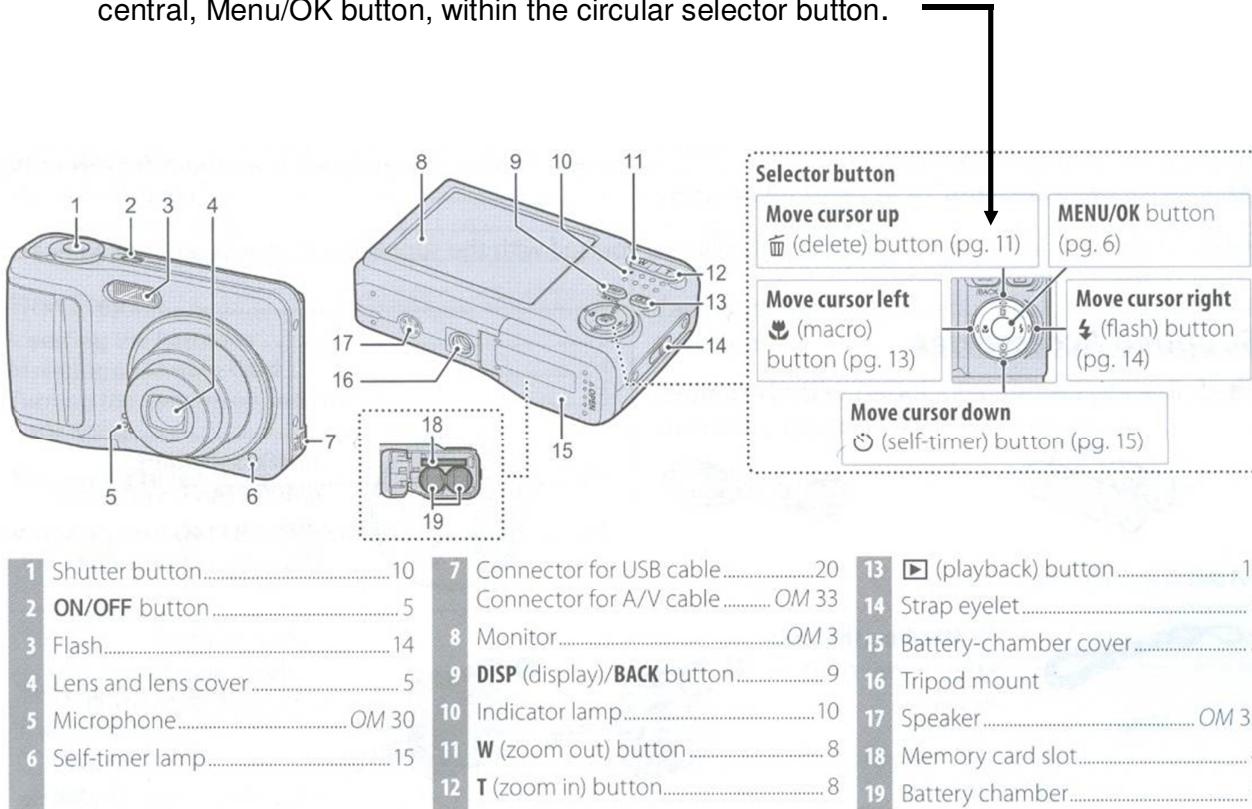
Health - good/average/bad

Self-selected pseudonym (first and second name)

Digital camera operating instructions

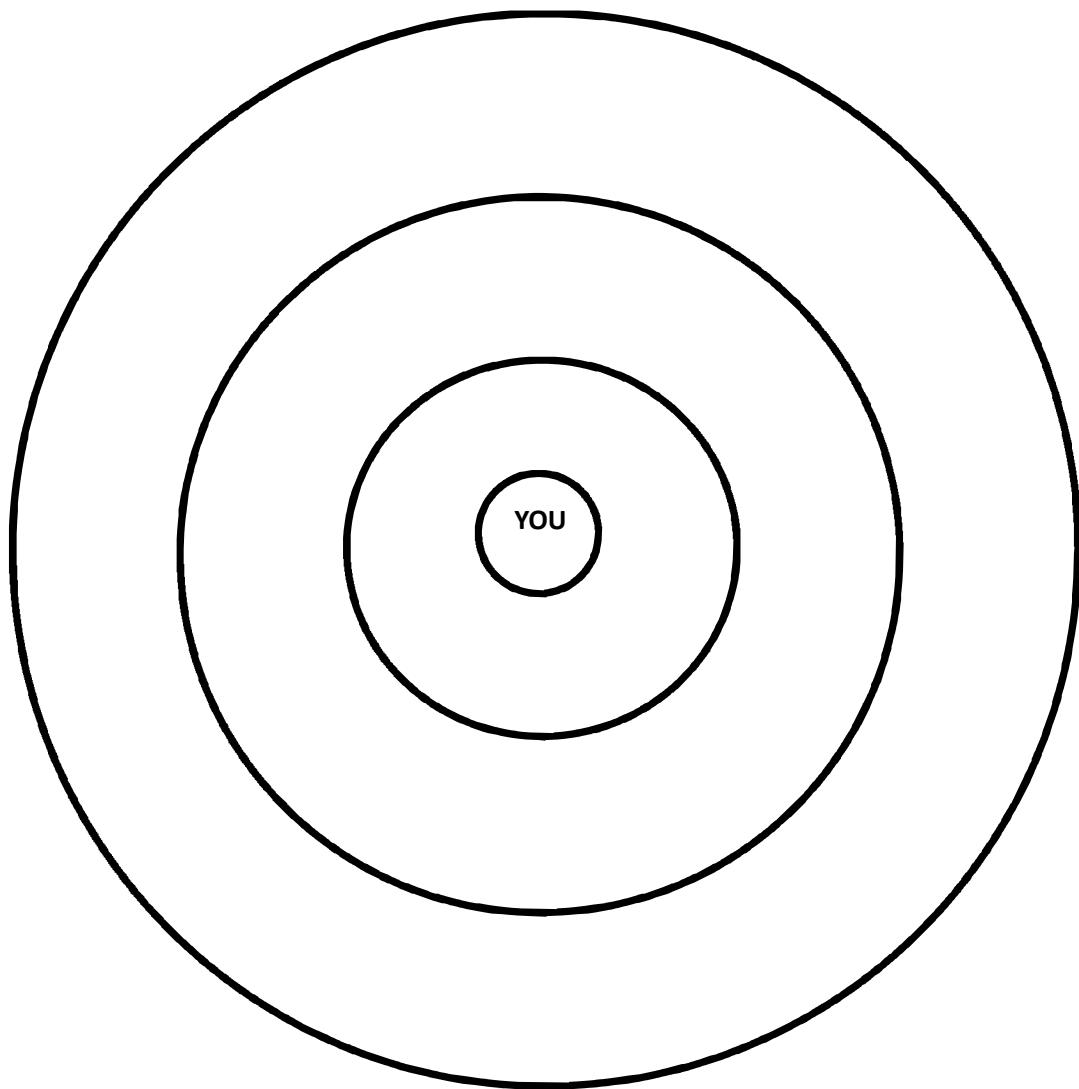
(refer to 'parts of the camera' diagram below)

- a. Press and hold the small "ON/OFF" button (2) on top
- b. View subject using the big screen (8) on the back
- c. Adjust zoom with the W and T buttons (11 and 12) on the top right-hand corner of the back of the camera
- d. When you are ready to take the picture, press the circular button on the top (1)
- e. To view your photos, press the triangle "playback" button (13) on the back of the camera and scroll through the pictures with the left or right side of the circular selector button on the back of the camera
- f. If you ever want to delete a photo, locate it on the screen (as above; e). Then press the erase button at the top of the circular selector button, with an image of a dustbin. To delete, press the left hand side of the circular selector button and then press the central, Menu/OK button, within the circular selector button.



Appendix D: Personal network diagram used in the pilot studies

Personal network diagram



Appendix E: Advert and information sheet used in local shops and village magazines

If you are male, aged 75 years or older and living on your own then you can provide valuable insight into the lives of older men

I am a postgraduate researcher at the University of East Anglia undertaking research with older men. We know very little about older men who live alone, in particular their social lives and the way they manage daily living.

