Making it count:

Explorations of time limitation and meaning

Deborah Samson

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THE FOLLOWING PART OF THIS THESIS HAS BEEN REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS:

pp. 209-234: **Part 2. Journal article.** 'But I just feel that the limited amount of time that I've got – I want it to be meaningful': Exploring transitional experiences of late midlife women.

THE FOLLOWING PART OF THIS THESIS HAS BEEN REDACTED FOR DATA PROTECTION/CONFIDENTIALITY REASONS:

pp. 235-262: **Part 3. Client study.** ACT and terminal patietients: when existential concerns enter the therapy room.

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Preface

This portfolio is comprised of the three pieces of work required to meet the specifications of the Professional Doctorate of Counselling Psychology. It includes a piece of original research examining age and ageing through the lived experience of women who are currently on the cusp of becoming older adults, a prepared journal article digesting the research for dissemination amongst a wider audience and a client study relating to my therapeutic work at my final placement. The pieces were not created around a specific theme but one has emerged organically, reflecting my own personal and therapeutic focus as I approach the end of my formal training period.

All three pieces are linked by a sense of time limitation resulting in a readjustment of priorities and focus including the increased salience of living meaningfully. Yalom (2008) refers to the reassessment that the perspective from the "crest of life" (p.5) provokes and separates the destructive nature of physical death from the idea that psychological benefits can be drawn through increased awareness of the phenomenon. This has echoes in Heidegger's (1962) concept of "Being-towards-the-end" (Sein zum Ende) where he suggests that by resisting the perception of death as something distinct from the idea of Being-in-the-world (Dasein) and considering it as more connected with the concept, it would allow the possibility of this space as being filled with potential and opportunity. For Rogers (1995) and Maslow (1962), making meaning was seen as an instinctive process for humans whereas Yalom (1980) depicts meaning as one of the givens of human existence and a major focus within existential therapy. It should not be considered the exclusive province of the middle-aged, old or dying and has resonance throughout the lifespan, although expressions of meaning may differ at different times of life (Devogler & Ebersole, 1983; Newton & Stewart, 2010), as well as being linked to protective factors and wellbeing (Brassai, Piko & Steger, 2011; Brassai, Piko & Steger, 2015; Steger, Oishi and Kashdan, 2009). However, as Dorothy Parker remarked, "Time doth flit; oh shit." (p.555) and the explicit recognition of a desire to living meaningfully and a more concentrated focus on what that might look like can

often be detected in those who appreciate that there is more life behind than in front of them.

The research project focuses on the lived experience of women who are approaching or have reached the age of state pension - a marker point chosen because of the complexities involved in attempting to categorise age. I wished to explore what it might feel like to be at this stage of life for women who were part of the large and influential cohort implicated in and affected by the social, cultural, political and economic changes that emerged following the end of the second world war. I was curious to know what ageing meant to them – this appeared particularly in the context of a youth-orientated society - and I also wanted to understand more about how this might be experienced in the here and now.

Three themes emerged from the women's narratives - the experiencing of this stage of life as distinctly different from earlier incarnations of adulthood, the negotiation of assumptions and judgements about age and the salience of meaning to this group. The emphasis on the importance of meaning found expression in diverse ways - through creative growth, self-care and well-being, curiosity and adventure-seeking as well as through connection and relationships. The importance of living a meaningful life was expressed both explicitly and implicitly amongst the participants but there were also indications of what may occur when this desire is thwarted by physical health or personal circumstances.

The journal article approaches the findings of the research project through the perspective of William Bridges' (1980) model of transition and aims to present a counselling psychology viewpoint to a wider audience. The struggle to create a meaningful existence is once again foregrounded and the therapeutic resonance of the findings are addressed.

The client study was written halfway through my final year on the doctorate and related to my placement at a Cancer and Palliative Psychological Service within an NHS hospital. Although I had formerly worked in bereavement counselling, it was a very different experience to engage with mortality that was directly and/or imminently under threat. The service provided support to cancer sufferers at all stages of the disease - including being in remission or terminal - and was delivered in hospital consulting rooms or on the wards, depending on circumstances. Those receiving palliative care for other conditions also came under the remit of the service and this support was also sometimes extended to families and carers. A common theme amongst the clients was the need to have a space to contemplate meaning, heightened by their encounter with the fragility and temporal nature of life. This is described in Kubler Ross' (1986) writings on the connection between death and growth:

> *….For when we know and understand completely that our time on this earth is limited, and that we have no way of knowing when it will be over, then we must live each day as if it were the only one we had. (p.166)*

The client study focuses on my work with James whose pre-diagnosis life had been both creative and fulfilling. Sometimes, living meaningfully can be perceived as a fixed way of being whereas it is both vulnerable to external threat and evolutionary in its nature, as Jung (2001) recognised in his writings on human purpose and meaning. For this client, the terminal prognosis had shaken his sense of self-knowledge and purpose and he sought assistance to make sense of living in this new context alongside contemplation of what death might mean to him.

The thread of this portfolio also has resonance with my own personal journey during the training in terms of exploring a sense of limited time and the desire to live meaningfully. Age-wise, I am separated from my research participants by just over a decade but appreciate that I, now, probably have more years behind me than ahead - a feeling that I was not consciously aware of when embarking on this research. My experience of training has been overshadowed with an awareness of endings and time

slipping way - my father's death shortly after being accepted on the course and my mother's continued physical decline has meant that existential concerns have inevitably come to play a larger role in my life, The striving towards meaning, evident both in the narratives of the participants and in the therapeutic collaboration outlined in the client study, spoke to me of Maslow's (1962) ideas of self-actualisation and Roger's (1995) belief in the human potential of growth and facilitated my recognition of the increased value I place on living a meaningful life. This has partly been the result of the personal therapy that accompanied my training but it also pre-dates this, as it was a motivating force in my decision to change career in my 40s and retrain for a more fulfilling career. As counselling psychologists, irrespective of the therapeutic model we embrace, we strive to understand our clients from a holistic perspective and choose to help our clients to find ways to live optimally, whatever their circumstances. The focus on meaning-making and the recognition of its various forms and functions throughout the lifespan can contribute to how we conceptualise and work therapeutically with psychological distress.

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Part I: The Research

"You know you're getting older when your toy-boy

goes grey": An IPA study of female experience of

approaching or reaching the age of state pension.

List of Abbreviations

D: Diary Transcript

I: Interview Transcript

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Abstract

This research explores the lived experience of women living in Britain aged between 59 and 66. Previous research on ageing has produced theories on specific aspects of ageing or particular challenges that face older adults but this study aimed to explore contemporary experiences of approaching or reaching pensionable age through the holistic perspective embraced by counselling psychology. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted on the interviews and diaries of seven women in order to better understand how each individual experienced the themes that appeared to link them together. Findings included recognition of this period as a new and distinctive entity. Participants also displayed a degree of self-knowledge and acceptance connected with age but appeared to be wrestling with a sense of transition that could sometimes leave them feeling vulnerable, particularly to the judgement of others and to fears connected with an uncertain future. Another key finding was the recognition, verbalisation and prioritisation of the activities and behaviours that are perceived as meaningful as well as renewed emphasis on pursuing these. These findings offer insight into what it means to be a woman at the threshold of older adulthood in the world today and may help inform ways in which counselling psychology can help support the emerging cohort of older adults to meet the challenges ahead.

1. Introduction

1. 1. Introduction overview

Britain is in the midst of a significant demographic shift and it is estimated that by mid 2039, the number of people in the UK of state pensionable age will reach 16.5 million (Office of National Statistics, 2015a), pushing gerontological concerns even higher in the list of priorities for policy makers and service providers. The cohort that is now approaching or reaching this stage of life is often identified in the media, as well as in academic research, with the term "baby boomers". Throughout their life, the members of this cohort have experienced seismic social, cultural and economic change, raising questions about how they might perceive the challenges of growing older and how their approach might differ from previous generations. Whilst the effect of these contextual changes can be perceived in both genders, women's lives have been transformed during the life course of this cohort, with increased educational and career opportunities (Gilleard & Higgs, 2007) that would have been unimaginable to their mothers and which have been further facilitated by technological advance as well as by improvements to and increased availability of contraception. How can we, as practitioner psychologists, begin to make sense of what growing older might mean to emergent and future populations of older adults whose expectations may be fundamentally different from previous generations? What issues and concerns will have relevance for them as they navigate through a climate of economic uncertainty and a culture that prizes youth, often at the expense of age? And how will any new knowledge sit with existing theory and knowledge about adults in later life, ageing through the lifespan and the experience of this cohort? I wondered if a possible starting point might be to explore what it feels like to be approaching or on the cusp of life as an older adult. I have chosen to focus on women - a section of the cohort who may be perceived to have reaped the most dramatic benefits associated with the social and cultural changes that started to emerge in the aftermath of World War II. I wish to begin the journey towards a better contextual understanding by attempting to engage holistically with those who are now somewhere in the blurred landscape of late middle age and older adulthood (Lachman, 2004; Lachman, Bandura & Weaver, 1995;

Staudinger & Bluck, 2001). My hope is that this exploration will allow for tentative speculation on how the findings might relate to navigating the transition to and negotiating life as an older adult, rather than analysing individual experience in order to generalise. This introductory chapter will seek to discuss the literature and ideas that have shaped my research question, concluding with a summary of the rationale behind the study.

1. 2. Baby boomer: Placing a generation in context

"Baby boomer" is a sociological term broadly pertaining to those born between 1947 and 1964. This period witnessed peaks in the UK birth rate, creating a cohort of significant size whose contextual needs and expectations have had an inevitable impact on how support and services have been provided (Leach, Phillipson, Biggs & Money, 2013) and will continue to do so as they progress into and through older adulthood (Karel, Gatz & Smyer, 2012). From a starting point as a sizeable, chronologically defined group, the baby boomers have been able to maintain their numbers through improved health and life expectancy, suggesting that they will be the largest ever cohort to reach pensionable age, significantly affecting the U.K. dependency ratio[1]. Size is not the only exceptional characteristic of this group - Gilleard and Higgs (2002) have described them as "the generation that broke the mould of the modern life course" (p.376). Reared in a climate of increasing social and educational opportunity, underpinned by a lengthy period of economic stability and characterised by notable cultural and political upheaval (Leach et al., 2013), this group have been constantly identified with change throughout their existence - change that has been both externally and internally generated. Their experience has been noticeably different from previous cohorts and this raises a new raft of contextual issues as they begin to transition into older adulthood. Born into a world that was being refashioned in response to the collective trauma of the second world war, this cohort of children grew up alongside the establishment of a welfare state that promised to care

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[1] The age dependency ratio is a calculation by the World Bank. It is created by contrasting the ratios of the working-age population and of dependents - those who are younger than 15 and older than 64. (http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.DPND)

for them "from the cradle to the grave" (Churchill, 1943), suggesting they may have been conditioned from birth to have greater expectations of governmental and institutional support (Jeste et al., 1999; Quine, Bernard & Kendig, 2006). There is governmental recognition of some of the challenges faced by society in terms of an increasingly older population - for example, dementia has a deservedly high media profile and has received significant funds for research whilst the planning of dementia care needs and dementia-friendly environments has become a priority within the NHS and Social Care. In addition, there have been attempts to think more laterally about the needs of increasing numbers of older adults such as the overlap between social and health needs and the establishment of the Better Care Fund, where some of the NHS budget is allocated to Social Care in order to reduce the pressure on hospital beds. However, in real terms the funding for Social Care offered to local councils has been cut by over 40% in real terms, according to the Kings Fund (2015) and this along with other austerity measures may have repercussions in the range of support is available and how it can be delivered. What resources will this cohort call upon to manage the gulf between previous expectations of support and current and future reality?

In addition to the more established needs of older adults, support may now be called upon for a whole range of emergent issues. For example, there will be larger numbers of individuals who are entering older adulthood living alone (Esbaugh, 2008; Lin & Brown, 2012) and although this is not necessarily an unwelcome or problematic situation (Esbaugh, 2008), it poses questions about how to best address potential issues of isolation and dependency. There may also be greater numbers of older adults requiring psychological support due to the combination of numerical size and cultural shift (Feliciano, Yochim, Steers, Jay & Segal, 2011; Jeste et al., 1999). Support for older adults may need to expand to encompass a range of issues including substance abuse and dependency (Epstein, Fischer-Elber & Al-Otaiba, 2007; Iparraguirre, 2015; Karel, Gatz & Smyer, 2012; Rollins, 2008) as well as more frequent occurrences of STIs (Rollins, 2008). Advances in medicine and increased life expectancies have

resulted in new challenges presented by comorbid conditions, such as managing the symptoms of HIV alongside the normative changes of an ageing physique (Brennan-Int, Seidel, London, Cahill & Karpiak 2014). Schofield & Beard (2005) considered the possible effects of large numbers of Australian baby boomer doctors and nurses retiring in conjunction with an increase in the number of ageing bodies and associated challenges and it is possible that this dynamic may have repercussions in other services. Increased life expectancy has also meant that this generation may still find themselves caring for elderly parents when entering older adulthood themselves (Fingerman, Pillemer, Silverstein & Suitor, 2012). The form of retirement for this cohort may be notably different from past incarnations - economic decline (Karel et al., 2012), the financial reshaping of pensions (Davies & Jenkins, 2013) and varying types and times of retirement (Byles et al., 2013) have already transformed the idea of an abrupt end to working life at a specific age from a certainty to an option. There are also questions over how this generation will adapt to growing older in a culture whose celebration of youth is frequently achieved through the denigration of age (Westerhof & Barrett, 2005). This is particularly pertinent as the baby boomers have ofen been perceived as the originators of youth culture (Gilleard & Higgs 2002). In addition to the perception of growing numbers of older adults as problematic or burdensome (Townsend, Godfrey & Denby, 2006), there is sometimes an increasing sense of animosity towards this particular cohort. They have been identified with wealth and consumer power (Yoon & Powell, 2012) and the resentment surrounding their economic and social advantages, when compared to the contraction of social and economic opportunity for the cohorts that followed them (Gillon, 2004; Hutton, 2010; Kapp, 2012; Willetts, 2010), has now merged with existing forms of ageism. This has led to portrayals of baby boomer ageing as a negative and problematic development within society.

There are criticisms of the use of the term "baby boomer" arguing that it has differing forms across countries and does not account for the vast diversity in wealth, race and culture within the cohort (Leach, Phillipson, Biggs & Money, 2013; Segal, 2013; Villa,

Wallace, Bagdasaryan & Aranda, 2012). Leach et al. argue that Britain did not experience one continuous baby boom but two separate waves - one that was grounded in post-war Britain and one lodged in the social and cultural whirlpool of the 1960s - meaning that there may be reduced levels of identification within the cohort. This identifies the problematic aspect of the length of the cohort and also begs the question of how closely the life experience and outlook of a 50 year old might resemble that of a 66 year old. Hudson & Gonyea (2012) suggests that it is old age that will fragment the apparent cohesion of this cohort, splitting them into contenders and dependents, depending on their economic and physical resilience. Race, gender and sexuality all further confuse a perceived sense of homogeneity and it is important to recognise that the identity ascribed to the baby boomers may not necessarily reflect how they see themselves (Guberman, Lavoie, Blein & Olazabal, 2012). However, these critiques are partly addressed by the suggestion put forward by Gilleard & Higgs (2002) that this group should be reshaped as a generation and arguing that they should be perceived as such, rather than simply in temporally bound cohort terms, because of the extraordinary historical and socio-cultural contexts that have surrounded them. Whilst the opportunities and possibilities that were on offer may have been less developed or established for those born in the late 1940s as compared with those born in the early to mid 1960s, all were able to benefit from them in a way that distinguishes their experience from older and younger cohorts. Whilst there may, indeed, be differences between the life experiences and concerns of a 50 year old and a 66 year old, they represent the smudging at the boundaries of this cohort as well as the debate that characterises attempts to define chronologically bound groups. Barak (2009) has argued that youth culture displays universal similarities for chronological and subjective age differences that - potentially - may well be reproduced in other cohorts and dimensions and this carries cross-cultural implications, suggesting that there may be a level of shared generational experience that is apparent within differing experience and contexts. I consider the baby boomer designation to be a useful sociological and historical contextual device, offering a generational identity marked by a birth date within a period of significantly - if not consistently - high birth rates and who

experienced the changes that were implemented as part of the post war reconstruction of society. I can recognise that, in terms of the influence, their size may be more important than a sense of cohesion, as suggested by Gilleard and Higgs (2007). However, as a psychologist I am aware of the advantages and limitations of categorisation alongside an appreciation of the individual nature of contextual experience and recognise that there is something to be learnt from both approaches. I acknowledge a generational identity alongside the awareness that this can encompass a plethora of differing experience, so have chosen to narrow my focus in order to understand in more depth, what it might mean to be on the cusp of older adulthood. Consequently, for this study I have opted to focus on the older subset of this generation, theorising that they are the individuals for whom older adulthood may be most salient at this time.

1. 3. Perceptions of age and ageing: Older adults.

The changing contextual parameters of age definitions were one element that originally intrigued me but it made the process of refining and categorising my chosen sample group far more challenging. For many years, 65 had been the official age of male retirement and 60 the female equivalent, offering an easy heuristic for older adulthood that was widely accepted as a norm in social and health policy, academic literature and in everyday perception (Neugarten, More & Lowe, 1965). However, in 2011 age discrimination legislation dispensed with the concept of a default retirement age, removing one of the legislatively identifying features of age and complicating the task of classification. Fortunately, the age that one can claim a state pension in the UK continues to be more clearly defined in government literature, despite its evolving nature[2], and offered me a means for categorisation.

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[2] The State Pension Age for women is increasing to bring it into line with the male equivalent by November 2018. However, the change is being staggered in an attempt to accommodate differing levels of expectations and planning. This means that a woman born on the 7th April 1950 would have reached SPA at 60 whereas a woman born on the 7th of April 1953 will have a SPA of 63 years. The increases will continue until women's SPA reaches parity with men's but there will then be further increases of the SPA for both men and women. (https://www.gov.uk/browse/working/state-pension)

Age, particularly but not exclusively, in midlife and older adults has always been more complex than a mere number as it is vulnerable to the effects of loss and growth across varying aspects of life (Steverink, Westerhof, Bode & Dittman-Kohli, 2001). Individuals appear to perceive a gulf between their chronological and internally experienced age, which is also sometimes known as actual and subjective or felt age (Biggs et al., 2007; Montpare & Lachman, 1989; Peters, 1971), and the differences between these perceptions have been linked with effects on health (Demakakos, Gionca, & Nazroo, 2007). However age also conveys a public identity (Logan, Ward & Source 1992) that, particularly for older adults, can sometimes be seen to overwhelm all other identities (Cruikshank, 2008). This may present a challenge to one's own sense of self, especially when the relevant public identity has links to negative stereotypes (Levy, 2003). Ageism is applicable throughout the lifespan but is most apparent, particularly in western culture, in the attitudes displayed towards older adults (Durost, 2011) and their cultural portrayal. For some older adults, notably white, western males, this may be their first experience of discrimination - Segal (2013) reminds us of de Beauvoir's assumption that ageing is worse for men than women, as they have to adapt to the secondary position that women have always been forced to occupy. For others, who have been discriminated against throughout their lives for other reasons such as gender, sexuality, disability or race, this may deepen and complicate the inequality that affects their lives (Age Reference Group, 2005; Averett, Yoon & Jenkins, 2011). The disparity between public images and individual perception may be further affected by widely accepted assumptions of what constitutes older adulthood. Even if we were to accept the proposition by Neugarten, Moore & Lowe (1965) that old age begins at 65, it means that the term encompasses a broad sweep of age (Queniart & Charpentier, 2012; Roth et al., 2012). No other age classification - other than the general use of the term adult - is used to reference so many decades and the identification of distinctive subsets, such as the young-old (Feliciano, Yochim, Steers, Jay & Segal, 2011; Spiro, 2001), old-old (Gillett, Scott & Davis, 2015; Roose et al, 2004; Spiro, 2001) oldest-old (Spiro, 2001), for academic, health and marketing purposes is not always reflected in the portrayal of older adulthood in popular culture.

Ageing is a process which occurs throughout the lifespan and facilitates development but the popular conception of "ageing" appears to bypass children and younger adults and is more frequently associated with older adults. Literature on age and ageing with reference to this population has moved on from the theories of loss and disengagement espoused by Cummings and Henry (1961) which suggested that by the time adults were approaching their mid-sixties, they should be engaged in a process of retreating from their public roles and that this should be considered a natural part of their psychological preparation for leaving the world. Rowe and Kahn (1987) embraced a contrary and more pro-active approach to growing older by encouraging engagement with the world and the selection and compensation process (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) created a model that offered a developmental resonance throughout the lifespan but that seemed particularly appropriate for midlife and older adults. The idea of moderating and balancing is evident in the work of Charles and Carstensen (2008) who suggest that physiological decline and increasing psychological strength should not be seen as potential source of conflict but rather perceived as capable of working symbiotically, in order to allow challenges to be met and for life to be experienced as fulfilling and worthwhile.

Some of the theories of "successful" ageing have been criticised for focusing on the maintenance of youthful characteristics (Byrski, 2014) rather than embracing what it might mean to be older, particularly for white western women (Casalanti, 2008), whilst other researchers have studied how the deliberate rejection of this by individuals, choosing to embrace the experience of growing older in a more creative fashion, such as by the members of the Red Hat Society (Radina, Lynch, Stalp & Manning, 2008; Van Bohemen, Van Zoonen & Aupers, 2013; Van Bohemen, Van Zoonen & Aupers, 2014). One might also question how relevant some of the concerns of "successful" ageing might be within more collective societies. Sugarman (2001, 2007) suggests a less rigid approach to chronology - her concept of the life course includes replacing the idea of self with a life space where various transitions and challenges are played out, echoing ideas of intersubjectivity and intentionality in the relational way that humans

operate. It will be interesting to observe how the history and expectations of the baby boomer generation might affect their negotiation of this. Sugarman also recognises an ambivalence towards age in that it is both irrelevant and contextually important and this observation has resonance for me, both throughout this project and in my own life.

1. 4. Age and ageing: Midlife and its relevance to older adulthood

Sugarman's (2003) work on the life course acknowledges the connection between past occurrences and their bearing on how the present is managed. Other researchers have also identified links or a sense of continuity between midlife behaviour, wellbeing and attitudes in later life (Alpass et al, 2007; Britton, Shipley, Singh-Manoux & Marmot, 2008; Defina et al., 2013; Fingerman, Pillemer, Silverstein & Suitor, 2012; Guberman, Lavoie, Blein & Olazabal, 2012; Hartmann-Stein & Potkanowicz, 2003; Morris, 2002). The middle years are also noted as a period of emerging awareness about time limitation, signs and concerns associated with old age (Freixas, Luque & Reina, 2012; Lachman, 2004; Versey & Stewart, 2013). Staudinger & Bluck (2001) argue that midlife exploration is an important element in understanding the life course and they espouse an on-going developmental approach that highlights the continued presence of challenge and need for adaptation across the lifespan. This plasticity results in multiple possible outcomes and suggests that the ability to adapt to contextual change at this transitional point in life may have longer-term benefits (Miche, Elasser, Schilling & Wahl, 2014) - a more constructive interpretation of the turmoil and crisis that Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson & McKee (1978) and Sheehy (1976) describe. However, it is important not to overstate the predictive value of midlife – a life course approach would conceive development as a fluid process (Sugarman, 2001) and recognise that multiple potential outcomes exist. Lachman, Teschale and Agrigoroaei (2015) acknowledge that sources of stress can be experienced throughout the adult lifespan - such as divorce and unemployment - but may be felt more keenly as the perception of opportunity for an alternative declines. It seems pertinent to note that any assessment of stress needs to have an appreciation on what the long term implications might be for mental well-being (Charles, Piazza, Mogle, Silwinski & Almeida, 2013), raising questions about how

the pressures of midlife may resonate in older adulthood. However, Lachman, Teschale and Agrigoroaei also recognise this period as an opportunity to demonstrate resilience in the face of pressure rather than one characterised by a sense of crisis. Neugarten (1968) perceives this period as time of optimum functioning and responsibility whilst Sugarman (2001) references an increased sense of perspective, likening midlife to standing in the middle of a see-saw conferring an ability to see in both directions of life and this is echoed in Staudinger & Bluck's (2001) suggestion that midlife might be the levelling point in the life-long negotiation of gains and losses. These perspectives have the advantage of broad relevance to midlife adults, including in terms of mental health, despite the difference in challenges that socio-economic disparity within this age group might present (Lang, Llewellyn, Hubbard, Langa & Melzer, 2010; Nandi & Welch, 2013).

Existing definitions of midlife are complex - Biggs (2003) considers it to be a chronologically vague term. A PEW survey carried out in 2009 noted that baby boomers themselves thought that midlife ended and old age began around 72 whereas Arnold's 2005 work on midlife women narrowed the focus to those between 50 and 65. Others note the start as earlier, placing the onset of midlife at 45 (Howell, 2001; Niemela & Lento, 1993). Lachman, who has written extensively on midlife issues, places the midlife period at between 40-65 (Lachman, 2004: Lachman, Lewkowicz, Marcus & Peng, 1994), allowing for indistinct periods of five years at either end of the boundaries (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1985). I have chosen to explore the life-world of individuals who are situated in the latter part of most midlife definitions, in the hope that their contextual experience will not only facilitate better current understanding but may also - embracing the suggestion that there is the potential for midlife experience to have a resonance in later life - help illuminate aspects of their future life.

1. 5. Women's experience/Feminist research

My original interest in how this period of life was experienced by those approaching older adulthood was not restricted by gender. However, as I read more, I began to

recognise that although societal, economic, education and medical changes have affected both men and women, the difference in opportunity for women has been more pronounced, suggesting a stronger contextual divergence in the experience of midlife and older women from earlier cohorts. There are gender differentiations in life expectancy, with women aged 65 now expected to live longer than their male contemporaries (Office of National Statistics, 2015b) and anticipation of this in addition to the lasting effects of a life time of gender inequality (Hallerod, 2013) may influence how women plan and operate within their current context. Women's life experiences and attitudes do not necessarily match those of men - Miller (1986) argued that women could not be fully understood though a patriarchal lens that valued strength in isolation over and above connection and shared vulnerability. Relational understanding (Gilligan, 1982) is the means by which women and girls discover their identity and embark upon personal growth, as opposed to more traditional exponents of development that place a much stronger emphasis on individualism and separation as evidence of developmental progress (Erikson, 1963; Erikson, 1990; Kohlberg, 1981). As most earlier research scrutinised women through this perspective and/or compared them to men, they were inevitably found wanting and this helped perpetuate concepts of women as weaker and less capable. Whilst comparative studies that do acknowledge these differences can be both relative and informative as is seen in Russell's 2007 exploration of older adults, there is an argument that such studies might require a generalisation or homogenisation of experience in order to emphasise contrast (Price & Nesteruk, 2010), meaning that it would be possible for both or either gender to lose something of their unique characters. Feminist critiques on research have also been influential in challenging the dominance of a positivist scientific approach and aspects of feminist counselling psychology approaches are reflected in some of the qualities that are deemed desirable in robust qualitative research (Willig, 2012). These include an awareness of inherent power differentials, the recognition and embracing of diversity, care and commitment and the importance of reflexivity (Kagan & Tindall, 2003) - ideas which are echoed in the criteria that Yardley (2000) uses to examine standards of qualitative research. However, feminist research has been

criticised, along with other disciplines, for a reluctance to focus on post menopausal and older women (Moe, 2014). With these factors in mind, I decided to narrow the parameters of my chosen age group to focus on women and to study their experience in a way that more closely reflects their understanding of the world.

1. 6. Women and midlife research

There has been research carried out on women in this age range across psychological, sociological and medical disciplines and that encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research. Despite the connections between feminist thinking and qualitative research, methodological and epistemological approaches need to be appropriate to the phenomena that they are examining and qualitative research does not produce the statistical "facts" that are often the preferred form of evidence underpinning funding decisions. Much of the research on midlife women focuses on individual aspects of life and single issue research has a vital role in forming our overall perceptions, such as the studies that have added to our understanding of how women approach and respond to retirement (Barnes & Parry, 2004; Hooyman, Browne, Ray & Richardson, 2002; Winston & Barnes, 2007). Midlife women have also been examined in terms of how they respond to the demands of being the "sandwich generation" (Putney & Bengtson, 2001; Taylor, Parker, Patten & Motel, 2013) and are recognised as being in the forefront of intergenerational caregiving (Barnes & Parry, 2004; Guberman et al., 2012; Weitz & Estes, 2001). There is also research on the significant numbers of women within this demographic who are not situated in the midst of family and who live alone through either choice or circumstance (Esbaugh, 2008; Lin & Brown, 2012). The focus of female midlife research has often been on biological change, particularly the menopause which has been examined from many angles including its overlap with depressive symptoms (Dennerstein & Soares 2008; Rubenstein & Foster, 2013; Walter, 2000). Demakakos, Gionca & Nazroo (2007) identified an interest in health and wellbeing as a concern of this age group and pressure concerning physical appearance, inescapable for many women throughout their lifespan, merits a host of studies linked with concepts such as self-acceptance

(Twigg, 2009; Ward & Holland, 2011) and self-esteem and sexuality (Covan, 2005; Lovgren, 2013; Montemurro & Gillen, 2013; Sandberg, 2013). Although all of these contribute significant parts of the jigsaw that constitutes human existence, using the Wertheimer's Gestalt principle that the whole differs from the sum of the parts (as cited in Wertheimer, 2014) it becomes apparent that there is an additional need to examine women in midlife from a broader perspective.

One way of doing this is by collecting literature on various aspects of life and collating them as an edited book, such as Lachman's (2001) *Handbook of Midlife Development* which examines the topic across gender but which also contains many pertinent observations about female experience. This major study built an overview of midlife at the beginning of the 21st century by collecting chapters written by experts on their specialist areas and arranging them in categorised sections. These included structures and models for studying age, reflections on psychological phenomena associated with this period and an examination of physical realities of midlife and considerations of the social environment. There are concepts and theories that continue to have relevance and which are frequently cited such as Staudinger and Bluck's (2001) consideration of midlife as an essential part of the chain of lifespan development or Kim & Moen's (2001) contemplation of retirement which acknowledged the need for a broader lens on the topic encompassing individual, social and historical contexts. The collection of studies was an important marker in the struggle to reshape midlife as a phenomenon worthy of study and more than merely a time of stress and crisis. However, even as it was being written, the authors recognised that the world around them was evolving - Putney and Bengtson (2001) queried the idea of the sandwich generation feeling particularly pressured about their responsibilities but recognised that this might not necessarily continue to be the case in the future. I certainly wonder if the current contexts surrounding the responsibilities faced by adults in midlife might sometimes arouse more complex reactions than were prevalent in their study. Shifting contexts also may have an effect on the findings in Aldwin & Levenson's (2001) chapter on stress and coping who found that midlife adults at the beginning of the 21st century

primarily experienced this part of their life as a period of re-evaluation. Uncertainties surrounding job security and financial futures due to evolving demands for skills and expertise and pension concerns might contribute to heightened levels of stress when this is taken into account with Lachman, Teshale & Agriroroaei's (2015) idea of the perception of contracting opportunity. Wiggs (2010) attempted to capture a more holistic perspective of midlife, focusing exclusively on female experience. She lamented the lack of focus on late middle age women - an observation that has been echoed by Walsh (2009) in her study on depression throughout the lifespan. Wiggs' painstaking examination of the relevant literature certainly depicts a broader understanding of the experience of being a woman at a certain time in life, noting creativity and transcendence as part of the process. However, some of the research in her meta-analysis goes harks back to the 1990s and whilst, as a former historian, I would never reject older knowledge as obsolete, I am curious to know if and how current experience might reflect changing contexts. In addition, whilst there are insights to be made from such a thorough meta-analysis, my interest lies in the individual nature of the experience as well as what can be drawn from it.   I acknowledge the debt my thinking owes to both these texts but cannot help feel that there is room for a more contemporary perspective when looking more broadly at midlife women.