This is an exciting study and will involve taking photographs for a week (with a very simple camera, provided by me). I will visit you at your home and there will be no travelling involved for you.

If you feel you can help with this project or would like more information, please call me, Penny Sorensen, on **01603 592068** where you can leave a message at any time and I will get straight back to you. You can also email: p.sorensen@uea.ac.uk

I look forward to hearing from you!



Are you a man, aged 75 years or older, living alone?

We do not know very much about older people who live on their own, their social worlds or how they manage daily life. Even less is known about **older men** who live on their own, sometimes by choice or due to bereavement or divorce.

Are you willing to take part in research that can provide us with valuable information about the world of older men and issues that are important to them?

Would you like **your voice** heard?

If you have time to spare and would like to take part, please contact Penny Sorensen for more details about the research.

Call **01603 592068** and leave a message for me and I will get straight back to you.

Appendix F: Information sheet and consent form for participants

Centre for Research on the Child and Family

I am a postgraduate research student at The University of East Anglia, undertaking research on men aged 75 and over who live on their own.

We do not know very much about older people who live on their own, their social worlds or how they manage daily life. Even less is known about older men who live on their own, sometimes by choice or due to bereavement or divorce.

About this research:

- I want to explore the worlds of men aged 75 and over who live alone.
- If you live on your own, you will be able to provide us with valuable information about the world of older men and issues that are important to you.
- I am interested in how *you* experience living on your own.

What I will be asking you to do:

- Take photographs of your everyday life as well as anything/anybody important to you. I will provide you with a camera and instructions for use. You can keep the camera as long as you need to.
- Allow me to talk to you about the photographs you have taken, either in your home or at a venue suitable to you. This will involve talking about your life and reflecting upon personal matters.
- Allow me to audiotape the interview, keep the information and analyse it for research purposes.
- Allow me to quote anonymously from the interview in my written thesis and future publications and presentations.

If you would like more information about any of the above or feel that you may be willing to participate and share your experiences with me, please contact:

Penny Sorensen on 01603 592068 where you can leave a message if I am not available or email: p.sorensen@uea.ac.uk

**If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study,
you are free to do so**

Age UK Norfolk - provides information and advice to older people and their families on a wide range of issues. It is available daily Monday to Friday between 10am and 4pm. Telephone **01603 787111** or email: **acn@acnorfolk.org.uk**

If you agree to take part in the research, please sign and date below:

.....

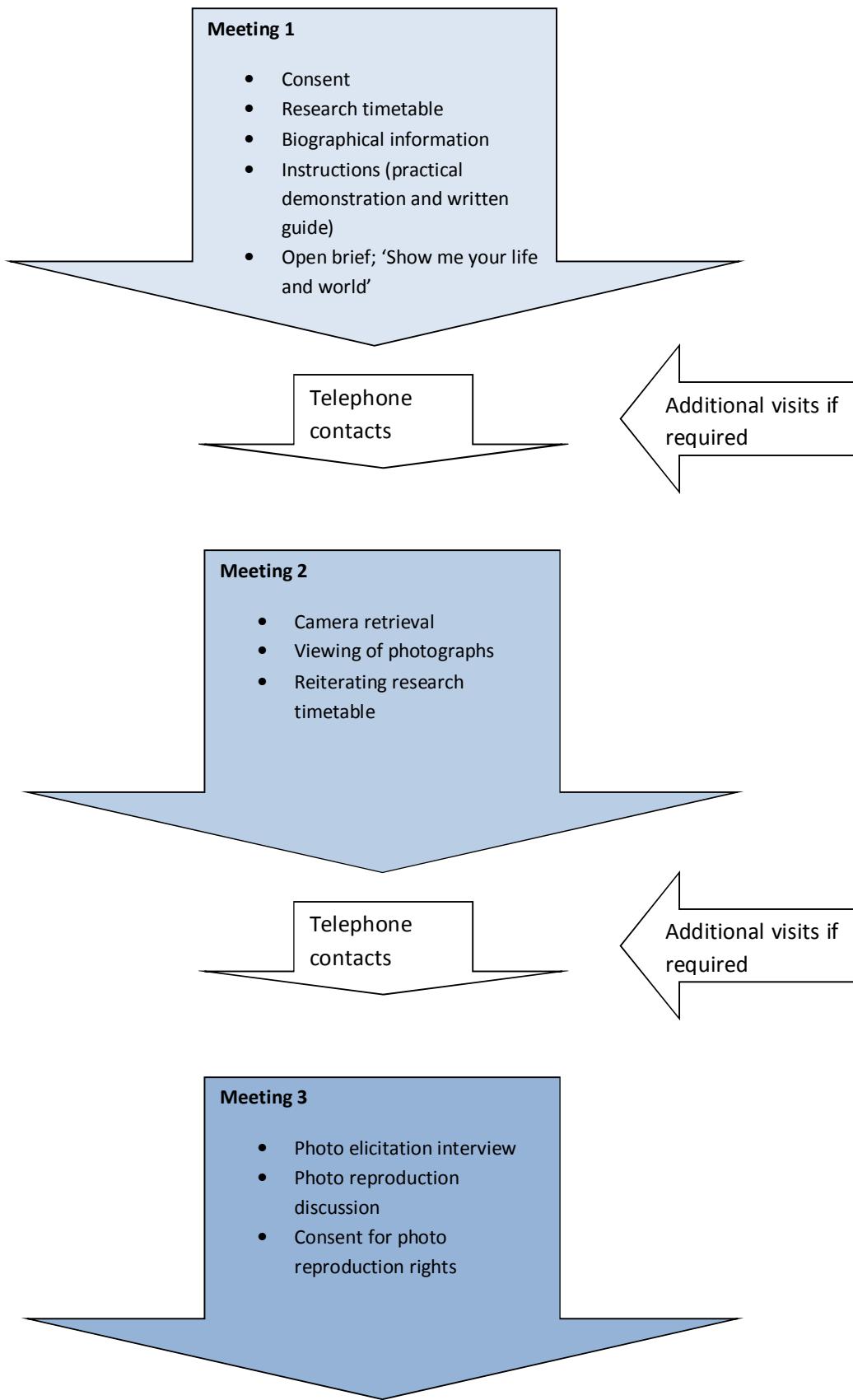
I agree to take part in the research on 'Men who live alone', as explained above,

Name in capitals.....

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix G: The research process



Appendix H: Table of participant details

	Surname	Age	Housing type	Ever married?	Children	Years living alone	Years in place	Health	Own transport
1	Arbour	75	Home owner	Yes	4	2	11	Average	Car
2	Beejay	75	Sheltered housing	No	0	Always	7	Good	Bicycle
3	Bridge	89	Home owner	Yes	3	20	21	Poor	None
4	Brown	80	Home owner	No	0	2	2	Good	Car
5	Crosby	80	Sheltered housing	Yes	4	50	5	Good	None
6	David	84	Home owner	Yes	3	10 months	27	Average	Car
7	Delaney	78	Home owner	Yes	2	8	11	Good	Car
8	Dennis	85	Home owner	Yes	1	2	20	Poor	None
9	Dickie	75	Rented flat	Yes	3	35	23	Poor	None
10	Harris	90	Home owner	Yes	2	11	10	Average	Mobility scooter
11	McBeth	86	Sheltered housing	Yes	10	2	2	Good	Mobility scooter
12	Pollock	80	Home owner	Yes	2	26	15	Average	Car
13	Rastus	76	Home owner	No	0	24	2	Average	Car
14	Smith	97	Home owner	Yes	1	6 months	23	Average	Car
15	Swalds	87	Home owner	Yes	3	18	11	Average	Car
16	Young	86	Sheltered housing	Yes	3	4	2	Good	Mobility scooter

Appendix I: An example of the development of a main category from codes

CATEGORY	FOCUSED CODE	CODE
		Becoming a burden
	Independence/masculinity	Remaining independent
		Soldering on/stoic
		Intrusive family
Men in families	Negotiating family expectations	'Gendering' expectations
		Intergenerational contact
		Sibling relationships
	Extended family relationships	Fictive kin

Code 'Becoming a burden' from open coding

Code description: Articulating the undesirability of burdening others – particularly family. The men often insist that they do not want to be a burden to their families and choose not to share problems or difficulties with them. Becoming a burden links with remaining independent and soldiering on to demonstrate the traits of hegemonic masculinity and breadwinner role. Depending on others is a last resort, even depending on family.

Examples of coded text:

Mr Swalds

I have told her that I will only do it on the condition that if I need care like become senile or incontinent or maybe have a stroke, then she has got to put me in a home. I don't want to be a burden to her or anyone else. I had an older sister who was getting married but then my father became ill and she cancelled the wedding and helped my mother look after my father. When he died, my mother became ill and she then spent years looking after her, her whole life was wasted the way I see it. She never married...I would not want to be a burden to my family or friends

Who is the person you discuss your worries or problems with?

I don't really. I don't want to burden my family so I would not talk to them but maybe Alice (friend), I suppose we share our problems. I feel I help her and listen to her so I don't mind talking to her about my problems but not too much. I was brought up to me a 'man', my own father would die for King and Country and we were expected to get stuck in and behave like men, he was a lovely father but I find it hard to be dependent on others.

I am worried about losing my independence and being ill and incapacitated...I don't want to be a burden

My daughter wants me to go and live with her and I am thinking about it. They will build an extension so that I have my own small flat but I worry about being a burden to her. I have told her that I will only do it on the condition that if I need care like become senile or incontinent or maybe have a stroke, then she has got to put me in a home. I don't want to be a burden to her or anyone else. I had an older sister who was getting married but then my father became ill and she cancelled the wedding and helped my mother look after my father. When he died, my mother became ill and she then spent years looking after her, her whole life was wasted the way I see it. She never married...I would not want to be a burden to my family or friends...

No, I am an old man and I can't see that people will get anything out of me. What if I am incontinent and all that? [Shivering]

Mr Rastus

I don't like just Karen myself...err I feel as if I am imposing on her, I don't think she thinks like that but...I will pop over there and stay for an hour or stay for dinner

Mr David

I don't want to be a burden on any of those, you see...at the moment and when this is done (lump)...I've put up with this now for 3 months, this bad head, it's been a long, long time err but I do take these tablets...it is achy but not stabbing pain

Mr Smith

Do you think you'll go (for Christmas) this year?

I doubt it, if I don't drive myself, it means that my son has to make 2 trips to fetch me and bring me back

But he might not mind that

No, he would do it but I feel sort of embarrassed to make him do it

Mr Harris

No I wouldn't want to be a burden to my daughter or son, they have their own lives to lead and I certainly wouldn't want to go into one of these old folks home

No, I wouldn't want to get to the stage where an 18 year old has to feed me, wash me and take me to the toilet...no, no, I have considered that...I would take an overdose, oh yeah

Mr Pollock

No, no they (sons) are very good they are no trouble - I hope I am no trouble to them but there we are.

Mr Beejay

So who could you turn to in a time of crisis?

Nobody

What about your sister?

Oh yeah, my sister yes...I won't worry her with problems, she is no, no no. I might have a little moan to her about things but I wouldn't tell her anything. Anyway I have got no problems anyway

So you do help each other out, she came to you when she was in trouble so would you not go to her?

Well, I can't envisage that I need to go to her for any trouble

Maybe not right now but things can happen, problems can develop

Well...no I wouldn't go...well if I became dependent, you are thinking if I became dependent and couldn't manage

Yeah

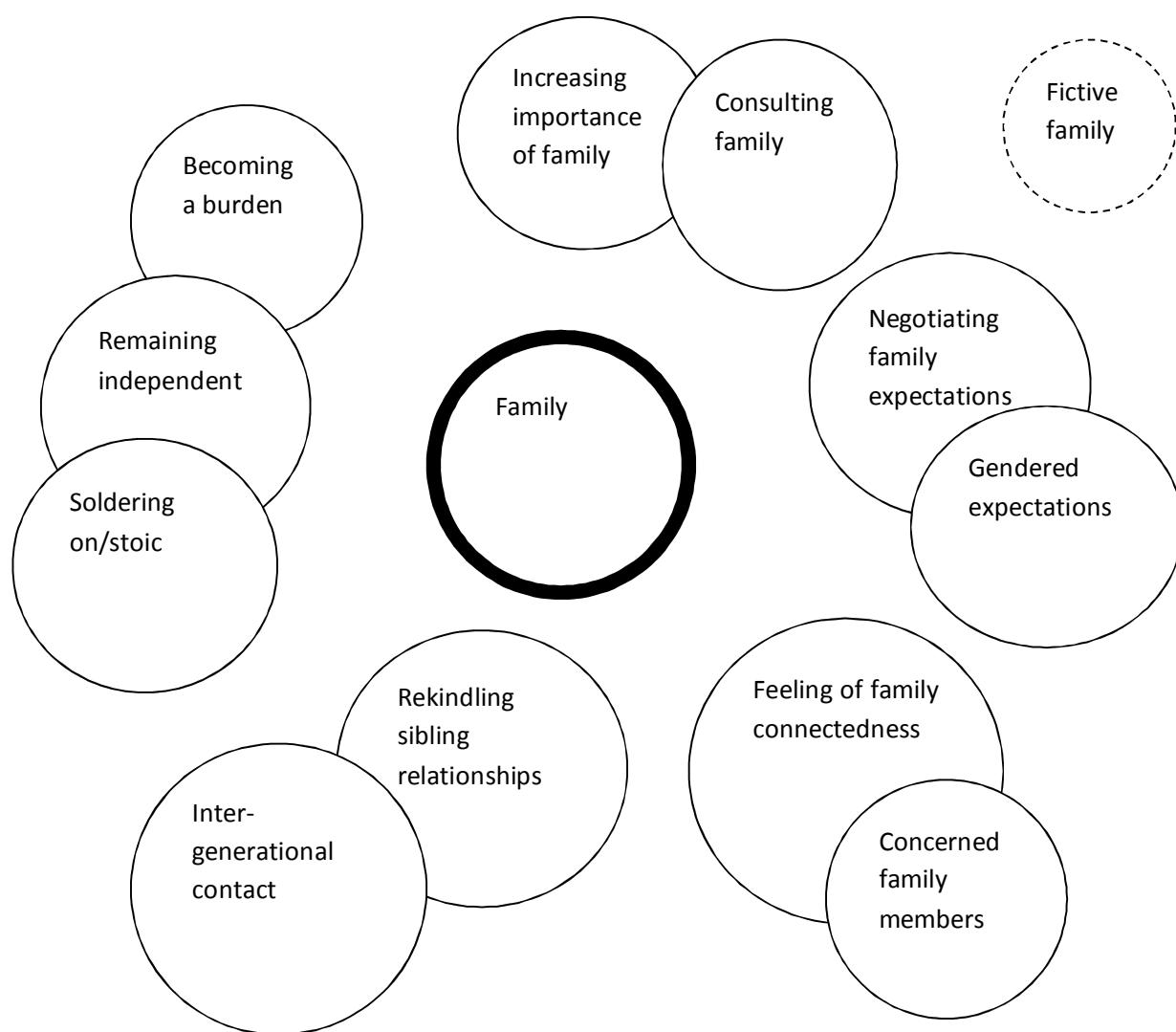
No, no, no. What you want is a nice little Thai lady if you are a position like that and that is what would suit me fine.

Young

I mean, she (daughter) has got enough trouble as it is, you know... but I don't worry about much to be honest with you...what goes wrong goes wrong and you just accept it...get on with it

Appendix J: Clustering to visualise initial links between categories

Developing 'Men in families'



Appendix K: An example of an evolving grounded theory memo

Family expectations – evolving memo developed during grounded theory analysis showing progression from earlier to later stages

Centrality of family – early memo

02.06.2009

Interview with Mr Bridge demonstrated the importance of family to him. Family allowed him to stay in his home despite his terminal illness and need for support. He socialises with family including grandchildren and in-laws. They have regular Sunday barbecues which his daughter organises. As well as family he also socialises with friends – he talks about many different friends from his time as a college lecturer and from bridge and his holiday club. He still organises bridge parties in his home. Family was central in his life but so were friends. His daughter often visits and came while I was there as Monday afternoon was bath night for Mr Bridge. There was an interesting change in him once his daughter came. He became more withdrawn and sat back while his daughter and I talked. He may have been getting tired as we had been talking for 1 hour but he appeared to become a bit more dependent. His daughter takes him shopping. He used to wait in the car but has started going around the shop for a while and she makes sure that he handles the payment in an effort to make him feel more independent. Many mixed messages but maybe all part of the negotiated nature of family.