A similar consideration concerns Arnold's 2005 exploration of midlife that targeted women aged 50-63 through a wider scope. She argued that this period of life required a wider, more contextual examination - an idea I agree with and which has resonance with Rafalin's (2010) description of the broader lens of counselling psychology. Although the data collection was in questionnaire form, the open-ended narrative form of questioning allowed for individuals to expand and describe experience in their own voices that were then examined phenomenologically. Her analysis revealed that although there was an undercurrent of turmoil from one's late 40s, rather than conceptualising this as a period of crisis and upset, it could be viewed as a time of reassessment and redefinition that was calibrated more carefully in line with the needs and interests of the individual. Her study depicted women who were interested in

renegotiating their place in the world rather than rejecting it in favour of retreat. So if there is already an informative study that looks at how women experience midlife and some of the findings pertain to transitions that will help shape later life, why embark upon another one? Firstly the contextual changes that were alluded to in the above paragraph also have a resonance here.   Since Arnold's study was carried out in 2005, the world has undergone a global economic crisis in 2007 and 2008, which destabilised many financial institutions and assumptions (Karel, Gatz & Smyer, 2012). The resulting changes in political outlook have had a notable effect on economic and social policy as well as on public opinion, just at a point when future dependency becomes more tangible for late mid-lifers. When this is coupled with the animosity which is increasingly levied at the perceived wealth and opportunity of older age groups (Gillon, 2004; Hutton, 2010; Kapp, 2012; Willetts, 2010; Yoon & Powell, 2012), it suggests that those moving towards the end of the midlife period might find themselves in a confusing position - sought after as potential voters and consumers because of their size and comparative wealth and yet attacked in the media and popular conception for being a drain on resources. In addition, whilst Arnold chose to think about women aged 50 to 63, her analytic findings focused on moving into one's fifties rather than moving out of them*.* Whilst I would aim to retain the openness and breadth of her exploration, in this study, I aim to restrict the age boundaries so that the focus is positioned more closely towards older adulthood. I would also argue that another contextual shift in the last decade has been significant. The upward shift in the age of women choosing to start families means that although the average age of first time mothers is 28.3 years (Office for National Statistics, 2014), the outer edges of the mean group stretch into the 40s suggesting it is increasingly likely that today's 50 year olds are more likely to be dealing with younger children than was common in earlier cohorts. This could result in busy family life being positioned firmly in the here and now rather than looking towards empty nests and the future. By situating my participants in their late 50s and into their 60s, the concerns are less bound by rearing younger children. Some of the younger women represented in Arnold's study would now fit the criteria of my study, suggesting that in some ways my research might build on her findings.

In 2002, Howell and Beth studied women between the ages of 40 and 60, using grounded theory to analyse their reflections on life that were generated in a focus group setting. Their sample of New York women produced an idea of three separate stages of midlife: rejecting the stereotypes attributed to them, exploring loss and meaning; and adjusting to new demands and expectations. They presented a bold, positive impression of mid-lifers who felt able to reject the negative labels others attempted to place upon them. Whilst there are themes that connect midlife experience across the span of ages, I would argue that specific concerns at the polar ends of the midlife scale might often be very differently experienced, affected by the age and dependency of one's children and parents, whether retirement is a distant fantasy or a realistic concern and in terms of one's own physical state. Reflecting on my own experience, I would say that I feel distinctly different from my 40-year-old self in terms of my preoccupations and choices and would also expect these to evolve in the next few years. In addition, I wonder how accessing these experiences through a focus group might have affected what the participants were prepared to share. Group dynamics operational in a focus group setting may encourage a shared and welcome social identity (Tajfel, 1978), reducing the power of the negative stereotypes within that context - which may be evident in the strong rejection of the labels foisted upon them - and if experienced as a safe place may offer increased opportunities and the wish to share painful experience. Conversely, the influence of conformity (Asch, 1951; Sherif, 1936) and desire to identify with the group may have meant that some individuals felt less able to share some of their difficult experiences if they diverged from a more optimistic group consensus. By focusing on a subsection of women for whom older adulthood is more salient and by seeking expressions of experience in a more intimate environment, I would hope to overcome the potential limitations of group dynamics and to move closer to individual perceptions of the crossover period between midlife and older adulthood. In summary, there appears to be room for a re-examination of women of this age that goes back to original narrative and allows for free expression of

individual experience within a contemporary context suggesting the type of issues that counselling psychologists might face when working with this population.

1. 7. Counselling Psychology and the lifespan

As counselling psychologists, the commitment to wellbeing across the lifespan underpins how we approach our work (Woolfe & Biggs, 1997; Fry 1992; Werth, 2003). However, in practice and in terms of counselling psychology research, this commitment is not always undertaken wholeheartedly, particularly in relation to late mid-life and older adults. The FPOP or Faculty for the Psychology of Older People (formerly PSIGE), although open and welcoming to other disciplines, is firmly situated in the Division of Clinical Psychology and whilst there is sometimes overlap in approach of clinical and counselling psychology, the distinctiveness of our professional identity should encourage a desire for a greater presence in debates throughout the lifespan. Fry's seminal 1992 work presents a useful summary of the writings and debates around older adults from a counselling psychology perspective but the intervening 23 years have seen enormous shifts in the contextual understanding of older adults, meaning that his questions about dealing with social, economic and psychological liberation now take place in a significantly different environment. Werth's concerns over the perceived lack of training and research in relation to adults in later life do not appear to have been comprehensively addressed - I followed Werth's example and examined published papers in The Counseling Psychologist, The Journal of Counselling Psychology, The Counselling Psychology Quarterly and The Counselling Psychology Review from 2005 to the present day and noted that this yielded surprisingly little in the way of articles and studies focused on midlife and older adult experience. Edwards and Milton's 2014 article in the Counselling Psychology Review, which examined the relevance of existential therapeutic approaches to working with issues raised by the transition to retirement, was a rare example of focus on midlife or older adults being linked to a counselling psychology perspective. This oversight is dangerous because it fuels the destructive cycle linking lack of research with a dearth of expertise which can result in low levels of specialist training. Whilst Werth pinpointed

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the challenge of finding participants as one reason why counselling psychology may have remained anchored in younger adults, Durost (2011) identified that the age bias of practitioners (including psychologists) combined with the internalised ageism that older adults displayed, creates barriers to providing and accessing services. The dearth of literature within the division is worrying and short sighted in terms of practice, as there is every indication that mental health provision for this population will become an increasing part of our workload (Karel, Gatz & Smyer, 2012). Having expressed an interest in working with older adults whilst on placement at a GP surgery, it was noticeable that the number of clients who were aged between 60 and 70 exceeded those who were 70 and above. This, of course, is purely anecdotal and can be ascribed to many factors including mobility and demographics. However, the observation caused me to wonder about evolving attitudes towards and expectations of therapeutic services by older adults. Lack of research may also ultimately have consequences in terms of the suitability of counselling psychologists to influence and advise on policy and provision of care. As counselling psychologists, we should be uniquely placed through our holistic perspective to conceptualise academically the physical and psychological stresses that later life might bring as well as to formulate the clients we see in our practice, Rafalin's (2010) broad gaze and emphasis on wellbeing rather than cure coupled with Sugarman's (2003) life course perspective suggests that as practitioners we should be able to offer new perspectives on detection of and debates about the depression and anxiety (Charles & Carstensen, 2009; Fisk, Wetherall & Gatz, 2009; Rodda, Walker & Carter, 2011), presentations often seen in mid to older adults in primary care. The vicissitudes of the lifespan are equally relevant to the more complex individuals who are seen in secondary and tertiary care. In addition to this holistic perspective, counselling psychologists are committed to building on the strengths of individuals (Altmaier & Ali, 2011), giving us a significant role in preventative work.

1. 8. Rationale for study and research question

Examination of the relevant literature shows that whether one considers "baby boomers" to be a media stereotype, a chronological cohort or a broader concept of generation or even merely a meaningless piece of clever alliteration, there is consensus that the period between 1948 and 1964 witnessed an increase in birthrate - albeit with fluctuations - in the UK. For the individuals born during this period, the narratives of their lives have been accompanied by significant economic, social, political and educational upheaval resulting in a world view and expectations that differ from those who have gone before them and this is particularly true for women. Although there is a considerable body of work about baby boomers - indeed in 2012, The Gerontologist dedicated a whole issue to them - there appears to be an opportunity for a contextual reappraisal, focusing in particular on women to reflect their vastly altered life trajectories. The size and transformed outlook of this cohort of women would already provide justification for studying this period of their lives but their experience is made more intriguing by the context they find themselves in as they stand on the threshold of older adulthood. The global economic and banking crisis has affected social, economic and political perceptions of older adults, often repositioning them as a selfish and/or problematic group, and removing some of their financial and social assumptions of the future. Whilst external perceptions may not be an accurate reflection of how this cohort recognise themselves, the psychological ramifications of ageing cannot be avoided - nor can they be fully addressed in the focus on dementia, however valuable work in that area may be. Life course challenges and the capacity for adaptation has a relevance to all the populations that we work with, whether they are in primary, secondary or tertiary care, and the connection of midlife - to the lifespan as a whole and to older adulthood in particular - has been demonstrated in the literature. Whilst previous research has contemplated the challenges of older adulthood, the earlier experience of baby boomers, the lives of women across the breadth of the midlife period or focused on single aspects such as the menopause, there appears to be space for a study that explores the current individual experience of women in the blurred phase of late midlife and older adulthood through a more holistic perspective -

one that recognises contextual effects and resonates with the qualities that Counselling Psychology espouses. The discipline's interest in the lifespan is unevenly represented in its research literature, sometimes appearing to be weighted away from late midlife and older adults, and this limits our debate on how the midlife and older adults that we encounter in our practice can best be supported both now and in the future. I hope this study may move towards redressing the balance and so I ask: what does it feel like to be a woman approaching older adulthood in Britain today?

2. Methodology

2. 1. Outline

The question that I wished to ask was deceptively simple but aimed to explore and engage with the factors that contribute towards a sense of older adulthood - what does the experience feel like for seven women approaching or reaching this age in Britain today?

2. 2. Rationale for Qualitative Approach

Whilst I chose a qualitative approach, I recognise that there is an important role for the quantitative paradigm grounded in the modernist ontologies that have dominated research in recent history and which is echoed epistemologically in the identity of the detached quantitative researcher - a common assumption of what a "scientist" should be. This stance has relevance for practitioner psychologists who have a commitment to evidence based practice (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003) but needs to be acknowledged alongside alternative methods of scientific enquiry in order to reflect the breadth of the psychologist role. However, with an acceptance of differing types of knowledge comes a broadening of expectations of how this can be accessed and in addition to realist approaches, I would also recognise subjective knowledge as making an important contribution to our canon of understanding. Idiographic approaches are not new and some of psychology's most notable earlier scholars such as William James and Gordon Allport embraced learning through case studies (Eatough & Smith, 2008). I favoured a qualitative method for this particular research project as I wished to understand the phenomena of ageing and to engage with the individuality and subjectivity that characterises the experience. My research question was aimed at perceiving experiences in a contextual, rather than generalisable way (Yardley, 2008) – something that Willig (2012a) recognises as one of the common features of qualitative research - and to offer a voice to individual experience whilst recognising that this will inevitably be mediated by my subjectivity (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Willig, 2012a).

The use of qualitative methods also offers a more reflexive and subjective identity affording me the opportunity to integrate aspects of my researcher identity with that of my practitioner stance and allowing for a more congruent form of awareness (Mearns & Thorne, 2007; Rafalin, 2010). I am enmeshed and invested in my research, both personally and professionally, and a qualitative approach allows me to own my place within it.

2. 3. Methodological Considerations

Qualitative approaches have been described as a family of approaches (Drisko, 1997), placing emphasis on the commonalities but Willig (2012a) also reflects upon the differences in their aims and philosophical underpinnings and these considerations helped guide where I chose to shine the spotlight of my research (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

2. 4. Methodological Approach

I struggled, initially, with settling on a method because so many incorporated ideas and concepts resonated with me. For example, I recognise the importance of language and how it influences our self-perceptions and the understanding of others but I felt it could not fully address the question I wished to ask (Willig, 2007). Eatough and Smith (2008) position language as a valid part of the analytic process but also conceptualise the individual as possessing more agency in their interactions than linguistic approaches might allow. Whether it is the power differentials highlighted by Foucauldian Discourse or the nature of the interaction as in Discursive Psychology (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), I experience these approaches as marginally more externally focused than my interests, reflecting their social constructionist underpinnings (Eatough & Smith, 2008). This was not only true in terms of the knowledge I sought - the lived experience of the participants - but in the way that I chose to analyse the data which not only included an appreciation of social context but also examined my subjectivity through internal interrogation (Finlay, 2003). Grounded theory offers the possibility of insights that are generated from the text and whilst this means one is not squeezing data into pre-

existing hypotheses and shares a measure of epistemological influence with IPA, there is a focus on accounting for phenomena rather than exploring inherent meaning (Smith et al., 2009). And whilst I am drawn to narrative methods of understanding how we can make sense of ourselves, our roles and our existence and wish to retain an awareness of contextual, historical and social influences, the emphasis of my curiosity rested on gaining a more phenomenological understanding of the experience. I continually return to the core of the question and the knowledge I seek: what does an experience feel like and how does one make sense of ? In my clinical work I find myself moving towards working in a more integrative fashion by attempting to remain open to how models can enhance my practice and I took this approach whilst holding in mind the question I wished to answer. Smith (1996) describes IPA as integrative from the outset and the ability to utilise a variety of concepts that intrigue me, creates a process that more closely resembles the form of my curiosity.

2. 5. Rationale for IPA

This section provides a description of the aims and assumptions of IPA enquiry and explores its relevance to my research.

2. 5. 1. Aims of IPA

IPA is an ideographic and inductive phenomenological approach to qualitative research (Smith, 2004). I use the term approach rather than method advisedly as it is characterised by procedural guidelines and suggestions rather than being a strictly controlled procedure (Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) - indeed, Larkin, Watts and Cliff (2006) describe IPA as a way of looking rather than a prescriptive process. Interpretative phenomenological analysis seeks to move beyond descriptive phenomenology, allowing the researcher to tentatively speculate on possible themes and undercurrents by thinking, on a macro and micro level, not only about the material itself, but also a participant's way of being in the world and assumes that this subjective knowledge can teach us about more than just the individual with whom it originates. It places a contextual lens on experience (Larkin et al., 2006; Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000), acknowledging the impossibility of direct access to the internal world of another

and instead uses the researcher's existing perspective and the relationship with the participant to generate a new interpretative slant on the experience. Heidegger identifies interpretation as a default skill in human existence necessary to navigate the concept of 'Dasein" or "being in the world" (Heidegger, 1962) - the need to make sense of ourselves in the world is also evident in Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concept of body-in-the-world (Smith et al., 2009).

Data may be generated through interviews or found in existing or specifically produced text and are examined repeatedly for meaning on several levels, echoing Schleiermacher's (1977) concept of grammatical and psychological interpretations (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). However, although themes may be considered to emerge through the hermeneutic circle - the oscillation of the analytic pendulum between the whole and the part that Smith (2007) claims can help break through the restrictions of linear thought (for example, the moving focus between the meaning of a single sentence and the whole paragraph) - IPA never loses sight of the participant's own perspective, language and individual meaning-making which has been described as the first level of interpretation (Eatough & Smith, 2008). It also not only acknowledges the double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2008) but by also embraces a third - recognising that the reader of any IPA study is attempting to make sense of a researcher trying to make sense of an individual who is also trying to make sense of an experience (Smith et al., 2009). Critical appraisals of IPA have flagged up limitations of the approach questioning the belief in the ability of the participant and their language to adequately convey the meaning of experience (Willig, 2008). However, IPA's philosophy also recognises Spinelli's (1989) separation of straightforward and reflective experience and the assertion that it can never be wholly reconstructed. Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) identify the first task of IPA as the attempt to: "produce a coherent, third-person, and psychologically informed description, which tries to get as "close" to the participant's view as is possible" (p.104) thus acknowledging that attempts to construct an identical perception are doomed. Willig also highlights criticisms that have questioned the place of cognition in phenomenology (2008) but IPA explicitly rejects a

dualist approach and fashions cognition into something woven into phenomenological experience rather than a separate, parallel operation (Eatough and Smith, 2008).

2. 5. 2. Relevance of IPA to this research

So, in addition to the reasons I rejected other approaches, what else encouraged me towards this choice? Smith (2004) considers IPA to be appropriate where the subject matter is "dynamic, contextual, subjective, relatively understudied and where issues relating to identity, the self and sense-making are important" (p. 520) which I would recognise as a fair description of my topic. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggests one of the primary factors in choosing a research method is to focus on which one will best answer your question and Willing (2012a) echoes this in her analogy of method as a lens by which to view data. IPA can ask, "What does it feel like...?" which is precisely what I hope to gain a better understanding of through this research. There is also an appealing inclusivity about IPA as it offers individual experience a voice that is not overwhelmed by the need to generalize. However, IPA researchers must remain alert to the ways in which they themselves affect the research process for example, recognising that acts of interpretation may carry implicit assumptions of expertise (Willig, 2012). IPA does not aim to deride causality but prioritises experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) so whilst it might be interesting in other studies to take a more explanatory perspective on the theme of ageing, the hermeneutic perspective would suggest the equal importance of having a more holistic appreciation. I see a connection between my dual identity of practitioner and researcher, particularly in the depiction of IPA as primarily trying to understand individual experience but also seeking to move beyond it (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2008). This ambition - coupled with IPA's open-minded, integrative and reflexive self-aware stance - mirrors what I strive towards in the therapy room where theory informs, rather than moulds my work, where I am led by the client as the expert on their life (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005) and where the tentative nature of any interpretation is echoed in the opening up of alternative, possible perspectives rather than certainties. I try to be visible in the therapy room and acknowledge my place in the

therapeutic relationship, mirroring the contextual analysis in IPA that allows the researcher a role and an interest in the ideographic as well as the inductive (Smith, 2004).

2. 6. Epistemological Standpoint

One of the most challenging parts of the process has been to pinpoint my epistemology, prompting me to question how helpful labelling is. When I consider the myriad options on offer, I often find it easier to be certain about what I do not embrace rather than what I can categorically claim as my epistemological stance. I find that I fit imperfectly into multiple categories or that I acknowledge a stance and then find a conflicting definition oit elsewhere, so I have concluded that maybe I should adopt the position or positions that most closely resemble my way of thinking. Willig (2008) has suggested that researchers can begin to understand their own epistemological stance by examining the type of question being asked, what assumptions are inherent in the chosen methodology and how that shapes the researcher's role - questions that have helped shape my stance in relation to this research.

For the most part, I do subscribe to the idea that knowledge is not an objective truth but a subjective perception. I assume the world to be conceptualised differently by individuals and that any exploration of another's experience would also be shaped by my assumptions and understanding. I recognise myself in Willig's analogy of the phenomenological researcher (2012a, 2013) - as a counsellor seeking to understand another's meaning rather than as a social constructionist "architect" or a realist "detective". Ponteretto's constructive interpretivist (2005) emphasises the role that the individual interpretations of the researcher and participant play in the uncovering of meaning and also holds resonance for me. Whilst my intention is to understand a phenomenon, I investigate with the understanding of the inherent restriction that I have only been able to access the reflective experience by the participant (Spinelli, 1989). However this perception is augmented by my subjectivity and prior knowledge (Schleiermacher, 1977), an appreciation of contextual influences at work on both

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myself and the participant (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000) as well as through intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is a collaborative means of making sense using the relationship between the researcher and the participant. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) propose that an individual's response to a specific question tells you something about the person as well as about the experience, deepening the relationship and the possibilities of learning from it. As the researcher's knowledge of the individual and their experience grows, the premise of Heidegger's "Dasein" (1962) suggests a shared space with partially recognisable elements and this intersubjectivity (Smith, 2007) and dialogue become building blocks in our understanding (Gadamer, 1996). I recognise that using the relationship and my understanding of the person to make sense (Finlay, 2008) and yet balancing this with the focus on the individual nature of the experience - rather than the individual themselves - has sometimes been a challenge during the research process (Willig, 2012).

2. 7. Brief overview of research design

My study was to consist of data collection through individual interviews and diaries generated by the participants in the two weeks preceding and the two weeks following the interviews. These interviews would be semi-structured in nature (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), connected to topics of interest that had arisen from preliminary reading and the informal piloting of questions amongst my university colleagues and as late middle aged and older adults of my acquaintance. These included prompts around relationships, physicality and employment as well as a request for issues that they considered to be pertinent to the discussion. The list of themes, suggested questions and prompts is attached *(see Appendix A)*. This list was occasionally employed to stimulate or refocus thoughts away from rehearsed narrative (Willig, 2012) or to draw out further meaning for the participant but not used as a fixed agenda (Smith & Osborn, 2008, Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). There was similar latitude offered in the form of the diaries where I requested participants to note down any thoughts or experiences connected to age that arose in that timeframe. There was no specification as to how frequently entries should be made, how long they should be or in what form they

should be presented to reflect the flexibility inherent in semi-structured interviews and in IPA itself (Smith, 2004). The data generated would then be examined using IPA. Further examination of the rationale behind specific decisions and limitations of the design can be found in the relevant sections of this chapter.

2. 8. Sampling

For the reasons outlined in the introduction, I utilised purposive sampling, seeking between six and eight female participants – IPA uses depth rather than breadth as a guiding principle (Smith & Osborn, 2008) and the recommended numbers vary, reflecting once again the non-prescriptive nature of the approach. The general consensus is between four and ten for a doctoral level study (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2004) and I interviewed eight participants in total. I sought women aged 59-66 at the time of recruitment - part of the first wave of the "baby-boomer" cohort to reach or approach state pensionable age, the legislative marker I had chosen to help define my sample. This would enable me to access women who might be about to embark upon this period as well as those who had already achieved this stage. Additional criteria for eligibility included fluency in verbal and written English and reasonable access to the evolving opportunities - educational, social, health and employment - that provided a historical backdrop to this age group. This was because part of my curiosity about this cohort centres around how these changes might impact upon the experience of reaching older adulthood. I was concerned about maintaining a level of homogeneity amongst the participants (Smith et al., 2009) and aware that these opportunities may not always have been in apparent in contemporaries from other cultures and backgrounds. I am also aware that this meant my sample would represent a more privileged subgroup of the cohort, namely those who may have benefitted from career opportunities and social mobility. I did, however, attempt to word my advertisements as accessibly as possible and aimed to recruit through diverse channels – these are outlined in the following section. My literature requested participants who were in, or close to, London, which I theorized might minimise both disruption for my participants and the travel expenses that I had offered to reimburse.

However, as many of my participants were already in receipt of a freedom pass and the latter consideration became less relevant. All participants were interviewed in person. There was one potential participant sourced through social media who enquired about using Skype for the interview but, after consideration and consultation with my supervisor, I decided not to proceed. This was because, in addition to the ethical and practical challenges that participants might face - such as feeling unsafe discussing personal stories with a remote stranger or interruptions - I, personally, did not feel comfortable enough with the medium to use it for my interviews. I was also contacted by three potential participants who were interested in the study but who, on hearing more about the research, expressed worries about having enough time to create the diaries or talking about personal issues and who ultimately decided not to take part.

2. 9. Recruitment

I recruited participants in a number of ways - I distributed or pinned up leaflets *(see Appendix B*) in cafes in North and East London including one that was run by an organisation aimed at harnessing the talents and experience of older women. I contacted gatekeepers such as local activity coordinators and requested permission to leave leaflets at their sessions although I avoided those linked to the NHS, such as local exercise classes for the over 50s, as I had not sought NHS ethical clearance. I did not always receive a response but some organisations were extremely helpful, offering to circulate my leaflet amongst their members and associates and in one case this resulted in increased exposure through Age UK. I contacted Gransnet - a social media outlet - and was permitted to post an advert on their media board. This took the form of a written advert (*see Appendix C)* rather than the leaflet that accompanied my other recruitment strategies. Any interested members initially responded to my advert on the forum board but following that, contact was made through private messaging, email or by telephone. Another recruitment strategy was through snowballing including emailing the leaflet to friends and acquaintances and asking them to forward the leaflet but emphasizing that any potential participants should contact me directly on my university email address. I had wanted to attract participants who had benefitted from increased

opportunities, including employment and so made reference to seeking people for whom work had been significant in some way (*see Appendix D).* However, as I began to attract participants, it became apparent that this stipulation was unnecessary and in my second wave of recruitment it was not mentioned. Once I had made contact through the initial mediums suggested, such as private messaging and email, I provided participants with a more detailed explanation of the study (*see Appendix E*), emphasising the expectation of participants to attend an interview and to keep notes or diaries.

2. 10. Participants

One participant responded to a leaflet she saw in a local cafe, four more came through social media channels and three emerged through personal contacts or snowballing. All the participants were white and British citizens although one of them was born and had lived for much of her life on another continent. Their ages ranged from 59 to 66 and whilst four had retired, three of them continued to work in some capacity. I had stressed, in our pre-interview conversations and email communications, that the interviews were not therapy and that they could potentially raise difficult feelings. Although some had sought psychological support in the past and were open to help in the future, they considered themselves to be adequately emotionally stable at this time.

Table 1. Participant's demographics

Participant	Age (at time of interview)	Relationship Status	Children	Educational Level	Job
Louisa	62	Single	No	Masters	Lecturer
Helen	65	Married	Yes	Undergraduate	Charity organiser
Sonia	66	Married	Yes	Masters	Nurse (retired)
Christine	65	Married	Yes	Masters	Teacher (retired)
Elizabeth	64	Married	No	Post graduate	Therapist (retired)
Alma	62	Single	No	Masters	Teacher (retired)
Janet	59	Single	No	Masters	Nurse

An eighth participant was interviewed but her involvement in the project ended for several reasons - she had amended the consent form at the end of our interview which diminished the clarity of the agreement and after several attempts to establish contact to discuss this and to attempt to access the diaries, she informed me of a bereavement suffered immediately after the interview. In light of her ambivalence toward consent and her personal loss, I decided against using her data and after contacting her again to inform her of this decision, destroyed the recording of the interview and consent form.

2. 11. Ethical Considerations

My initial contact with participants was through social media and emailed or paper leaflets. Requests for telephone contact (through a separate mobile used solely for client communication) and personal details were only sought after I had supplied potential participants with more detailed information about the study (*see Appendix E)* including anonymity, reimbursement, my background as well as the aims of and my investment in the study. This was in keeping with my desire to comply with BPS (2010) and HCPC (2012) ethical guidelines and to strive towards Beauchamp and Childress' (2001) four principles of ethics. In the literature, as in all my dealings with

the participants including the interviews, I endeavoured to make any language as accessible and relevant as possible (Feliciano, Yochim, Steers, Jay & Segal, 2011). As alluded to earlier in section 2.8, I was contacted by someone based outside London who wished to participate via Skype. Aside from the practical concerns of interviewing someone unknown to me through this medium - such as interruptions, technical hitches and rapport - I was concerned that discomfort might be harder to detect and support more challenging to offer and felt this conflicted with principles of beneficence and non-maleficence (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). I feel more comfortable with in-person face-to-face engagement and anticipated that this might be the case for others. However, on reflection I feel that the overriding factor was my dislike of communicating in this way, even on a personal level, and my reluctance to add another challenging variable into my first experience of IPA. Whilst I think this ties in with a level of self-awareness, I do wonder what limitations this placed on my access to participants. The majority of participants were interviewed at City University but one requested to be interviewed at home and another at her work place. In these last two circumstances, safety issues needed to be addressed - consequently, daytime appointments were made and the details of who I was meeting and the location of the interview were left in a sealed envelope with a close relative until my return, when they were destroyed.

To those who wished to take part, I sent out further information (*see Appendix E*) including a section on what would happen to the study and it's findings and outlining possible areas of future publication. I also sent out consent forms (*see Appendix F*) alongside an information sheet detailing sources of support (*see Appendix G*) via email so that participants had time to consider what they were signing before the interview. Hard copy of the forms and the information sheet were also taken to the interview. The consent form contained references to confidentiality and allowed for the fact that this is tied up with anonymity and the identities of the participants (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) and not the content of their interviews. This anonymity was further enhanced by the fact that anyone recruited through family and friends was asked to contact me directly using my university email in order that our mutual contact would not know of

their involvement unless the participant themselves decided to share this information. Therefore, I am the only person who currently knows the real identities of all the participants. I had considered the recommendation of Smith et al. (2009) that participants only be offered withdrawal up to a specific part in the research - for example, up to the beginning of analysis - however, on reflection, I felt uncomfortable about this position. Although I recognise that I am bringing myself into the research and my interpretations, my participants' experience is something they have offered freely and generously to me - there was no payment offered other than the reimbursement of travel costs. Consequently, I did not feel the data was mine to withhold and instead, stressed the right to withdrawal at any time - a risk that I felt able to make because of nature of the research. In addition, participants were also repeatedly informed that they were not obliged to discuss any topics or areas of their lives that made them feel uncomfortable - I was aware that, despite offering them an opportunity to talk about themselves, that I held the power in the situation and that their sole means of control was in what and how they chose to disclose information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This decision was facilitated by the semi-structured nature of the interview and I endeavoured to remain sensitive to the tone of my participant's responses. I deliberately allowed extra time in the interview process to allow a space for a full debriefing, to answer questions and to reiterate the sources of support. The requirement of keeping a diary before and after the interview not only offered opportunity for triangulation but also a means of expressing any issues that continued to preoccupy the participants. As outlined below, in section 2.13, steps were taken to anonymise and protect interview data - this involved renaming and keeping the material in locked computer files and drawers. During transcription, care was taken to alter names, dates and biographical information that may have identified the participants. At the end of the study, after the project has been evaluated, I have undertaken to destroy the original data in order to continue to protect confidentiality.

2. 12. Procedure

2. 12. 1. Pre-interview

Once participants had agreed to participate in principle, I contacted the majority by phone to introduce myself, discuss dates for meeting, answer questions and to gain a sense of whether they understood the aims of the research and what was being asked of them. However, some participants were more comfortable arranging details through emails and messages. Shortly, before the interview, I forwarded the consent form for their information *(See Appendix F)*, reconfirmed the dates and offered directions and confirmed whether they wished to keep a digital or paper diary - this performed the additional function of reminding the participants about the diaries. The diaries - or relevant notes and observations - were to be kept for two weeks before and two weeks after the interview. I had initially included this extra form of data as a method of triangulation - to capture thoughts and observations that may have not been covered in the interview or in the hope of adding depth to the data (Lovgren, 2013; Schiwy, 1996; Vickers-Willis 2002). However, creating notes or diaries also worked as a non-prescriptive primer for the interview itself. There were difficulties in judging when to start keeping the preliminary two weeks' worth of notes/diaries as I was only able to confirm the interview date and time roughly one week ahead due to university booking procedures - however I decided to ask them to keep the diaries for two weeks ahead of the provisional interview date and in the event, all the dates I requested were confirmed.

2. 12. 2. Interview

Most of the interviews took place at City University between four and six weeks after the initial contact, depending on availability of participants, myself and meeting rooms. I had allowed 1.5 - 2 hours for each meeting to allow for the travel delays, settling in and debriefing as well as the actual interview. I met the majority of participants at reception using the walk to the interview room to engage in small talk and begin to get comfortable with one another (Seymour, 1998). This felt less relevant to the participants who were interviewed at home and in the workplace. Before the interview

started, I asked for the consent forms to be signed and offered each participant hard copy of the extra information sheet that they had received by email in addition to a list of possible sources of support (*see Appendix G*). I also enquired about reimbursement for travel expenses - it felt important to do this at the beginning of the interview to remove any possible mutual anxiety surrounding this transaction - however, the majority of my participants had used their freedom passes. I asked about the diary keeping and offered a reminder of the rationale behind keeping a diary - that it was an attempt to ensure that no topic of interest to them was overlooked and to add depth to the interview findings – an explanation that participants appeared to find reassuring. I offered to supply stamped addressed envelopes in which diaries could be sent to me care of my supervisor. However, most of participants chose to supply their diary notes by email - either in scanned or typed form - although some handed the earlier sections to me at the interview. I am unsure whether email delivery allowed them to reflect upon or edit the content - most participants named the need to make them more presentable. I then explained the format of the interview, as well as recapping how the material would be analysed, clarifying the commitment to anonymity and the participants' prerogative not to talk about anything they did not wish to discuss. I asked if there were any questions or concerns at this stage but most participants just seemed keen to embark on the interview. With the permission of the participant, I started to record the conversation.

The interview was semi-structured using broad open questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), which is often widely suggested as an appropriate method of interviewing for IPA (Willig, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2008). I perceived my role as encouraging and opening up the conversation with the aim to creating a sense of a shared understanding as suggested by Gadamer (1975). Kvale and Brinkmann suggest that mining for information in this way has echoes in Socrates and Freud's searches for knowledge and need not be an exclusively positivist pursuit - they describes the research interview as"…an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 123, 2009).