10.06.2009

My second collaborator expressed the centrality of family differently as he had a son with severe learning disabilities who lived in a residential home 100 miles from Mr Delaney. He was in touch via telephone to his son every evening and had him home for weekends. His son was central in his life but he *cared* for his son. The rest of his family was very much on the periphery of his daily social world. I feel that in this case, possibly because of distance, family is not important in terms of support as Mr Delaney is supportive both to his disabled son but also to his other son as he has just gone through a divorce.

05.07.2009

I continue to find that family is mostly peripheral and not part of daily interactions (only via telephone/email). At the moment Mr Bridge is a ‘disconfirming case’.

Mr McBeth is similar to Mr Bridge. Again there is a large local family network but interactions are not always welcome as they are too frequent, too long and there are just too many family members visiting. It takes up most of his time, yet he is bored and feels quite lonely. I am tentatively considering family as ‘intrusive’ although it appears such a negative concept. I feel that family is caring too much, or feel too obligated? For Mr McBeth there is no time for other social interactions. He helps his children out financially; maybe that is why they feel obliged to reciprocate. Although when they come he cooks for them etc. Mr Bridge does not feel the same, he manages family and friends but he needs family as terminally ill.

19.12.2009 12:23

Pivotal family relationships

I think the centrality of the family needs to be replaced with 'pivotal family relationships'. There appears to be a certain point where the balance of the relationship tips and becomes either too interfering/too much control or too little contact/disinterest. Obviously there are areas either side of that which may not be perfect. Mr McBeth told me that his daughter comes every day and stays until 3pm which means that he usually misses anything that goes on in the common room but he does not like to tell her. Although he is integrated within his family, he seems to be excluded from his immediate network of people and peers – that appears intrusive.

01.03.2010 14:09

Intrusive family - pulling concepts together

Chambers et al (2007) Family practices in later life p4

I think there are two of Finch and Mason's (1993) modes that might apply to this category

- clear intentions - individual family members decide how to act without much discussion with other network members
- non-decisions - similar to above but occurs without apparent intention. Rather, it just happens due to circumstances and individuals' biographies

Although the approach emphasises the degree to which family members draw on insider knowledge of others in the network to determine what they can expect of one another, I have found that the insider knowledge is not very accurate at times. It appears that there is little negotiation and little understanding of the situation or life style of the older men. 'Uncritical adherence to established family practices' (Chambers et al. 2007, p.8)

Morgan (1999) sees people as having agency when he talks about family practice. Here, I have not seen much evidence of the men exercising agency to rearrange visits etc. Maybe agency cannot co-exist with dependency? I also notice behaviour which is expected behaviour rather than behaviour that suits the older men. Morgan (1999) also suggests that there are structural influences ('regularities') that characterises family living - work schedules, leisure, food consumption. Growing old, therefore, occurs within a network of relationships with others including family and friends and the experience is shaped by those relationships be they restrictive/oppressive or supportive/enabling (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Will this get worse for older people as they have to depend on family if the state reduces assistance available due to economic pressures? And will family become sparse due to low fertility levels –beanpole (Bengtson, 2001) or will more complex family structures (divorce, separation, re-marriage) increase the pool of available (maybe more peripheral) family members? Morgan (1996) - practices are influenced by normative beliefs (masculinity) – need to appear/feel independent - and material circumstances.

As well as changes for the older person there can be changes in the wider family e.g. separation and divorce of adult children death, geographic mobility/relocation.

The need for support but are there not two different kinds of support? Family vs. state/institutional. The men liked to have family visit and care about them but they did not necessarily want to be cared for by them. Link to becoming a burden - that can ruin the

relationship. Are expectations different for different family members? Mr McBeth is a poorly matched case as he is unable to have outside interactions due to the constant visiting. Mr Bridge is able to accept support (practical) and still have an extensive social network including bridge parties in his home.

I wonder why the men do not negotiate more but it appears (Mr McBeth, Mr Young) that they think family members mean well and they do not want to upset them.

Appendix L: Example of a narrative memo and themes developed for Mr Harris

Narrative memo Mr John Harris

I am taking the Riessman (2008) dialogic/performance approach to analysis i.e. a focus on the way talk is interactively produced and paying special attention to my influence within the interview setting (Goffman). Riessman (2008, p.105) suggests that 'the dialogic/performance approach asks "who" an utterance may be directed to, "when", and "why" that is, for what purposes?' I am an active participant in the process and an active presence in the text. It fits in well with social constructionist grounded theory as it has a focus on how social reality is constructed through interaction. Riessman (2008) also suggests that this approach invites the reader to engage with the text.

This type of analysis will enable me to look more at the macro-level, too, as the stories are put in context (interactional, historical, institutional). It may also throw light on the performance of (male, ageing) identity.

Mr Harris is a 90 year old man who lives alone after the death of his wife 10 years ago. He retired from a job as deputy-head teacher at a primary school in London at age 62 and moved to Norfolk after the death of his wife to be nearer to his daughter and son-in-law.

The topic of the conversation was social connectedness and ageing and he had taken quite a few photographs of his family as part of the initial exercise. Using the photos as an ice breaker, we started looking at the photos of his family. He wanted confirmation 'I think you said something about taking photographs of things that are important to me?' and I confirmed that that was indeed the case and that the majority of the photographs were of family. He then appears unsure about the importance of family, 'Aha...it has become increasingly important as I have got older' and later in the interview 'Well...I have never really thought about it [family] like that...about it being important...I know it has become important as I have become older but I suppose it was...I know it was important to my wife and what was important to her was important to me'. He does not want to give the impression that family is the most important and when confronted with questions about family he redirects the conversation towards his childhood years, the emotional deprivation and isolation which meant that he did not know how to show emotions when he met his wife as he had never received a hug or a kiss from his own mother. He constantly reasons that his independent nature is due to his early childhood experiences both at home and within the wider historical context. He experienced a strict schooling environment, including physical punishment, as well as material deprivation during and after the war. Boys were expected to be tough and get on without complaining. Affection was for girls. Being independent and able to look after yourself and later a wife and family was a priority 'Whereas with my generation women were expected to have the children, care for the home and the man would go out to work'. The thought of becoming dependent was considered with horror after a life of working hard to get on.

I asked him about the options which might be available to him if he was no longer able to look after himself at home and he very firmly told me that he would take an overdose, something that he had already thought about, planned. He had the drugs available already. I was surprised that he was so adamant about the need to end his life should he become dependent. I had already made comments in my field notes about his wish to be independent as on one occasion when I had visited him he had run out of drugs for his eye condition. He had not been able to get to the doctor to pick up some more as the weather was very bad and his road had several centimetres of snow on the pavement as well as the road. It was not possible for him to use his electric buggy safely on such surfaces. I had therefore volunteered to go and pick up the drugs. Initially he declined my offer, telling me that he did not like asking anyone for help. I reminded him that he had not asked me but rather, I had suggested it. Eventually he agreed and I collected the drugs. The theme of being independent was reiterated later in the interview 'Oh I prefer being independent...if someone offers help then I will accept it with thanks and be grateful but I prefer to be independent...I said to my daughter in law some time ago 'when I die, if my kids say of me "he was an old bugger but he was a nice old bugger" I shall be satisfied. Yes, I am very independent because as a child, remember, I grew up independently. I found that if I build a wall around myself...nobody could hurt me unless I allowed them to'. Here he begins to allude to protecting himself by being independent - not being let down - rather than independence as expected behaviour for a man.

The following extract demonstrates his wish to remain independent and the idea that dependency in later life makes for a life not worth living.

No I wouldn't want to be a burden to my daughter or son, they have their own lives to lead and

I certainly wouldn't want to go into one of these old folks home...I went in one on one occasion and they all sit round the walls, nodding off, only come to life when the tea trolley comes round or it's feeding time.

Is that living?

You know some of these poor old souls with Alzheimer they don't know what time of the day it is but the doctors feel that it is incumbent upon them to keep them alive...why not let them die with dignity? I know life is precious but if you are in that state you are not living, are you? You are just a cabbage...

no I wouldn't want to get to the stage where an 18 year old has to feed me, wash me and take me to the toilet...no, no I have considered that

In the narrative he positions himself as a man with agency, the ability to make choices is still available to him unlike 'the poor old souls'. He is still a thinking, acting man who is in control. Moreover, he is not one of 'them' and earlier in the interview he had exclaimed when asked about joining a club or organisation 'What? A sea of old boys, all 70 and 80 and singing all those old songs...no thanks very much' but later in the interview he tells me that at one time he had to remind his daughter that he was 88 when she wanted him to do something and her response was that he did not behave like an 88 year old. 'How should I look and behave? I think age is a mental attitude and I think I keep myself mentally alert'. He stereotypes older people and he is ageist but he also shows confusion as to what old age is and how he should act it out. Whereas he had a blueprint for being a good worker, husband and father, he is not sure about the behaviour expected from him now that he is 'old'. His narrative performance is of a desirable self (not so old and still independent) which helps him preserve face in the difficult situation he is now in (becoming dependent and frail). His preferred self is that of an autonomous male.

He is also telling a moral tale of rights to live and die, positioning me as a witness to the tale of decay and humiliation whereas he is on the periphery, distancing himself from the 'cabbages' although imagining himself in that situation. In the broader context of medicalisation of old age,

he questions, again, the rights of doctors to keep people alive no matter what. He equates the 'state' the older people are in to death.

The narrative is dramatic, made more so by the use of questions which draw the audience in:

Is that living?

Why not let them die with dignity?

I know life is precious but if you are in that state you are not living, are you?

Mr Harris also uses verb tenses performatively, that is, he tells his story both in the past tense and the present:

I went in one on one occasion and

they all sit round the walls, nodding off,

only come to life when the tea trolley comes round or it's feeding time.

Audience

Thinking about the audiences he is performing for? There is the interviewer. I was a younger female and throughout the interview Mr Harris uses terms of endearment (dear, my love) as he tries to make me understand the world he lives in now and the world he used to live in as an independent but married man. During the interview he also tells me 'I like women and girls, I don't mind admitting that'. But women should be dressed properly and behave like women, something he told the nurses in hospital when he was a patient. He wanted to see the nurses in dresses, not trousers, and told them so. Of his own wife he comments 'my wife never raised any objections, she wasn't one of these women who wanted things her own way all the time'.

He often talks about the way things used to be and the way things are now, for example, he does not like women wearing trousers and I could well be one of those women; too young to understand and easily bored as he asks 'boring?' and 'I am boring you to tears?'

The narrative is about growing old, losing a valued place in society and becoming a burden. The public discourse regarding ageing often emphasises the economic burden of older people as well as the need for older people to remain productive and active, still *giving* to society rather than *taking*. By suggesting that he will not become a burden to his family (or the state for that matter if he takes his own life) Mr Harris is not the kind of old man we read about in newspapers (dependent and a burden) instead he demonstrates agency and control over his own life – he is a

'good kind of old man', not a burden on society. In that way he speaks to a much wider audience that he might imagine my research will reach.

Themes

<p>Aha...it [family] has become increasingly important as I have got older....I...had a very lonely childhood, I had a very lonely childhood er...my father [sighs], I didn't know my father, at all...never met him...my mother married in December 1918 which was a month after the armistice of the first world war...when she was pregnant with me, apparently, my father started having an affair and she wouldn't have him back</p> <p><i>So family has always been very important?</i> Well...I have never really thought about it like that...about it being important...I know it has become important as I have become older but I suppose it was...I know it was important to my wife and what was important to her was important to me</p>	<p>Changing family relationships: His mother was not important to him His wife was always important to him His children were extremely important to him</p>
<p>my mother was, I suppose as a child, she was my world, I was totally dependent on her...does that make sense to you?</p> <p>Yes, I am very independent because as a child, remember, I grew up independently. I found that if I build a wall around myself...nobody could hurt me unless I allowed them to</p>	<p>Feeling dependent: He has vivid memories of just having his mother to depend on Later in life he does not want those feelings to return – he would rather commit suicide than become totally dependent</p>
<p>No...looking back, it was instilled into us at school, a love for books and a love for learning, that was instilled into us at school, I am sure of that and of course I was ambitious, I wanted to get on, I wanted to get out of the rut, I had a rotten job because in the 30s...I would have left school at the end of 33 and I had a rotten job, 10 shilling a week, do you know what that is? 50 pence but of course money was worth a great deal more...not all that much more [laughs]. Then I went on to polytechnic and er I got my qualifications there</p>	<p>Being ambitious, wanting to improve, getting out of the rut: He did not want to stay working class and he had a great desire for learning and bettering himself He was very aware of the need to gain qualifications but also balanced work with family life</p>

<p>No, no she stayed in London and I went on my own and I did that purposely because I knew that if I went to a local training college I would still be involved with the family...this sounds selfish, doesn't it? We had one child and I knew that it would be a distraction, I am not sure that I explained it to Doreen (wife) but she gave me all the encouragement, she didn't raise any objections or anything so we were parted for that period of training, I could only get home at the end of term...that was an intensive year course and we were on probation for 2 years afterwards and we were expected to do courses for those 2 years and I did. I applied for a post in Bedfordshire, small village school because I had hoped to get a house and move the kids and family to the country and I stuck that for 3 years, getting home on a Friday evening and going back on a Sunday afternoon and my wife never raised any objections, she wasn't one of these women who wanted things her own way all the time...and er at the end of 3 years I thought 'hang this for a game of soldiers' so I resigned and applied for a post in London</p>	
<p>We never argued or quarrelled, even if I was hot under the collar she would just walk away and later when I had calmed down she would have her say quietly...oh she was a wonderful person...</p> <p>Yes, I am very independent because as a child, remember, I grew up independently. I found that if I build a wall around myself...nobody could hurt me unless I allowed them to</p> <p><i>Yes but that changed when you met your wife</i></p> <p>Oh it did...I learned from my wife how to show affection...I had to learn how to...I had never received it</p> <p><i>Was your wife the one person you were really close to?</i></p> <p>She was my world</p>	<p>Having a soul mate: The importance of having someone you can get on with, who provides support and company – irreplaceable?</p>
<p>I have just about mastered, or had mastered the basics of computing but with the bother I have had with my eye over the last 3 or 4 months I think I'll have to revise it. I mean, I bought myself an iPod er which my son in law recommended, he is very good, he is very clever, he's up to date</p>	<p>Learning new skills: Although some concerns about technology, he is willing to learn new skills and to use technology e.g. he also had a door bell that lit up a light in his living room as he did not hear very well.</p>

<p>with all this modern stuff but I think that iPod is absolutely brilliant and I have recorded a number of things on it and I can sit here just for 10 minutes listening to some of the music I like and I don't have to move, I have got a CD player, it's true but that is a brilliant piece of technology</p> <p><i>How do you download the music?</i></p> <p>From the computer, I load a CD into the tray and then from the computer to the iPod</p>	
<p>No, she...remember she was of a different generation and women had their own field of expertise and men had their own field of expertise...not that I am opposed to equality, please don't think that but you see...nowadays a woman has so many choices, hasn't she?</p> <p>Whereas with my generation women were expected to have the children, care for the home and the man would go out to work but I feel many women nowadays don't have the choice...they go out to work not because they want to but because they have to, to help pay the mortgage and I know when I was in hospital...I don't know if you have been in hospital and seen the nurses in these baggy trousers</p> <p>They are all wearing baggy trousers now and er these jackets, coloured jackets and when I was in hospital there was one nurse in a dress and then I saw another one in a dress and I spoke to one and said 'please don't think me rude or forward but it is refreshing to see a nurse in a dress'. She told me that she felt freer in a dress than she did in trousers. I told her that I don't object to women in trousers but I do like to see a woman dressed as a woman; does that make sense to you?</p> <p>I suppose so but there was one nurse with her who said she would like to wear a dress but they wouldn't let her...I think there should be a choice, don't you? You see, women started wearing trousers during the war...particularly in ammunition and aircraft factories where they were climbing about where as with a dress, I suppose the blokes could look up there dresses or the wind might blow...anyway trousers would be more practical, I suppose. I find it acceptable</p>	<p>Changing times: Trying to understand the differences between then and now. Conflicting standards/morals.</p>