My initial questions were purely biographical in order to help the participants relax and to defuse the impact of being recorded, as the building of rapport has been noted as a key factor in productive interviewing (Smith & Osborn 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). I then started with a general question on their perspective of ageing such as "What comes to mind when you think about ageing?" before moving onto other areas of interest (*see Appendix A*)*.* However, in the majority of cases the participants navigated themselves around the topics without the need for my deliberate intervention demonstrating the observation by Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) that the participant is the expert. The only question consistently asked was about whether there was anything that they considered to be pertinent to the research which had not been covered - most participants had something to add and these often arose either as a tangent to something we had discussed but also as a result of the pre-interview diary keeping. However, I did offer reflection or ask direct questions at times in order to clarify a participant's meaning. At the end of the recorded interview and with the agreement of the participant, I stopped the recorder and we took time to debrief (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I asked each participant about how they had found the interview experience. I reminded them of the sheet with sources of support, should they begin to feel distressed or uncomfortable about anything we had discussed, as well as suggesting that if something felt "unfinished", they could also use the diary as a means of expression. I thanked them for their participation and made clear that they could contact me by email, private messaging or phone if they had queries relating to the research and offered an approximate date of when the research would be submitted. I asked whether they would be interested in hearing about the research after it had been submitted and they all expressed curiosity although, unsurprisingly, requested a brief summary rather than the entire project. I intend to send them amended copies of the article I have prepared as part of the portfolio. I did not offer the participants the opportunity to offer feedback on the analysis before submission - this was partly due to the fact that we had discussed the iterative form of the analysis before the interview and the relatively uncontroversial nature of the research but also because most had

engaged in post-graduate research and displayed an understanding of the process. If they disagree strongly with the findings or return thought-provoking comments on the summary, I will acknowledge this in the article that I intend to submit for publication. After the participant had left, I made brief notes on the interview - how well I perceived it to have progressed, the high and low points of the interaction, what might be done better in the future as well as general feelings and impressions. The actual interview section of the meeting lasted between 55 and 80 minutes and I noted and reflected upon these variances. I considered my personal reactions to the participants - how comfortable I had felt with them and what this might be due to (Finlay, 2003) - but also thought briefly about what had stood out for me at this point (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) in order to be able to work reflexively with the data in the analysis stage.

2. 12. 3. Post-interview

Contact that took place after the interview was by email and messaging although the participants still had the telephone number I supplied and the ability to contact me through that medium if they preferred. I noted that the majority of contact before and after the interview was through email and social media messaging which prompted me to reflect on my own assumptions about older adults and technology as well as what it might tell me about my chosen sample. Interviews were immediately downloaded onto my personal computer and then wiped from the portable recording device. Each participant was assigned a false identity - the details of which were kept separately - and the interviews saved as audio files in a password-protected folder. Approximately two weeks after the interviews, the participants were due to supply me with their pre and post interview diaries/thoughts - however, in the case of the earliest interviewees, the Christmas period meant most of these did not arrive until about a month later. Although I had offered to pay for postage, most were submitted electronically. Those that were supplied in hard copy were scanned and typed up, with the originals stored in a locked drawer and the electronic copies kept in a password- protected folder. At this point the active involvement of the participants in this stage of research came to an end - they were thanked again for their involvement and reminded again of the offer to inform them of the research findings and an estimation of when this might occur.

2. 13. Analytic Strategy

2. 13. 1. Transcription

My initial intention had been to collect all the data before embarking on any transcription or analysis. Langdridge (2004) suggests that transcription is a means of familiarisation and should be considered the first stage of analysis and I was concerned that early perceptions of data might preclude me from allowing the singular nature of each participant's experience to emerge at the interview stage. However, I became aware of the desire for progression and to gain a flavour of the material that had been gathered. This was coupled with the feeling that a rigid format of data collection did not sit comfortably with my commitment to subjectivity and reflexivity. Smith et al. (2009) recognise the hermeneutic pendulum as being active at several levels, including between the interview and the research and Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) observations about the role of interpersonal influence meant acknowledging that my interviews would inevitably evolve as I learnt from and worked reflexively with each participant (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Although some characterise IPA as a structured and systematic approach (Griffin & May, 2012; Willig, 2013), as a novice researcher in this method, I was drawn to the latitude offered within these boundaries - the non-prescriptiveness that Smith and Eatough (2008) recognise to be one of its strengths. Even when there are step-by-step instructions suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), the flexibility as well as the complex, non-linear nature of the approach is still emphasised. Gadamer (1996) argues that hermeneutics cannot be constrained by the term "method" and whilst I embrace that spirit of openness, I found myself guided by Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) whose approach combines this freedom with the recognition that all decisions have consequences and must therefore have a rationale. I began by ascribing letters to my pseudonyms to denote the interview transcript (I) and the diary (D). I then began to transcribe the sessions and diaries whilst I waited for the final interviews to take place and diaries to arrive.   My transcription style aimed to be verbatim rather than prosodic as advised by both Smith and Osborn (2008) and Smith et al. (2009) and I

held in mind Langdridge's (2004) exhortation to focus on the macro rather than the micro at this stage to create an overall picture in my mind. I recognised that as well as being a means of familiarisation, transcription removed me a step away from the original conversation - Kvale and Brinkmann emphasise that translation must be recognised as the tool and not a faithful facsimile of the original (2009). However, listening and transcribing also brought me back to the actual interviews and allowed me to recall gestures and my own responses and linked back to the reflective notes made immediately after the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Diary transcription was sometimes straightforward - a case of increasing margins on the existing text and numbering the lines - or complicated by deciphering handwriting or puzzling out how to lay out mapped thoughts in a linear form. I had offered participants a relatively free hand in deciding how they wished to present their thoughts and notes as I did not want the diary element to act as a deterrent - however, one participant chose mind-mapping as a form of thought collection which proved challenging as it has sometimes been used as an analytic instrument in qualitative research, with similarities to IPA (Tattersall, Watts & Vernon, 2007). This meant that even transcribing this data was performed with an eye to the hermeneutic pendulum, listing the words whilst holding the connections in mind.

2. 13. 2. Coding

My first step after transcription was to further familiarise myself with the text and to make notes of these first impressions in a separate notebook (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). I had decided to analyse each participant separately, looking at first at their interview and then at their diaries before moving onto the next as recommended by Smith et al. (2009) - this seemed a logical process as I was using the same analytic process for both forms of data. The hermeneutic circle (Smith, 2007; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Smith et al., 2009) needs to be deployed throughout the analysis and it is important to understand what the text represents as a whole before trying to tease it apart (Smith et al., 2009) - the overall impression contributes to the contextual aspect of understanding that is a core aspect of the IPA approach (Larkin et al., 2006). I then turned a more focused lens on the text and began my initial line-by-line coding (Smith

et al., 2009). Langdridge (2004) describes coding as "the process of assigning labels to your textual data" (p. 267) and views it not only as a means of description but also of understanding, whilst others see it more practically as a means of dealing with the sheer mass of information (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Werth, 2005). Earlier IPA texts (Smith et al, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Willig, 2008) recommended making initial codes in the left hand margin but this felt counter-intuitive to me. I felt that the observation by Smith et al. (2009) of the flexibility of the method as well as the possible significance of Jonathan Smith's being left handed, justified my decision to mark my initial coding in the right hand margin. At this point in the analysis, I was guided by the language and semantics but working without a specific agenda - Smith et al. (2009) suggest that comments can be descriptively, linguistically, conceptually based or interpretative but advised that, in all cases, researchers need to keep referring to the text and Larkin et al. (2006) remind the researcher that first order coding remains clearly with what the participant's voice identifies. As suggested by Smith et al. (2009), I reread paragraphs line by line against some of my codes to avoid simplifying or making assumptions about what was in front of me. I also reread the passages in their entirety whilst holding the micro coding in mind, using the principle of the hermeneutic circle that either position can potentially reveal more about the text. I have attached an example of an annotated transcript (*see Appendix H)*

Originally I had considered asking a colleague to code my work - the point of having another researcher code one's work in IPA would not be to seek consensus as this is not a concern of the method but to highlight bias and assumption that may have been overlooked (Yardley, 2008). However, I began to perceive this approach as potentially problematic in relation to my subjectivity - my acceptance that there is more than one reality should perhaps offer me permission to own my personal interpretation, warts and all, and encourage me to assume responsibility for my own reflexivity. Instead, I tried to adhere to the concept of independent audit suggested by Smith et al. (2009) as a means of ensuring validity by the constant retracing of steps and the establishment of a clear trail through the research.

2. 13. 3. Emergent Themes

Once I felt I had exhausted the process of coding, I was able to consider the themes that had emerged from the overall readings, exercise of coding and from the initial impressions that I had formed and noted in my reflexive diary. Themes were considered idiographically, acknowledging context and examining how the participant makes meaning in the world (Willig, 2012a). Part of the ongoing process of IPA is the movement between the mass of the data - breaking it down and building it up again - and how the researcher deals with it in order to get a better understanding. Having examined the minutiae of the text of the phenomenon, it was now time to introduce more of what I saw emerging from the account - the hermeneutics of meaning-recollection that forms a bridge between the hermeneutics of empathy and the hermeneutics of suspicion (Larkin et al., 2006; Langdridge, 2007). Wertz considers the coding and thematic work to be organisational rather than analytic (2005) but I disagree and consider all manipulative work performed on a text to be part of the interpretative analysis, which is why it needs to be attempted tentatively and with awareness (Willig, 2008). During the process, which I marked in the left hand column, I attempted to remain aware of differing categories of themes - Smith et al. (2009) recognise a variety of connections: abstraction, subsumption, contextualisation, polarisation, numeration and function - and to balance looking beyond the obvious to remaining grounded in the text.

2. 13. 4. Master Themes

Having established and attempted to corroborate the emergent themes, the next step - recommended in Smith et al. (2009) - is to begin to collate them into master themes. I followed their suggestion of physically grouping by writing each emergent theme on a separate piece of paper and spreading them out over the sitting room floor or on an extendable table. I then arranged them in clusters that reflected their commonality and positioned similar themes in piles next to one another. This stage called, once again, for a hermeneutic appreciation of the text - building master themes in IPA raises the possibility of moving beyond the text but discourages moving away from it (Larkin et al., 2006). Revisiting the text clarified which themes did not predominate and could be put

aside although not permanently discarded, as this would not fit with IPA's idiographic nature. This is a delicate tightrope to walk as one embraces the interpretative element of IPA but also seeks to minimise the distance from the text as we develop our interpretation. Willig (2012) recognises this as a dilemma of the psychologist researcher who weighs the disadvantages of overtly psychological interpretation with using it as a means to understand beyond what one is being told. The themes that I embraced as master themes were then compiled into a cumulative table (Larkin et al., 2006) and linked to sub-themes and quotes, allowing for information to be presented in a simple form – an example of this step is attached. (*See appendix I*)

At this point - after analysing both the interview transcript and the diary, I concluded my analysis on the participant and moved onto the next (Smith, 2004). Although I had already transcribed the majority of interviews and diaries, being absorbed in analysing an individual's words and meanings had partially distanced me from other accounts. Smith et al. (2009) suggest attempting to bracket what you learnt through other accounts and coming to each new participant afresh whereas Smith and Osborn (2008) see both the choices of bracketing or using acquired knowledge as equally valid. I chose to go with the former as I felt it reflected more faithfully the commitment to idiographic element inherent in IPA - however this became increasingly difficult as I worked through the analysis of each participant, as impressions and themes became reinforced and previous observations came to mind. In view of this, I attempted to hold in mind that there was still a stage of analysis where I could assimilate this emergent information.

2. 13. 5. Analysis across cases

After concluding the individual analyses, I wrote out the themes for each participant and repeated the physical process of grouping linked concepts. Smith, Larkin and Flowers (2009) suggest that in samples of seven and over, master themes do not need to be present in all the participants but can be represented by as little as a third. I preferred to work with their recommendation that a major theme should be evident in at least half the sample so have only included master themes that were represented by at

least four of the seven participants. I created a table to reflect the frequency of a master theme and corresponding sub-themes amongst the participants *(see Appendix J)* in addition to an integrative table (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006) that linked the master themes to sub-themes and quotes, an example of which is attached to the appendices (*see Appendix K*).

But where does generalising fit with the prizing of individuality that characterises IPA? Although the commonalities are highlighted in tables that efficiently condense a mass of knowledge, the writing up of the analysis in IPA allows a space in which I was able to contemplate characteristics and meanings that were both individual or overlapping - this integration is key to the approach. Although the individual as a recognisable personality is minimised in IPA (Willig, 2012), the focus remains on their individual experience, rather than an abstract concept, and this element is underpinned by the use of quotes. IPA is a humanistic endeavour that never loses sight of the individual and the analysis section gave me space to address the individual expression of themes, as well as acknowledging the differences that had emerged within and between participants, embracing the contradictions inherent in the human condition. I recognise that the interpretations offered are just a few of the many possible interpretations, in accordance with my constructive-interpretivist stance (Ponteretto, 2005) and that the research continues to evolve in the reader's continued interpretation of my writings (Van Manen, 1990).

2. 14. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an integral part of a counselling psychology practice and the role of avoiding a static position, managing ones assumptions and opening oneself up to experience (Gadamer, 1996; Finlay 2003) is as relevant here as it is in therapeutic practice (Kasket, 2013). This is further supported by the assertion by Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) that owning one's perspective is a key guideline in qualitative research. Reflexivity can be pitched at many levels in research - Woolgar (1988) positions it on a continuum - but can never be static or completely achieved (Salzman,

2002). Finlay's (2008) description of reflexivity as a continual dance is evocative, mirroring the back and forth manoeuvres evident in the hermeneutic circle espoused by IPA (Smith, 2007; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Willig (2008) divides reflexivity in research into two categories: epistemological reflexivity, which tackles the assumptions and biases we bring to our research, and personal reflexivity which deals more with the connection between our work and its meaning to us.

I hope that the research diary I kept and the reflective notes I made immediately after each interview have helped contribute to a sense of perspective and reflexivity. Throughout the process, I have sought to remain open to the perspectives that are generated by the questions of my research supervisor as well as those that arose for me in therapy. As the research rests on my personal struggle to understand others attempting to make sense of their worlds, I needed to constantly question the meanings I uncovered - Morrow (2005) notes that awareness of subjectivity requires an ongoing commitment and should be embraced in the interests of fairness towards participants, research and readers. This is not only relevant in terms of the design and analysis, which was inevitably shaped by my assumptions, but also in my interactions with my participants where it would have been apparent in power differentials (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and in the recognition of how my own age, ethnicity, gender and class may have affected the research relationship.

My personal reflexivity has also had an important role to play in how my research topic emerged and progressed. The subject of ageing intrigued me for several reasons. I was born shortly after the end of the baby boom and am aware that, in some respects, my curiosity and fears about my own future have fuelled my interest. This "future" is far enough away to mute anxiety but not so distant as to be unimaginable and may have facilitated intersubjective recognition of some of my participant's experience. As a longitudinal observer of my parents and their peers, my interviews have partly reflected the conversations that I would love to have but which are subject to contextual and

social restraints and I have sometimes struggled to balance my original perceptions and observations with prioritisation of the individual nature of the experience. I am also fascinated by the management of transition - a concept I often come across in my practice - consequently, I felt I needed to be alert to the possibility of the interview drifting into therapy and to refocus myself on the research. I have also had to recognise my professional and personal investment in this as the culmination of years of study that have a marked impact on my family and I am aware that maybe this has affected some of the decisions I have made in regard to my research. Reflexivity can be frustrating - as demonstrated in Gruenberg's 1978 description of it as a double bind or Lynch's cybernetic looniness (2000) - but it has been an integral, essential and meaningful part of the research process for me.

2. 15. Trustworthiness

My IPA study consisted of analysing research interviews and diaries that were specifically generated for this study. Whilst I am unable and have no wish to claim generalisability, I hope the qualities of social validity, subjectivity and reflexivity that Morrow (2005) theorises underpin trustworthiness might characterise my research and I hope it will extend or deepen existing knowledge. I have not sought to ground my method in the more quantitatively appropriate qualities of reliability and validity, preferring to embrace Guba and Lincoln's 1985 concepts of dependability, credibility, confirmability and transferability. These are promoted through the transparency of the research process such as continuous researcher reflexivity - for instance, attention to one's own assumptions and striving to anchor analysis in the participant's own narrative (Madill, Jordan & Shirley, 2000) - as well as by careful documentation such as keeping a research diary (McLeod, 2001) and the careful notation of exclusions and editing to provide a paper trail. I trust that the design offers qualitative triangulation - also a consideration in credibility, dependability and confirmability (Krefting, 1991) in the form of depth by incorporating not only experience as relayed within the interview scenario but by written data generated outside it (Yardley, 2008) in the hope that "Engaging multiple methods….will lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction

of realities" (Golafshani, 2003, p.604). The diaries were included to work towards the concept of contextualist triangulation (Madill et al., 2000), which aims at "completeness not convergence" (p.10) and to allow participants to reflect on issues that we or they may have overlooked in the interview.