<p>but what I don't like very much are these shaggy old jeans, to me that is overall material but there we are, it's the fashion [I was very relieved that I was not wearing jeans]</p> <p>Yeah...oh gosh yeah, I mean...I am not knocking modern technology but I do find it a little bit overwhelming, I do really...I have just about mastered, or had mastered the basics of computing but with the bother I have had with my eye over the last 3 or 4 months I think I'll have to revise it.</p>	
<p><i>There is a nice photo of the family</i> I think that was last summer, that is my daughter there, she was taking the photographs and my son in law was at work anyway. My son in law works for the police in their forensic department. That is my son, he lives in London, and he comes about once a month. He came last Saturday with his wife, I think they enjoy the run, it is a pleasant run. He has 2 children, my grandson Phillip who has 3 children, I am a great grandfather. They had 2 children and the third was born just 3 or 4 weeks ago, I have not met the youngest one yet.</p>	<p>Justifying visit as something other than 'duty' or 'obligation'</p>
<p>That's my granddaughter, she is 33 now, she is not married, I think she is very picky, I think she is looking for somebody like her grandfather [laughs]. She says I spoil her rotten, when she was about 3 and staggering around she couldn't say grandpa so she called me pa and when she used to come home and stay with us for a few hours, we were sitting at the table having a meal and of course my wife and I were addressing each other by out Christian names and madam said 'nanny Doreen, pa John' and the pa john stuck and they all call me that now. She said to me that I spoil her rotten [laughs].</p> <p>Rosie has a degree in Russian and she loves what she had learned about Russia...I am proud of my kids and my grandchildren, particularly my granddaughter</p>	<p>Special relationships: He is very fond of one of his granddaughters and feels that he has a special bond</p>
<p>That is Petra's daughter, Sarah, her adopted daughter...they adopted her when she was nearly 8, she had a very, very unfortunate childhood er she was physically and sexually abused and her mother was a drunkard, an</p>	<p>Complicated family relationships: He makes distinctions between biological and adopted grandchildren – insiders and outsiders. Possibly based on his own feeling as a child when he had a much younger half-brother and had felt</p>

<p>alcoholic and she would sit on the bed with her mother, watching horror movies at night because...I don't say she wanted to but she did...and her father didn't want her at all and she had a rotten time in foster homes and Petra and her husband adopted her when she was nearly 8. Petra was 30 when she got married, which was a bit late and Hugh wanted to start a family more or less straight away but she wanted to wait, she was working and really it came to the stage when she had to work because of the mortgage but anyway and I didn't like Sarah (adopted granddaughter)</p> <p>Er...it wasn't because she was adopted, it was because of her attitude...I thought she was rude and...by my attitude I made it clear that I didn't approve of her...I could understand her background but she was forever attention seeking, I realise now what that kid needed was love and attention but...on one occasion Petra did have the gumption to confront me about this and she said something about why I didn't like Sarah and why didn't I accept her as a granddaughter...and I told her that I found her very rude and objected to it and she said that she would have a word with Sarah. She came back to me and told me that Sarah had not meant to be rude but she had just been joking...now I partly blame myself because with my own 2 grandchildren, Freddie and Rosie, had they been what I thought was rude, I would have pulled them up straight away and give them a chance to say sorry but with Sarah, the distance between us was so that I didn't bother to check her because I didn't want to offend my daughter, Petra or my son in law...in a way I was very childish, I allowed the resentment to grow and then I think it was a year or 18 months ago when Petra said that Sarah was only joking, I decided, I made a conscious decision to change my attitude...and when she came the next time I said' oh hello Sarah, how nice to see you, give me a hug' and from that day onwards my attitude has changed towards her completely</p> <p><i>And has that made her change too?</i> No...she used to attend the Convent school around the corner and about once or twice a week my daughter would ask if Sarah could</p>	unwanted himself
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<p>come to me because she had a meeting and she would be too late to pick her up and Sarah would come here and I would give her something to eat, beans on toast or some form of sweet and so on...I was being polite because it was instilled into me as a boy 'courtesy costs nothing' that was the mantra we had every day...I was polite but distant</p> <p><i>Do you feel closer to your biological grandchildren?</i></p> <p>Well, what you have to remember...is that er with my biological grandchildren, I have known them virtually from the day they were born,</p>	
<p>I like women and girls, I don't mind admitting that...I said that to my daughter some time ago and she said 'oh dad that's all very well but you should be careful who you say it too' but I told her that it was a statement of fact...I don't want to jump into every nice looking girl I meet, I don't mean that. I suppose it is probably my upbringing, you feel protective towards girls and er I suppose with my natural granddaughter knowing her from, well I saw her the second day after she was born when we went to the hospital...I suppose I do tend to spoil her but I have grown closer to my adopted granddaughter</p>	<p>Expressing feeling freely: He wants to be able to say what he feels but current social context does not allow for older men to 'like' women and girls. His daughter has to ensure that he is aware of that. It is OK to say so at home but not to others. (similar to Les Pollock who does not feel that he can have his granddaughters to stay on their own for fear of others thinking he is 'up to something').</p>
<p><i>Are you in regular contact with all the grandchildren?</i></p> <p>They come up several times of year, yeah</p> <p><i>Do you talk on the phone?</i></p> <p>My grandson is not a great one for phoning</p>	<p>Keeping in touch: There are many ways of keeping in touch and it often requires an effort from both parties. Deafness can make it hard to use the telephone as can worry about cost. Technologies are useful but are often costly and require support, at least initially (e.g. Mr Dickie)</p>
<p><i>Yes, do you find that they are the most important thing in our life?</i></p> <p>Well...what you have to remember is that I spend a great deal of time on my own, it would be difficult to say who or what is <i>the</i> most important...the books are very, very important to me, I have grown up with those, I had books before there was radio, remember when I was a boy, radio was new, one boy in our class had a radio in the family and we thought that was very, very posh, a few people had what was called a cat's whisker, it was a little device and you wore headphones to listen to the BBC, it was new</p>	<p>Important things/people: He initially talks about material objects which are important to him but he decides that people are probably more important than things. Maybe things are more reliable though? He is reminded of his wife and her fondness for people and family</p>

<p>technology when I was a boy and when my kids were small, I refused to have a television because I knew what would happen, they would be glued to the television instead of doing their homework...television is important, my family of course is important, my computer, my DVD player I don't use much and my radio I don't use much but they are important but I suppose people are more important than things aren't they?</p> <p>at a thanksgiving for her life (wife), my daughter in law, Maggie, she got up to give a eulogy and she said that it was difficult sometimes to buy my wife a birthday or Christmas present, not that she was difficult to please but what do you get someone who thinks more of personal relationships than she does of possessions and that stuck in my mind and that was true of my wife...</p>	
<p>Sighs...my wife was diagnosed with oh...a lesion on the lung, a rectal tumour and oh...there is a lining to the womb and I have forgotten the name of it but the oncologist said that all 3 were connected and she was taken into hospital in October 98 and she died...on Friday 22nd January 1999 and her service was on the 1st of February 1999, so it is just 11 years ago. I think that for some weeks...I was in a state of denial, I didn't want to accept the fact that she had died...I was living in a state of denial</p> <p>Sighs...my wife was diagnosed with oh...a lesion on the lung, a rectal tumour and oh...there is a lining to the womb and I have forgotten the name of it but the oncologist said that all 3 were connected and she was taken into hospital in October 98 and she died...on Friday 22nd January 1999 and her service was on the 1st of February 1999, so it is just 11 years ago. I think that for some weeks...I was in a state of denial, I didn't want to accept the fact that she had died...I was living in a state of denial</p>	<p>Coming to term with a loss: He describes the loss of his wife as something which he could not accept – he 'denied' that it had happened</p>
<p>after a few months my son in law said to me 'dad, you have always liked Swaffham, what about moving to Swaffham?' I thought it was an idea because where I was living...the area was becoming flooded with West Indians, Greeks, Turks and er I was beginning to feel that I was in a minority</p>	<p>Moving: He explains how the place where he used to live had changed, the changes may not have been so important or noticeable when he was living there with his wife but once he was on his own he found it harder to be a 'minority' He also saw it as an opportunity to 'start a new</p>