3. Analysis

3. 1. Overview

This section presents the analysis performed on the interview and diary data gathered from the participants resulting in the generation of three major themes that weave together the expressions of the participants with my own subjective interpretations. The first theme centres on the participants' perception that, whilst they possess a strong sense of self-knowledge, there is an awareness of transition - a feeling that something qualitatively different is about to be or has been embarked upon. This is expressed in various ways including awareness of loss, an appreciation of new roles, a sense of choice and opportunity but also a sense of fear and uncertainty. The second theme focuses on the tension between perceptions, assumptions and judgements of age - the interplay between external expectations and judgements and internal perceptions. This highlighted an ambivalence towards this life stage and was echoed in the way that participants might rail against the assumptions made about age, yet still make statements that associate it with negative concepts. The final theme concentrates on the sense of time limitation and the drive and opportunity to focus on activities and behaviours that offered meaning.

3. 2. Theme I: Something about this feels different

This theme focuses on an awareness that despite possessing a fairly stable sense of self, the participants are also conscious - in varying presentations and in varying depth - of a different quality to this period of life. For some of the women, this is tangible through the disappearance of the known - the realisation that familiar aspects of life are no longer there. For others the sense of difference is sometimes characterised by a sense of freedom and opportunity and experienced through attempts to create new structures and inhabit new roles. The transition appears to be perceived as more challenging and threatening to those who are at the beginning of the process or who

feel frustrated in their attempts to recast the way in which they wished to live. Relationships and sexuality also emerge as markers of change - longstanding marriages face the challenge of renegotiating domestic space and roles, often alongside a reassessment of how closeness and intimacy can be expressed. For those who are single, there is also a re-evaluation of the importance of and the qualities required for potential future relationships, influenced by the reduction in the power of sexual drive. Difference is also made salient in a more general physical sense with an increased awareness of bodily change. As well as recognising one's physicality as increasingly vulnerable and unreliable, this rouses fears of future dependency linked to both physical and cognitive impairment. Key to perceptions of difference are the means by which these are recognised - they can be apparent through a difference in outlook between generations or seen in the comparison with or the re-emergence of earlier self-constructions.

3. 2. 1. Disappearance of the known

For many of the participants there is an appreciation of loss, as familiar aspects of life appear to move away. For some, this has been experienced in the way that work roles altered prior to retirement. As Sonia remembers: *"But, it came to a stage that I was feeling more and more, more and more, more and more tired doing paperwork when I should be caring for ladies and gentlemen."* (Sonia, I, 26:16-18)

This suggests incremental change, emphasised by the repeated use of "more and more", that chipped away at the fulfilling elements of her job and reshaped it. The respect and warmth that Sonia held for her patients is implicit in her use of "ladies and gentleman" and contrasts with the impersonal nature of paperwork. Elizabeth experiences her loss in more organisational terms - retirement has meant that the familiar restrictions of the working day have disappeared, leaving her with a sense of being uncomfortably adrift in a new world:

> *Well, I never kind of wanted to do any other work on top of things so I'm sort*
> *of cut loose really, I ...it's a kind of strange feeling, I feel like I haven't got any*

> *boundaries now and....And I've started to go to bed really late and then get up really late and then feeling tired and…*(Elizabeth, I, 22: 15-23).

The sensation of the world moving onwards is also experienced by a participant who is still engaged and invested in work:

> *I noticed a few years ago that, um, one person I used to do a lot of work with died. Um, (laughing) 2 or 3 more retired so suddenly all the normal people I kind of rang up and said "Um, there's this interesting brief going around", said "`Well, you know, I'm dead, I've retired, I want to spend a bit more time with the grandchildren...And um, so professional peer groups have sort of disintegrated so that's kind of.... that's definitely an age thing. (Louisa, I, 11: 12-25)*

Louisa's attitude towards and investment in continued employment appears out of step with many of her contemporaries but for Alma, this sense of the unfamiliar is experienced in broader societal terms:

> *Um, yeah and I do sound old. But I probably felt that when I was younger as well. I thought you don't do that to people. You know you respect other people. Um.... I do feel it's quite an alien world actually. Um….(Alma, I, 21: 27-22:2)*

Disappearance is also noted through the loss of friends, acquaintances and family. Louisa is not anxious about mortality but observes the gathering speed of bereavements:

> *And felt more relaxed in spite of the fact that actually all sorts of traumatic things were happening like you know people were dying because you know, there's a bell curve about the death of your friends and relations and you know, I def... Hadn't been to many funerals before I was 40 but you know, I've been to an awful lot since then. (Louisa, I, 10:7-11:5)*

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I do think about death quite a bit as there has been a ripple of acquaintances who have died recently, some quite suddenly. I'm not anxious about it though, it simply spurs me on to get my "affairs in order" so have scheduled a review of our wills. (Helen, D, 1:3-6)

The increasing frequency of death meant that participants sometimes display a resignation and acceptance towards death that might have been more difficult when younger. However, this does not suggest immunity to loss for Helen, particularly where her family is concerned. The appreciation of the potential depth of loss is shown in her compassion for her sister and ailing nephew and its effect upon her:

And he's, he's very ill at the moment and so I've been sort of in contact with her, in the last week supporting her and if I allow myself to dwell on the tragedy that is waiting.... that we cannot avoid, that's when I will, I just kind of.... I just want to go and....sit in a dark corner and pull a duvet over my head and not have to face life. (Helen, I, 52:20-53:4)

Yeah because a lot of my friends - and again, you know, I might have felt differently about ageing if I was on my own. A lot of my friends are on their own.... And they, you know, lonely.... or more fearful.... or, um, don't have double...the double income….(Helen, I, 42:14-43:4)

The awareness of the protective factor of marriage/partnership and consequences of what the loss of this would mean is apparent in her comparison with friends and even Elizabeth, who is ambivalent about her marriage, recognises how it guards her against a sense of loneliness: *"You know, if I end up with Richard...that sometimes I feel very sad because I think that he'll die and then I'll think "Oh, I'll be on my own then" and what would that be like and you know."* (Elizabeth, I, 48:19-22). So whilst there is recognition

that accumulating loss is a feature of the current landscape and that there are ways to accommodate this, this does not diminish the anticipated effect of the loss of loved ones.

For Louisa, the sense of disappearance is characterised by a complex blending of the known and the unknown. Her description conveys different a sense of multiple rather than linear movement - rather like escalators or moving walkways running at different paces and in different directions. There is a slightly dreamlike quality that captures the dual nature of what is lost and what stays the same. This may be true throughout the lifespan but appears to be more pronounced in later life:

> *Actually walking around Crouch End which is a place I have known for 50 years...*
> *40 years, 45 years - there's quite a lot of people I would have...used to see on*
> *street corners are dead now, you know, so there's the...there's the thing about*
> *time passing and some of the population of your life moving away and that*
> *goes.... that goes for family and friends, that's a sort of ...It's kind of, it is a*
> *mortality thing perhaps not about death per se…(Louisa, I, 71:21-72:4)*

3. 2. 2. Changing roles: freedom, choice and responsibility for care

The perception that there is something qualitatively different about this period of life is not restricted to awareness of loss and disappearance - it is also notable for the emergence of new roles and developments that span the public and domestic sphere. One example of this is retirement, which can be perceived as the loss of employment or constructed as the embracement of a new role as a retiree. Christine notes: *"Yeah, quite exciting in a way. Um, yeah it is liberating to have those choices because you.... I feel that I haven't had...been in that situation before, really…"*(Christine, I, 4:13-16)*. She retired two years ago and welcomes this period in her life as different and stimulating, employing language that conveys that sense of eager anticipation and freedom. Semi-retirement also appears to be able to offer this sense of liberation, freeing one from the sense of drudgery particularly if you are fortunate enough to be selective about when you work:

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Yeah, I like it because now I kind of self-select. I just do the bits that I really like so that's really good. I work for them 10 days a month, 12 days a month...I've told them this month I'm going to hardly work for you so er…that's…(Helen, I, 33:22-25)

Freedom can be challenging as displayed in Elizabeth's struggle with the absence of boundaries, suggesting that she has yet to find an alternative rhythm and focus. Her description of a dream about trying on a dress that does not fit mirrors the sense of transition and reflects the need expressed in her narrative to find new ways of being that are better suited to her current context: "*You know so I've written down a dream about a dress that I put on and then I noticed that my boobs weren't filling it and I thought this is about age…*" (I, 53:27-29). However her attempts to fashion new structure and meaning are often frustrated by her multiple medical conditions: " *It sort of feels like I've got to say no to everything. I can't play the violin, I can't do anything….*"(I, 44:3-5)

The concept of choice also has resonance in terms of how one wishes to live and for Sonia, this has been a guiding principle throughout her life and one that she intends to continue to follow: "*And from my perspective, I am my age but I don't have to be in some ways but I can look at other people my age and they're wallowing in it…*"(I, 52:4-6)

For Janet, the choices of this stage of her life elicit a different response. She is just beginning to contemplate her future and finds the concept of moving away from or refashioning the known world of work overwhelming. In response to a question about how she feels about the future, she reveals a sense of trepidation about stepping into a new stage: "*Panicky. I can't imagine it at the moment. I can't imagine not working.*" (I, 8:28-29)

Another role emerging for some of the participants was that of being a grandmother, adding a new and valued dimension to their lives - note Helen's pride in describing herself as a grandparent: *"And we've got, and at the ripe old age of 65, I became a grandmother."* (I, 2:14-15) However, despite the role being welcomed for what it adds to life, this emblem of age can sometimes be a more ambivalent experience. Although she enjoys many aspects of this new relationship, Janet struggles with what it means about her and how it conflicts with her own self-concept: *"I think: it was a great shock becoming a grandmother. Much as I love my granddaughter, I can't actually believe I am a grandmother. Maybe I'm just in denial about getting older, I think, "* (I, 5:18-21).

Being a grandparent also links into how caring for others also continues to offer an important role in the lives of these women. Often a feature in earlier life through work or personal demands, the role of carer might now evolve to include taking responsibility for grandchildren or parents:

> *And I mean business business, not anything else and I, yes, I don't want to predecease my mother as I'm looking after her and nobody else is going to be able to sort out stuff I'm doing so.... that's kind of the practical, the practicalities. (Louisa, I, 25:22-26:2)*

For Louisa, the role of carer for her mother is extremely important to her and one she takes seriously. However, care for another often comes at a cost and for Louisa, her role has been made more demanding and stressful by the inter-sibling struggle over who should hold financial and legal responsibility for her mother: *"Well, it would have been.... it was mostly that we wouldn't have been able to look after her the way that she needed to be looked after. "* (I, 39:2-4)

> *And so, that was.... that I would say was by far the most stressful sort of thing that has happened to me in my life...never.... the cancer was nothing compared to that. (Louisa, I, 36:21-23)*

Christine's care is focused on her availability to her children and grandchildren whilst Sonia seems unsure as to what form her involvement with her grandchildren might take and how it will be received in the future:

> *How I will feel in 10 years time...I don't know what the future holds. I don't know. Um, I've got grandchildren who are 10 down to 4, um; I'm hoping that some of my life skills will be of use to them. Probably not, they'll be saying "Silly old woman" (laughs) (I, 60:12-16)*

For Elizabeth, there is an expansion of care - she is protective of her younger son who has learning difficulties and still lives at home but she has also assumed emotional responsibility - and in one case, legal responsibility - for her brothers following the death of her mother. The expansion of caring responsibility is not the only concern - she is unsure how she will manage as she becomes more debilitated: *"And I think that you know I overwork really. Because I sort of take everything on my shoulders and my shoulders are now injured, you know."* (I, 43:18-21)

> *And my youngest brother's in care and I have to go and see him and I'm sort of and I feel like I'm the mother of the...of my own past family and my one now. You know. (Elizabeth, I, 46:14-20)*

3. 2. 3. Intimate relationships

Difference and change is also perceived in terms of existing intimate relationships and in the contemplation of future ones. For those currently in relationships, that in our sample took the form of heterosexual marriage, there is a clear sense of redefining domestic space and roles particularly when the couples had formerly led busy lives outside the home as Sonia shows: *"Now when he was first retired, I was working full time, um, and so it's only really in the last couple of years if you like that we've lived together (laughs)."*(I, 40:8-10)

For Sonia and her husband, being consistently at home together is a novel experience in their marriage as he had frequently worked away from home and she had been occupied with a demanding job. The challenge of this novel experience is compounded by another feature - her husband's increasing dependency. Although Sonia had worked in a caring profession, the disparity in age and their divergent attitudes to physical ageing means that the nature of their relationship is changing - a situation she describes as *"annoying"* (I, 41:5) and further reflects: *"Um, I think it's becoming, in a way, I'm turning into a nurse to my husband…"*(I, 38:18-19).

For other participants, there is the sense that domestic territory is being renegotiated to allow for both companionship and space:

> *So um, yeah I mean it's nice in a way and I think, as I say, he complains.... he's only been retired for a year, well is it a year? Yeah, just over a year. He would say...he complains that I'm out all the time and it's all "I retired to be with you and you're never in" I mean it's only joking but I think because he's.... I could be at home all day in my sewing studio and he's down in his garage.... And we never see each other anyway, so...If we're both at home at the same time, unless we're doing something like maybe we sometimes do the garden….(Christine, I, 22:26-23:7)*

> *But I'm very aware that both my husband and I are extremely happy with just the two of us in the house and hours will go by and we won't speak but there's that sort of together alone stuff, that I would say is increasing. (Helen, I, 50:14-18)*

The relationship may include a reassessment of sexual connection whether through ill health or menopause. Helen's husband had suffered a serious illness and the nature of their intimacy has evolved to reflect this, without damaging their relationship:

> *You know there's not that much vigorous sex going on but because our history of*

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having had that, I think we've had a really good innings and we, we absolutely just take so much pleasure in just lying in bed together... Physical intimacy, we have a lot of you know, he'll ....we'll put the world to rights with me lying with my head on his shoulder, um, you know and if something…if…if it ends in a sex act, that's a bonus. (I, 35:19-36:5)

For Elizabeth, whose ambivalence towards her marriage is apparent throughout her interview and diary entries, the difference of this stage might lie in her increasing resignation to staying in the marriage because of what she might lose by choosing to leave: *"And sometimes I think…. and sometimes think: "Oh I'll leave him. I've had enough." You know but I guess that's an awful effort (laughs) and I think one or two...and we were happy in New Zealand, you know…"* (I, 42:25-28)

I would be much worse off with my meagre pension, of course, and Luke would suffer because there would be less to give him. If we split up we would have to split the house and it would mean us both living in small places. (Elizabeth, D, 13:9-12)

Unattached participants displayed ambivalent feelings towards potential future relationships although none completely dismissed the possibility. Both Louisa and Alma referred directly to the loss of sexual drive as a motivating force: *"Erotic sensation. Because that's all gone now. (laughs) That's the thing with age, you just - the eroticism, it's just not there."* (Alma, I, 37:18-20)

However, there were other considerations that restrained them from the active pursuit of relationships such as increased self-awareness:

Been there before & can see the inequality in relationships now. Couldn't see that when younger - so age does have some positives. I feel I now have some idea of what is not good for me and where I will not go even if it means I'm on my own.