<p><i>Did you feel safe?</i></p> <p>Oh...yes, I didn't feel threatened but I did feel resentment...so anyway, I came up here, I drove up here and Hugh had looked at estate agents and we viewed several places, one was very nice with a huge garden but that was no good, I am not a gardener, I used to cut the grass and the hedges but my wife was the gardener...anyway we had a look round and with him being in the police force he had investigated the crime rates in the area and came here at different times to see if it was noisy...he is a really good bloke, Hugh, he really is and I decided to buy this place so I moved here on 14th October 1999.</p> <p>Well, I believe that I thought it was an opportunity to make a new life because I joined the local Baptist church when I came up here although I couldn't join...because it was what is called a closed community...I couldn't become a member of the church because within the closed community of the Baptist church, you can only be a member if you are baptised Baptist whereas I was brought up in the Anglican church, I was christened and confirmed in the Anglican church and er I saw no reason why I should be baptised into this church so I am classified as a friend but that never really took off</p>	<p>life' although he later suggests that there could never be another person close to him in his life the way his wife was. He hoped to join a community, particularly a church community.</p>
<p>I did go to several of the church meeting but as a friend but not a member you are allowed to speak but not allowed to vote so...I don't want...I can understand that there must be rules and regulations if you belong to any association, mustn't there?</p> <p><i>Well, it doesn't seem terribly inclusive</i></p> <p>I thought that they were willing to accept my donation or offering, they are willing to accept that but I am not allowed to vote, I can't really take part in the church but...anyway...</p> <p><i>Did you make any friendships there?</i></p> <p>Oh they were very, very friendly, don't misunderstand me, the church secretary and her husband will still visit me on occasions, yeah but I haven't been to church for a couple of years now partly because things have changed...I don't know if you are religious?</p>	<p>Attempting to make new friendships:</p> <p>He has attempted to become part of the local church community but it has failed and he feels disappointed although he also suggests that he is not worried. Instead of being part of the community he says his prayers on his own. The lack of inclusion has robbed him of potential social connections.</p>

<p><i>But would there not be another church that would suit you better?</i></p> <p>I suppose so, I could poke my nose in the local Anglican church but I think that is what is called a high church...I am not worried about it</p>	
<p><i>So leaving friends behind was not a big issue for you?</i></p> <p>I am not a friendly person, dear. Well, I don't make friends easily, I don't cultivate friendships</p> <p><i>Did you as a couple?</i></p> <p>Er...no there were folk at church we knew and the wife's sister and brother and of course our kids and grandchildren</p> <p><i>So have you made a group of friends here?</i></p> <p>No, no</p> <p><i>And you don't miss that?</i></p> <p>Er...no, I...most of my friends before the war, was friends at church when I was a youth, I was never a teenager, I was a youth, teenagers have come over from America and they have been a bloody nuisance ever since [laughs]. I was a youth and my friends were within the church but when war was declared we were scattered, most of the men and some of the girls went into the armed services</p>	<p>Changing attitudes to friendships:</p> <p>He suggests that he is not really bothered about friends and that he has never been interested in cultivating friendships – in contrast to Mr Bridge</p> <p>When he talks about friendships he talks about friends in his childhood, it is as if he never had friends once he was a man rather than a 'youth'</p>
<p>I was a youth and my friends were within the church but when war was declared we were scattered, most of the men and some of the girls went into the armed services...I was grade 3 because of my eyesight</p> <p>I still say my prayers, I haven't opened my bible for a month or so but that is partly the problem with my eyes</p> <p>so because I was grade 3 for my eyesight, when I went for my medical they put me on a barrage balloon site...I said no thanks, I said no thanks, I have been trained by the British Red Cross and wanted to volunteer for the royal army medical corps and then I have this job in a factory making the fuel and oil tanks and I joined the Home Guard</p> <p>I usually get up about 6ish er the waterworks wake me up...I get up around 2 o'clock to use the bathroom and then I get up about 6</p>	<p>Illness and disability:</p> <p>He has always had poor eyesight but recently he has started going blind and he is worried that eventually he will not be able to read books which is one of his favourite past times</p>

<p>at about 7 o'clock I make myself a bowl of porridge and shortly after 11 I start thinking about some lunch but I don't cook now either, the only thing I cook is a bowl of soup</p> <p><i>Did you use to cook for yourself?</i></p> <p>I used to, yes, I used to</p> <p><i>Do you not have any hot meals then?</i></p> <p>I tried some of the frozen meals but I don't...some of them I find not very palatable but I haven't a great appetite, I never have had, I have always had a poor appetite...one nurse I spoke to at the surgery questioned me about my diet and I told her that I have porridge and she said that if I have a mug of milk and a couple of biscuits during the morning so I usually do that and then I have a dose of complain in the afternoon</p> <p><i>What do you normally have for lunch?</i></p> <p>Oh I might have some ham, tomatoes and mushrooms, all cold</p> <p><i>Do you not fancy meals on wheels?</i></p> <p>I thought about it in the same way as I have thought about getting a home help but I haven't done anything about it...I am congenitally lazy, I think, I have done nothing about getting a home help, I should because I don't do the housework myself now, I used to</p>	<p>Cooking and eating:</p> <p>He appears to have no interest in cooking or entertaining in his home. When family visits they will bring food with them e.g. Christmas time</p>
<p>I am congenitally lazy, I think, I have done nothing about getting a home help, I should because I don't do the housework myself now, I used to</p> <p><i>So who does it now, your daughter?</i></p> <p>No, she is too busy...when my son and his wife come up, very often they will do a bit</p> <p><i>And they come regularly?</i></p> <p>About once a month</p> <p><i>Do you like to be independent?</i></p> <p>Oh I prefer being independent...if someone offers help then I will accept it with thanks and be grateful but I prefer to be independent</p>	<p>Managing the daily grind:</p> <p>Putting up with an untidy house. Labels himself as lazy rather than suggesting that he is perhaps not able to do it due to frailty</p>

Appendix M: Photo Reproduction Rights Form (adapted from Davies, 2008)

Photo Reproduction Rights Form

This form refers to the photographs that you took, as part of the research project about men living alone, in which you have participated. All the photographs will be securely stored but, as discussed with you, they may be shared with other members of the research team to help with the analysis.

I would like to use some photographs (in electronic or print form) in reports, presentations, publications and exhibitions arising from the project.

Please could you sign one of the boxes overleaf to indicate whether you are happy for me to do that. I have attached numbered prints of the photographs to assist you, and for our records.

No photographs will be used outside the research team without your permission.

Thank you for participating in the research project. If you have any queries about the project or your participation in it, please do not hesitate to contact Penny Sorensen on **01603 592068** or email: p.sorensen@uea.ac.uk

Or my supervisors:

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Tel no: 01603 593630

Please sign either 1, 2 or 3 overleaf:

1. I give my consent for all the photographs to be reproduced for educational and/or non-commercial purposes, in reports, presentations, publications, websites and exhibitions connected to the research project. I understand that real names will NOT be used with the photographs.

Signed.....date.....

OR

If you would like to give permission for me to publish some, but not all, of the photos, please list the numbers of the photos you will allow me to use

2. I give my consent for photo numbers.....

.....
to be reproduced as above.

Signed.....date.....

OR

3. I do not wish for any of the photographs to be reproduced in connection with the research project.

Signed.....date.....

Appendix N: Pen pictures of the research collaborators

The collaborators in the research are presented in alphabetical order using their self-selected pseudonyms.

Mr Sydney Arbour

Mr Arbour is 75 years old and the youngest collaborator. He lives in a large, rural, privately owned bungalow with a large garden. He has been a widower for two years and lives in the home he shared with his wife. He still works from home, managing an extensive property portfolio with the help of one female employee who is also his best friend. His married life was spent travelling for work to many Middle Eastern countries and Africa. He has therefore been used to living alone when away from the family home.

He is a car owner, regular churchgoer and an active member of his local church community. Through that, he volunteers at a residential home in the local area. He belongs to several organisations including the U3A.

He has four children and several grandchildren, some living locally. His best friend is his employee who he considers to be a 'daughter'. His own daughter is an alcoholic and he finds it difficult to cope with her chaotic life style. He is close to one of his sons although he cannot accept his sexuality.

Mr William Beejay

This is the only man who has always lived alone but he is also the only man who is in a relationship. He is 75 years old and a retired workshop engineer. He moved to a sheltered housing complex when he was 68 years old. He has a lady friend who lives in Thailand who he visits for a couple of months at least twice a year.

He is interested in literature and photography. His favourite form of transport is the bus and he uses his free bus pass extensively for pleasure. Twice a week he goes to the same pub but he does not take part in any organised activities. He is also a keen gambler and frequents a betting shop at least twice a week.

He does not have any close friends or family apart from a step-sister.

Mr Arthur Bridge

Mr Bridge is retired lecturer, aged 89, who has lived alone since becoming a widower twenty years ago. He lives in a privately owned bungalow close to the city centre.

He has a huge circle of friends and a large family who all live locally. A terminal illness confines him mostly to his home but he still manages to organise bridge parties with old friends.

He has two sons and a daughter and nine grandchildren. His daughter and sons see him every day and his daughter is his main carer.

Mr Roland Brown

Mr Brown is 80 years old and used to work as a farm hand on local farms. He is a bachelor although he has only lived alone for a short time since the death of his sister. He lived in his parent's home, with his father after his mother's death and then with his sister after his father's death.

He owns and drives a car and continues to enjoy going out with 'mates'. He is not interested in taking part in activities for older people but spends time in pubs with people of all ages and enjoys jazz evenings.

Mr Brown has no family other than a nephew (his deceased sister's son) who lives in Denmark. They have very little contact with each other.

Mr Bing Crosby

Mr Crosby is 80 years old and lives in a very run-down sheltered housing complex. He used to work for the council but also worked as an entertainer. His housing arrangements make him miserable and he is hoping to move to a more suitable flat in the same complex.

Although he has suffered from depression in the past, he is very lively and really enjoys being with people. His social life is in the city, mainly at the market. As he lives on the outskirts of the city, he catches the bus every morning to go to the market and returns home in the afternoon. He has a younger friend who he spends a lot of time with and who he considers to be like a son.

He was previously married and had three daughters when he was very young but left his wife when he discovered that she was cruel to his children. He looked after his children as they grew up and had another relationship which resulted in another daughter. He is not close to his three oldest daughters but very fond of his youngest daughter who he finds caring and helpful.

Mr Graham David

Mr David had been a widower for less than a year and was always very emotional during our meetings. He is 84 years old and a retired electrician.

In the past, he has been keen on playing golf and dancing but now he is reluctant to do anything although he expresses a desire to get out and meet people. Despite having lived in the same

house for over 20 years, he is not very familiar with the neighbourhood and any local activities. He has never had many friends as he was very close to his wife and had never felt the need for anyone else. He does have a neighbour who he considers a friend.

He has three sons who all live some distance away. He also has a brother who lives in the same road but they do not get on.

Mr John Delaney

Mr Delaney is a 78 year old widower and used to be a driver for a television company. Mr Delaney moved to Norfolk from London with his wife and he finds the quiet rural village where he resides a very nice place to live.

He knows many people in his local neighbourhood and has breakfast with one neighbour six days a week. He does not participate in any organised activities as he has not found them welcoming and he does not enjoy going out on his own.

He has two sons and two grandchildren but he lost touch with his granddaughter after his son's divorce. One son has severe learning disabilities and lives in a residential home some distance from Mr Delaney. Mr Delaney sees him regularly as he picks him up and brings him home for weekends.

Mr Alfred Dennis

Mr Dennis is 85 years old and a retired engineer. He has lived alone since his wife died just over 2 years ago. He is not adjusting to life on his own very well and during our meetings he was always very emotional.

He does not participate in any activities and during the winter months he does not go out. His experiences with day centres have not been positive. Every day a lady comes in at lunchtime to heat his food and make sure that he eats regularly. He also has help with his shopping once a week.

He has one daughter who lives some distance away and visits every six weeks. Although he has two granddaughters, he has virtually no contact with them.

Mr Trickie Dickie

Mr Dickie is a 75 year old and retired stage manager. He lives in a small, dark flat in a social housing block. He was married and had three children but he separated from his wife when she discovered that he was seeing another man. He was in a long term partnership until a few years ago when his partner moved to France.

He has had two strokes which have affected his mobility and speech. Despite this, he is very independent and does not have any help in the home. He is embarrassed by his disabilities and never participates in activities. Most of his time is spent watching television at home.

His children found it hard to accept his sexuality and he has no contact with them at all. He knows that one son has died but he does not know the whereabouts of the other son and his daughter. He is still in touch with one friend from his working days and she comes to visit about once a month. He has no other friends or family.

Mr John Harris

Mr Harris is 90 years old and a retired school teacher who moved to Norfolk from London after his wife died 10 years ago. He owns his bungalow in a quiet road but he does not interact with any neighbours.

He uses a mobility scooter to go to the shops and the doctor. His daughter sometimes takes him out to places of historical interest. He is a religious man although he is no longer actively involved with the church.

His daughter and son-in-law live locally. He also has a son who lives further away but who visits regularly with his family. He has three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He has not had any friends since childhood.

Mr Percy McBeth

Mr McBeth is an 86 year old retired night stoker and has lived alone in sheltered housing accommodation for the last two years. He does not like going out to visit others but he always welcomes visitors to his home which is spotless.

Although there are many organised activities available, he rarely participates unless it involves dancing. Mr McBeth spent many years with the traveller community and made many friends but he does not get the opportunity to see them now.

He has seven living children and many grandchildren. He has family visitors every day, usually several times a day. He also has a friend who lives next door to him and who thinks of Mr McBeth as his brother.

Mr Les Pollock

Mr Pollock is a very active 80 year old man. He is a retired coach driver and has lived on his own since his divorce 26 years ago. He lives in a bungalow in a small rural village. He grows his own vegetables and drives a car.

Mr Pollock enjoys dancing and belongs to U3A where he participates in several groups. He knows lots of people through the groups but he never sees them outside the groups or invites them to his home.

He has two sons who both live over 100 miles away. They keep in touch by telephone and email and meet up once or twice a year.

Mr Gordon Rastus

Mr Rastus is a 76 year old man who has never been married. He retired from his job as a job centre manager when he was 57, after being assaulted by a customer. He moved to Norfolk from London two years ago.

He belongs to U3A and several other organisations where he attends regular meetings. He does not see anyone outside the organised activities. He is keen on travelling; particularly to Arab speaking countries, as he speaks some Arabic.

He cared for his mother for many years until she died. He has a sister who he sees now and again but he does not appear to be very fond of her. Mr Rastus has a friend who he is very close to and who he considers to be his daughter. He sees her often and they have trips out together.

Mr James Smith

Mr Smith is a 97 year old retired fireman. He lives on his own because his partner of 64 years is severely affected by Alzheimer's disease and has had to move to a residential care home.

He does not participate in any activities and has limited interactions with anyone outside his family and his partner's family. He used to be a car enthusiast and enjoyed tinkering with his 47 year old car which he still drives.

He divorced his first wife when his son was 10 years old and lost touch with him for 50 years. They are back in touch and his son visits him several times a week. He has no contact with his two grandsons.

Mr Edward Swalds

Mr Swalds is a widower, aged 87. He is a retired engineer and has lived alone for 18 years although he has had brief relationships during that time. He lives in a quiet road in the centre of a small town and has easy access to all amenities.

He is very keen on socialising, particularly with younger people, and belongs to some local clubs.

He has family who come and visit and stay for a few days, and friends who he keeps in touch with via technology. He has recently discussed with his daughter the possibility of his moving into an annexe next to her house.

Mr Tom Young

Mr Young is 86 years old and a retired salesman. He recently lost his partner to cancer. He divorced his first wife once his children had grown up and re-partnered soon after. He lives in sheltered accommodation in the same building as his ex-wife.

He is a heavy smoker and drinker and spends most of his time in his flat with the television on. He does not participate in any organised activities. All his friends live where he used to live before moving to Norfolk.

He has family nearby and they visit regularly. His daughter visits every day and his grandchildren often pop in.