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(Alma, D, 2:9-14)

For Janet, reluctance is partially generated from a more difficult source, that of negative self-appraisal:

Um, yeah - more I'm not interested, who knows? Yes, I'm not closed to it and I'm not against it and I'm not feeling bitter that...but I suppose some part of me, if I'm honest, does sometimes look at myself in the mirror and think: "No, well you're probably a bit too old now." Mmmm. Who's going to want someone looking like me? (laughs ruefully) (Janet, I, 27:7-17)

3. 2. 4. Physical change and fears of dependency

The conflicting feelings engendered by physical appearance are addressed in a later theme but physical alteration can also be noted in the awareness of and increase in physical challenge. Sometimes this is observed through low-level depreciation in strength and dexterity:

So it doesn't, it doesn't really feel any different but there are times when you get that cold reality that you're not quite as agile as you were.... Though I still run, I still exercise, um, opening a jar suddenly becomes a challenge and then it's frustrating because you feel that it's due to your age. Or I do. That I haven't got that same strength for example. (Janet, I, 5:26-6:6)

For Sonia, awareness emerges through an increasing list of physical problems that require treatment combined with an intellectual appreciation of what is happening:

I find it a bit annoying - I've had cataracts, I've had a detached retina, um, really bad one but I've been really lucky (bangs table). When I come back from my next holiday, I'm having floaters taken out of this eye...because...bad floaters in this eye. Um, I understand what's happening. Yeah, the ends of the DNA are basically wearing out and was explained to me as ...as it's a shoelace and the plastic bits

at the end get shorter and shorter and shorter as you get older.... And as you get older...so that the DNA in each cell doesn't replicate quite perfectly and you start getting all these.... various things go wrong with you. So in one way, I accept it because I inte...(slowly) intellectualise it…(Sonia, I, 45:4-46:2)

For another participant, the increase in the number and type of physical ailments has become difficult to manage and places limitations on what she feels able to achieve. In addition, Elizabeth has to deal with the effects and management of chronic pain:

She told me about her physical problems and I shared mine. I told her that I tolerated the pain well for a while, subdued myself to it, but after a time, I just wanted it to fuck off, and it made me irritable. (Elizabeth, D, 9:5-8)

She experiences a sense of frustration on two other levels - primarily, the amount of time it takes to manage her conditions, leaving little time for any of the more pleasurable retirement plans: *"Just when you have got time to do the things you didn't have time for, then you find your body gives out."* (D, 11:7-8)

In addition, Elizabeth is struggling to accept that her co-morbid conditions render medical solutions more complicated and there is a sense that her body is working against her:

It's stopping you which...I'd like to go on walks but I've got arthritis in my toe and um, I've been a bit scared of.... like I went and had an injection in it and um, could have an operation but it means that I'd be.... it would be a two and a half month recovery, maybe longer and then I'd have to use crutches and I can't use crutches now and I can't bear the thought of…(Elizabeth, I, 44:15-21)

This inability to trust one's body and the resulting sense of vulnerability is also captured in Louisa's description of how this affects her everyday life:

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Yes and you get sort of worried about if you did trip over, um, you wouldn't just hurt, you might well break something you wouldn't have broken a few years ago, you know um...You know, you wouldn't fall, you wouldn't fall in a sense, you'd bounce but, um, and that I think is (pause).... that's something...and that does kind of affect the way that you ...yeah, I wouldn't.... I'll run up stairs but I wouldn't run downstairs in case I missed my footing because that would be scary (laughs). (Louisa, I, 70:13-22).

The recognition of these changes also raises fears for the participants in terms of anticipating future dependency. All had made explicit or implicit expressions of the importance of independence in their narratives. Janet is blunt about how pivotal it is to her:

Yes, because I think I'm fiercely independent - this is the problem. And that's part of the reason I have always wanted to work is that because I wanted to be...I wanted to have that independence. (Janet, I, 15:18-21)

Louisa's embracing of adult independence and responsibility is a reminder that when contemplating this age group, the focus is often on "older" meaning that the "adult" part, pertaining to one's maturity and capability, is forgotten: *" So there is the point where mortality is still there but you know.... I think I, I do actually think adulthood beats childhood into a cocked hat. I think being an adult...I think being grown up is good. "* (I, 77:14-17)

However, the reverse side of the taste for independence is the fear of dependence, which was expressed in the apprehension of physical and cognitive impairment. Helen, who is generally content about where she finds herself in life, identifies physical deterioration as a primary fear. The strength of her assertion that no one could fail to be afraid of the prospect and the use of the word scary makes it feel like a solid and

immovable prospect: *"I...I think that the thing...people say they're not afraid of the physical side of ageing, then I think they're telling lies, you know. That I think is what is…What's scary."* (I, 21:2-9)

There is anxiety about cognitive impairment, particularly forms of dementia, which some participants have witnessed in their own family as in the case of Alma: *"You know and if I go completely gaga, I want to go happy gaga. Not gaga like my mother in anxiety."* (I, 54:30-55:1). Others relate instances where their memory has let them down and they have found themselves unable to laugh it off as they might have done in the past, suggesting a sense of anxiety or shame about what the oversight might mean. Helen reveals: *"I have daft old women moments – like finding an envelope of money and not knowing where the heck it came from. Eventually I remember – so I don't tell a soul about the not remembering."* (D, 2:3-5) For Elizabeth, forgetfulness is more present and problematic, compounding the sense of frustration and being overwhelmed that she feels in her current life:

> *Always a bit chaotic. I feel the need now to put my house in order. Get rid of the things that confuse me and make me stressed. I need this as my memory is not as good as it was, and it is intensely frustrating to lose things and have to spend so long finding things. (D, 5:19-6:21)*

These concerns are often linked with those surrounding the provision of care - a future Christine hints at but is unprepared to waste time worrying over in the present. Despite their involvement in the care of others, there is sometimes a question mark over who will perform this role for the participants. Elizabeth already has a desire for this:

> *And it would be nice for someone to look after me, you know. So that I can just sort of, you know, be a bit more relaxed really, And I could get better and then do the things that I want to do, you know, that I would like to be able to do.*
> *(Elizabeth, I, 46:17-25)*

Alma is not concerned about care in her current context but is aware that, despite her friends rallying round when she was diagnosed with cancer, she has no one to step in and help her if she became more permanently dependent. This, along with her mother's experience, heightens her anxieties around a potentially bleak future:

> *Saw L and we had a talk about the treatment of the elderly & old. She feels her father was not looked after properly in hospital. The same things happened to her father that happen to ma - dehydrated, food taken away from them because there was nobody there to feed them. Thank whosoever, her father had her & her siblings, Ma had Muna & I - but....who will I have? If this happens to me I will be dehydrated - I will starve. (Alma, D, 6:6-14)*

Janet's clear expression of the importance of independence means the opposite state is difficult for her to contemplate. Through work she comes into contact with geriatric health provision and describes witnessing their dependency as *"frightening"* (I, 14:28-15:7), leading her to wonder about her involvement with care:

> *So yes there's something in me that is very independent and I don't want to lose that. And I wonder because I.... my work is to give care and to give support...But obviously, I don't really want that.... I don't want that back. I don't want someone to do that for me. (I, 15:26-16:3)*

The spectre of dependency also contributed to a heightened sense of financial pressure. Louisa is wrestling with arranging the financial concerns and care of her mother but she is also aware of time pressure in relation to herself:

> *Um, about ummm, wondering whether I'm, you know...you know, whether I'm going to end up with Alzheimer's like my mother in which case how many years have I got.... to earn enough money to get a carer to look after me. (Louisa, I, 7:19-22)*

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The fear of insufficient funds also has a wider impact in scaling down choices and increasing anxiety. Janet recognises that her current pension provision would not permit her fantasy retirement and vacillates between avoidance and action: *"Um, there's the ideal of having enough money to retire and being able to travel but that in reality is not going to happen. So I think, I think... (whispers) I try not to think about it too much. Mmm"* (I, 13:14-18)

> *But it's also - and this is an interesting fact - it's made me think about maybe being a little bit more grown up about some things. So I've actually written to Belgium where I worked for 10 years and said: "Hey, hang on - have I got a pension there? I know damn...I know I paid into one" and so I'm putting a little bit of my house in order in that sense.... And I thought: mmm, maybe I should do a plan for the future, financial plan for the future so...which I haven't really done. Um, mmm. (Janet, I, 29:22-28)*

3. 2. 5. The means of perceiving change

The data also offered insights into how the women detected difference through comparison. Sometimes this was through the perception of generational difference - feeling distinctive in outlook from those outside one's peer group. Janet is surprised by her daughter's playful assumption that she had been on a one night stand (D, 5:20-30) whilst Louisa is baffled by a younger generation who do not seem keen to embrace independence and continue to live at home: *"But you know, never mind, sort of…and they're still being sort of looked after and bailed out by their parents. That I find absolutely extraordinary but it seems to be quite normal"* (I, 77:1-4)

This perception of difference between groups can be strengthened by identification with one's peers - a sense of feeling comfortable about where one finds oneself:

> *But as far as the ageing goes, I've got a lot of things in my life about being older that are good and that provide me with structure and with.... I have a life as an*

older person that I like and I enjoy. And I'm very grateful for that and I'm aware of

that and appreciate that. (Helen, I, 20:22 - 21:2)

Alma also recognises that her generation has an advantage that younger people don't - financial muscle: *I think we're pretty powerful - baby boomers are a powerful lot because there's lots of us and we've got money.* (I, 13:25-27)

There is also an appreciation of difference through comparison between how the participants saw their younger selves and how they perceive themselves now. Sonia acknowledges that the assumptions she has had to fight throughout life have shaped her outlook and self-belief and Alma contrasts current self-acceptance with her younger self:

> *Er, I'm fairly comfortable with - up here (taps head) - with ageing in that (pause) I*
> *know more about what I want and what I don't want and what I won't accept now*
> *which I….think I accepted a load of crap when I was younger. (Alma, I, 13:8-12)*

For Louisa and Helen, a sense of a differentiation from life in earlier or middle adulthood is expressed in the form of circularity, where they recognise much earlier incarnations of themselves in the person they currently feel themselves to be. Louisa links this to menopausal change: *" It's like being about 9 again, it's sort of - I don't know - 40 years of hormonal, er, insanity suddenly stops "* (I, 12:8-10)

Helen also experiences this sensation of noticing difference by recognising re-emergence and welcomes this as an indication of being more fully in touch with herself:

> *I'm aware of a "return to self" – I have become the person I was always meant to*
> *be (hope that makes sense) – having gone full circle, I again recognise the "me" I*
> *was as a child, and I like her. I'm aware of my essence. (Helen, D, 2:13-15)*

For both these participants, this is not expressed as a desire to identify with a younger self but more an acknowledgement that aspects of oneself that have been buried or lost over time now have the opportunity to re-emerge and contribute to the sense of self in their current context.

3. 3. Theme II: Perceptions, assumptions and judgements about age

Another theme apparent in the women's experience is how internal self-perceptions and attitudes are affected by the perceived judgement of others. Whilst the participants often displayed a strong sense of self, they also appeared to be vulnerable to the effects of stereotyping and the judgement of others leading to uncomfortable sensations of ambivalence and dissonance. For some, the rejection of stereotypes also roused a sense of confusion about expectations and models of older adulthood. Whilst some of these perceived judgements were resented and railed against, the participants' own negative assumptions could sometimes be observed in the passing comments that linked age with pessimistic outcomes and concepts and this imbued alteration in physical appearance with a deeper and more distressing meaning.

3. 3. 1. Internally generated perceptions of age

Among the participants there was a sense that age brought a level of self-knowledge and acceptance: "*But I haven't got any need now to educate myself. I've done that - been there, done that, got the t-shirt. Um, and I am who I am - insecurities, chameleon shell and a brain somewhere. Not bad for a Kent girl."* (Sonia, I, 60:20-23)

Sonia's realisation that the need to prove herself has diminished hints at a sense of perspective, which Louisa links with traditional notions of age and wisdom. The image of the wise older woman is a staple figure in myths and stories throughout the centuries - one of the few positive clichés attributed to this age group - which may be why Louisa sounds somewhat self-conscious about her assertion: *"Um, so you know, sounds a bit pompous but I also think about the getting of wisdom without...actually being...realising that's what you've...that's what's happened".* (I, 9:13-19)

However, despite this confident sense of self-knowledge, the participants' responses become more conflicted when asked about themselves in relation to age. Internal perception of their actual age sometimes diverged from their assumptions about age, hinting at a sense of dissonance but for other participants there are more definitive statements about the age they feel themselves to be: *"How do I feel about being nearly 60 years old? Unbelieving I guess. I am still 22 years in my heart & head."* (Janet, D, 1: 4-7)

> *Because generally when I'm at work and I'm mixing with people, I find myself ageless in a sense….(Janet, I, 3:31-4:2)*

Janet's internal age clock is set back in her twenties, leaving her with a sense of disbelief about her chronological age and this is strengthened by her perceived irrelevance of age in the workplace. It may also be reinforced by the subjective meaning of age - for some, such as Elizabeth, it is interwoven in every aspect of life making conceptualisation challenging: *"Well, I think it's very difficult to sa...to talk about old age without talking.... because everything that happens to you is about your old age and who you are now. It is, you know."*(I, 48:12-15)

Sonia recognises a mixture of influences but prioritises the impact of the psychological: *"Ageing is physical, psychological and societal."*(D, 1:12)

> *You know the, the DNA might be crumbling at the ends and you start having physical problems but I think age is a mental, a mental being rather than a ...a physical being. (Sonia, I, 7:23-25)*

She argues that her life experience has taught her that there is always the element of choice available in how we choose to live: *"The expectation that you have to behave your age. How stupid you have to fight it all the way. The mind, the body and the*

*attitude to both. "(*D, 2:11-13)

Other participants acknowledge this element of challenge inherent in ageing. Their narratives had outlined resourceful and resilient responses to stressful situations and examples of how they chose to conceptualise difficulties, offering an idea of how they might face their current contextual challenges. *" I've had lots of practice in, in dealing with transition so ageing is just another one of those…."* (Helen, I, 55:12-14)

Participant's perceptions of age were also drawn from comparison with others. For Louisa, the realisation that those who are younger now sport symbols of ageing gives pause for thought and some amusement:

> *And er, I was..I've got my nephew living with me - one of my many nephews - living with me at the moment (laughs) and I.... the other thing I notice is that, you know, I.... once they were little, once they were (gestures at low level with her hand) and now they're young adults (whispers) He's going bald (laughter). He doesn't know that he's going bald; he thinks that he's just getting, receding like that but you know, I can see that it's receding there as well. I think, it's a bit like a country and western song - you know, like there's probably one where you know you're getting old when your toy-boy goes grey. (Louisa, I, 72:22-73:8)*

Sonia, too, feels the passing of time by comparing herself to the others around her or through the observation that her daughters are now reaching their middle years: *"And my daughters who are now in their 40s.... One's 43 and one's 40, um, sort of I'm astounded they're in their 40s."* (I, 49:8-13)

Janet uses comparison with her peers but perceives them as looking younger than she does - suggesting that her appraisal of her own looks is negatively weighted. *"Great weekend at cousins place. Him and his wife have turned 60 years old. Of course to me no one looks 60. EXCEPT ME IN THE MIRROR! "(*D, 5:6-9)

The sense of "not good enough" through comparison is echoed in Elizabeth's comparison of herself with a new band member. However Helen uses comparison with her peers to her advantage, concentrating on her strengths:

Quite happy with it. Yes…Yeah, yeah, you know I er.... I mean everybody would like to have less of a double chin or not everybody but a lot of women of my age or um, thing but again, you know my Mum had very good skin and I'm aware that compared to some of my friends, I'm lucky. Again, you know I'm quite unlined, um comparatively. I could be a lot worse because I lived in Australia I lived on the beach and went to the beach and I do have a lot of sun damage but I'm not.... I'm much more careful these days. (Elizabeth, I, 22:7-19)

3. 3. 2. The judgement of others: Institutionalised stereotyping

Most of the participants recount experiences of stereotyping or discrimination associated with age - an awareness that you are being categorised by others with scant attention paid to the individual nature of human existence. For some, the sense of stereotyping is societal and institutionalised. Christine is animated about the patronising nature of an NHS campaign:

It's like NHS...I think "What a waste of money" You know, it's like saying "Don't go to A & E, just go to your pharmacy, you don't need to clog up the doctors". I thought well if you are under 60 and under the weather is it ok to go to A & E? You know what's that, it's so insulting and patronising and what a waste of money to spend on all those posters and leaflets and things….(Christine, I, 41:3-10)

She feels that the situation is complicated by outdated bureaucratic assumptions of older adults as a homogenous group - a view shared by Sonia who has spent a lifetime overcoming others' limited expectations of herself:

But I think people are getting younger with each generation but statistics and

insurances and perceptions of people haven't caught up. I still think a lot of 30

and 40 year olds would actually perceive somebody of my age of being old

(emphasises the word). (Sonia, I, 48:25 - 49:1-4)

I'm different. I can remember my grandmother being 65...Sitting in a chair in the

corner of our living room as a tiny little old lady.... And her health probably wasn't

as good as mine because.... She was born in the 1890s. Um, she didn't have

the.... didn't have all the medication and the treatment that's been available to us.

(Sonia, I, 48:8-25)

Helen is generally comfortable with being identified with her peer group but she too

baulks at ticking the age box on forms. The dislike is not only grounded in the finality of

it being the last box on the list but also because of the potential breadth of the group: *"I*

don't like ticking the last box (Age: 65+) on the list of age groups on most forms!

Especially because they are usually open ended." (D, 1: 10-11)

3. 3. 3. Judgement of others: Examples in everyday life

For Sonia there is an appreciation that age may be yet another struggle to be seen for

who she really is. She expresses a hope that she will be able to be perceived more

holistically but she recognises and has personal experience of the impact of other's

perceptions, acknowledging why the judgement of others is so powerful: *"Age matters*

because how other people perceive you rather than how you perceive yourself." (I,

8:4-5)

Um within months of retiring, um, I was in a discussion with a social worker and

my opinion had no value at all….Because I was being seen as a retired older

person rather than a professional. (Sonia, I, 8:23 - 9:4)

Louisa is quite content to identify with her peer group but worries that her identity as an

older adult might work against her in employment terms, despite anti-discrimination

legislation:

And so, I don't um, so ...and they have their...they have of course their policy preference for, I mean, the age of discrimination stuff's gone so, you know, they can't chuck me out in three years time when I am 65. Just because I'm 65...but they are actively looking for some younger, not young tutors, but younger.
(Louisa, I, 61:10-18)

Helen also relates an example of being overlooked as a result of age and gender but feels the depersonalisation of the stereotype protects her from being perturbed by it. Her comfortable acceptance of age enables to laugh about certain assumptions:

Um and…and um, the other thing that we sometimes laugh about is er, my husband and I.... is ...younger members of our family, not our own children because they know us well enough obviously, um but um, young nieces and nephews will come and ...they come and visit us on a Sunday afternoon in a sort of duty bound way, bring a cake for the old folk which we recognise that we might have done at one time and then we'll chuckle because what they don't know is that we want to go and get into bed and have an afternoon session.(laughs)
(Helen, I, 24:17-23)

For Helen, this sense of being at ease with herself means, the judgement of others can also occasionally be received favourably - Helen records in her diary how she feels better equipped at this age to take on board the compliments of others: " *I describe myself, um, I.... and because I pay more attention these days to what people say about me and I'm perhaps more able to accept, er, things, compliments really I suppose…"* (I, 6:2-5).

3. 3. 4. The judgement of others: Physical appearance

For Alma and Janet, the judgement of others is connected explicitly to physical appearance and conveyed as a painful experience suggesting that identification as an older female adult carries negative and unwanted subtexts. Alma's description of how it

has affected her relationship choices is particularly poignant: *"Maybe I was in it because I didn't want to be seen as that sad old girl on her own."*(I, 34:1-2)

> *And we did have a little fling. But I couldn't hack it because of the age gap. I really couldn't hack it because of the age gap because I thought I didn't want to be standing next to him and people think: Is she your mother? (Alma, I, 15:4-8)*

She connects the words "sad" and old", playing into to a polarised view of lonely older adulthood. This is particularly interesting when contrasted with her view that she is no longer prepared to compromise in the way she has in the past in order to embark upon or maintain a relationship. It is also notable that Alma's experience is filtered through the presumed perceptions of others and this external locus of evaluation contrasts with the self-awareness and understanding she displays elsewhere in her transcript.

> *Took bus today to Waterloo in the morning -8.30. Was offered seat! Now these are the moments that hit home. Standing there minding my own business feeling ageless. Then WAAH! (Janet, D, 3:26-31)*

Although Janet depicts her experience in comic terms, there is still the sense of unwelcome intrusion - the "minding my own business" sets the reader up to brace oneself, as if an assault is about to happen and Janet's sense of shock and despair seems to echo this**.**

3. 3. 5. How the judgement of others affects judgement of self: Negative age-related assumptions

Physical appearance - a means of identifying age - becomes suffused with meaning if it conflicts with internal perception and can lead to a sense of dissatisfaction and vulnerability:

> *Had hair cut & sat in hairdressers' chair in front of a long mirror: really, really looked my age & some! . Couldn't see that clearly without glasses but saw my mother's face in mine & with hair (thin hair) pulled back looked so old. Hated it - well, disliked it. Why? Because it was just not a pretty sight. I looked ugly. (Alma,*

D, 4:7-13)

For Alma, looking her age is unwanted and reinforces the impression of something unconnected with her internal self-concept. Although the use of the word "hated" is amended to dislike, there is still a strong sense of dissonance - a forceful rejection of this image of oneself, emphasised by the use of the world "ugly". She explains very clearly why someone else's perception of her as an older woman is so painful and why she tries to avoid this:

> *Um (pause) I'd like to say that I'm comfortable with the ...the wrinkles and the, you know, the ventriloquist dummy chin (indicating with her hands) but I'm not, I'm not. Um, if I'm honest, I'm not and yeah, I do use creams and I don't want to be seen as an old woman and I think it's a...and in our society, there's no value to age. There really isn't any value to age. (Alma, I, 13:18-25)*

> *Because I'd like to say it doesn't mean anything anyway but it does. I mean I might see myself as sexually redundant but I don't want other people to see that. You know. (Alma, I, 16:21-24)*

She recognises that there are associations with age that she can intellectually reject but which still wound her emotionally and this mirrors the contradiction of feeling comfortable with oneself and yet being vulnerable to the gaze of others. Whether this is learnt through personal experience or absorbed through pervasive messages in society, Alma acknowledges that she is not as free to think about ageing as she wishes: *"I also um, you know, I realise that I'm conditioned."* (I, 14:30-31)

Janet, too, prefers to work with the images engendered by internal reference and chooses a policy of avoidance of external contradiction of these wherever possible. She describes her disdain for expectations to look a certain way and her continued resistance to being sold expensive anti-ageing face creams but these portrayals

conflict with her reaction to catching sight of herself: *"So I avoid photographs like the plague because when I see that person on the photograph, that is not the person that I'm seeing in my head."* (I, 20:3-5) Louisa appears fairly sanguine about her physical appearance but acknowledges this is partly due to a level of self-delusion and partly because she has limited interest in attracting a partner. However, even she reports moments that give pause for thought:

> *Um, only when I look at photographs of myself and think: "Shit" (laughs). Um, because I think I kind of have the ...the opposite of that kind of body dysmorphia. I think I look like I looked about 20 years ago and yes, on a good day in the right light, I sort of I look like ...in my mirror in my hall which is really badly lit, er...And also I've got sort of, it's like the cataracts soft focus everything. I know that I don't actually look like I think I look but I'm quite happy ...to think I look like that, you know (laughs) but um.... I'm not trying to pull you see so I'm now not particularly bothered. I just, um...I ...there are bits that, you know, there are slightly...and I'm slightly horrified by them you know. (Louisa, I, 65:5-21).*

Christine shares her perception that, as well as opportunity and choice, age is characterised by decay and decline:

> *As I say, you can't change, you can make the best of yourself I suppose and um, not be confined by stereotypes of what you should be I suppose as an older person.... But that doesn't mean fighting...I mean I don't believe in fighting, you can't do very much - I mean ok you can look after your skin, that's fine. Um, and ageing...yeah it's got quite a negative connotations about sort of, slowly falling apart I suppose. Um, I guess if you look after your health and care about your appearance then all those things you can make the best of… a bad job if you like. (Christine, I, 30:32-31:17)*

The use of language such as " falling apart" and "best of…a bad job" depicts ageing as

an undesirable situation and has resonance with her oft-stated determination to live in the moment because of what the future might bring. Avoidance, ambivalence and negative associations with age can also be seen in other the responses of other participants. As we have seen, Janet is often uncomfortable identifying with her chronological age - here, she light-heartedly acknowledges her ambivalence: *"A profitable day and finally feel I can achieve this MASTERS Degree. Also proud to be doing it at 60 yrs. How contrary we are. Happy to use my age to get more praise!! Shameful."* (D, 3:16-21) The ingrained nature of ageist sentiment can even be glimpsed in the statements of the participants who appear relatively unmoved by the judgement of others on age use language that hints at this Helen equates sadness and the weight of the world with the sense of being (considerably) older - as if being a centenarian might be an oppressive and restrictive experience:

> *I'm aware when tragedy strikes, um, I have to guard against it because in an instant everything can be stripped away from me and I can feel absolutely burdened by everything that's every happened to me in my life and, and, and I can feel 100 years old. You know...(Helen, I, 50:25-51:5)*

3. 3. 6. Ageing without a roadmap

So, for some of the other participants, the perceptions of others overwhelm the comfortable self-concept that allows them to function in the world and instead tap into the fears and vulnerabilities that lie beneath the surface. The rejection of the stereotype can also raise possible confusion about how one is meant to be. Janet recognises that she has always discovered her ambitions by first understanding what she did not wish to be: *"You were going to be married by 22 and have your first child by 23, for example. And I did not want that. I did not know what I wanted to do but I knew what I didn't want to be."* (I, 31:25-21:1) This causes her to wonder about the certainties and expectations that shaped earlier generations of women lived and how her generation can begin to make sense of who they will be as older adults:

Sometimes wonder about becoming a grandmother. My mother embraced her

age- the perms, the grey hair. Was so happy to be a grandmother, is it

generational? Are we the "baby boomers" so very different? Dare I go grey? NO.

(Janet, D, 3:4-12)

Sonia, too, voices confusion about who she is meant to be in this new world,

particularly where she sits within the foursome that includes herself, her husband, her

sister and brother-in-law - all of whom are older than her:

Observed Freda, DH and Bill being aged. Although I am 9 years younger than

any of them I felt a great deal younger then them. Almost like I had to be the

responsible parent to them! Is there an aspect where the child becomes the

parent? Am I the child? (Sonia, D, 2: 13-17)

Sonia explicitly distances herself from her perception of her own grandmother but her

rejection of emulating a stereotype means she is out of step with the others, even

allowing for the fact that they are older than she is. The freedom to reject assumptions

may also mean one is forced to work harder to create a life that makes sense.

3. 4. Theme III: Time limitation and increased emphasis on meaning and fulfilment

Given that the average life expectancy for 65-year-old women in London is 21.9 years

(Office of National Statistics, 2015b), it is maybe unsurprising that many of the

participants display heightened awareness of the limitations of time, producing a desire

to live in the present and focus on meaningful activity. This may be facilitated by the

development of perspective coinciding with a period of free time and opportunity. For

some this takes the form of curiosity and adventure whilst for others, new

accomplishments are pursued. For all the participants, connection - whether it was with

the world, family or friends - was deemed important and could be displayed through

chosen behaviour and different levels of relationships as well as being characterised by

a softer, kinder attitude towards others. The sense of time passing and the focus on the

meaning could also indicate an appreciation of the need for letting go. This was expressed in various ways and was linked with the ties that needed to be relinquished in order to live in a different way.

3. 4. 1. Time limitation and living in the present

Among the participants there is a sense that there is less time ahead than there is behind them. When this sentiment is attached to concrete aspects of life, such as making enough money to survive or holding onto cognitive or physical faculties, it appears to promote a need to plan for the future as in the case of Louisa's attempts to make enough money to pay for future needs. However, when the sense of time limitation is connected to more philosophical musings, it finds expression in enjoying the moment and making the most of the present.

> *And even if it's not doing...I mean this is what I think is quite good, it's a good thing that we try and do as much as we can with these years that we've got now because, you know, as I said: "Who knows what's round the corner anyway?' We could, you know, sort of get infirm in some way and not be able to do it so.... this is why I say you should live for the present, the moment and not put things off that you feel like doing. (Christine, I, 31:33-32:20)*

Alma feels that, having recognised the feelings that have challenged her throughout her life, she does not wish to waste more of her time on them: *"And it maybe that, you know, the realisation that you haven't got that much time here - what is the point of being miserable? There's no bloody point."*(I, 44:28-30)

Helen, too, embraces the sentiment of living in the present, referring to it several times during the course of her interview and diaries. It is a strategy that allows her to navigate life feeling blessed: *"Happiness is wanting what you have, like my brother says."* (I, 47:8-9)

3. 4. 2. Time limitation and letting go

Another apparent effect of time limitation is the realisation that in order to focus on what matters, there may be a need to let go of what ceases to be relevant. A sense of impermanence may fuel the emphasis on living in the present but also entails finding a way to separate from the past as demonstrated by the ability of Christine and Alma to let go of formerly satisfying careers and embrace retirement. Both Sonia and Louisa acknowledge a Buddhist influence on the way they think. Louisa recognises it has allowed her to take a more flexible approach to her place in the world:

> *Um, (long pause)….impermanence, you know, yes. Nothing, nothing is permanent. And...I've been thinking about this since I was , ever since I was about ....I was sharing lodgings when I was doing my A levels. I went to a 6th form college and was sharing lodgings with somebody who became rather a full on Buddhist while we were there.... And although I've only ever been a...sort of fellow traveller on that, I've...by the time all of that stuff had happened, I had already been doing a lot of meditation practice.....in the Buddhist tradition...ways of thinking about permanence and some of that stuff must have been, must have gone fairly hard wired….(Louisa, I, 23:17-24:11)*

Helen has chosen to streamline in order to concentrate on those whom continue to hold meaning in her current context: *"I can't keep up with everyone, so I drop the ones that don't serve me (that sounds incredibly selfish)."* (D,2:1-2)

However she also recognises her own impermanence, not only in her mortality but in the roles she played in others' lives, and this generates a realisation that in order to enjoy the present, the illusion of control has to be relinquished:

> *Um, but as you go on through life, you have less...you less have the ability of keeping your family unit close because people go off and they have relationships,*

they...my children have had relationships, um, that have...my son in particular has

had relationships that have failed, um, and that he's ...come close to having a

breakdown himself that I've thought: Is what happened to your gran genetic or

whatever.... So, the sense of - it's not unravelling isn't the right word. This kind

of, the great big.... you're a river and then tributaries join, then you go into this

great big delta of life...Into the ocean. That you cannot contain it. Um, you know

and um, so...what was I going to say? So that's another part of ageing that for me

anyway is that ...of letting go, letting go…(Helen, I, 38:8-25)

3. 4. 3. The importance of meaning

Whilst it is seldom a deliberate choice to live a meaningless life, the hectic character of
adult existence can leave little time to explicitly recognise and work towards a sense of
fulfilment. The awareness of time limitation and the wish to live in the present brings a
focus on how that present is lived. All the participants spoke unprompted about the
various aspects that enriched their lives with some referring directly to the importance
of meaningful experience in making sense of their existence. For Sonia, an
appreciation of Buddhist thought shapes her self-reflection:

It's you can have a life well lived or a well-lived life. I think I have had a life well

lived. Using a Buddhist saying I think my kindness (to others and self) has freed

me from the wheel of rebirth. (Sonia, D, 3:4-7)

She spoke movingly about her work and its importance in her life and although she did
not desire to return to her job, the passion with which she described it and the blunt
response to how she uses her gift now, suggests that she is still searching for a
meaningful substitute:

There's a talent which is death to hide lodged in me useless though my soul will

bent. (Sonia, I, 31:1-2)

And I think if I hadn't trained in a caring profession.... My talent would have been

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lodged in me useless....(pause) that's, that's the long of it (laughs)

Interviewer: No, fascinating and it's really interesting as well to know with.... so now, having left that world behind in that way, what do you do with that talent?

Sonia: Nothing. (Sonia, I, 31:18-32:7)

For Elizabeth, the need to have meaning in her life seems to be experienced as a pressure - she misses the sustaining elements of work and yearns for something more:

> *I feel guilty for leaving work sometimes, and feel I ought to be doing something more meaningful, but I seem to spend my time on trivial things that needed to be sorted out. Things I didn't get done when working. Must leave time for fun, if possible. (Elizabeth, D, 11:10-14)*

However, for Alma, living meaningfully has become a guiding principle. After being diagnosed and treated for cancer three years ago, she recognised that she wanted a gentler, simpler kind of life that fulfilled and sustained her needs: *"Um, but yeah.... when we go, we go. I'm going to be compost. Um, fair enough. But I just feel that the limited amount of time that I've got - I want it to be meaningful".* (I, 54:16-20)

> *I'm still angry about inequalities but I realise there's a limit to what I can do. And I'm tired, you know, and I want to, I want to.... it's a sort of Candide. I want to tend my garden and so… my little plots, literally my little plot I want to make as beautiful as possible. (Alma, I, 10:22-26)*

3. 4. 3. Meaning through curiosity, adventure and engagement

Amongst the participants there was a continuing sense of engagement with curiosity and adventure. This might take the form of academia or other types of learning, travel, a continuing connection with work or a willingness to seek the unknown. It goes further than the collective capability for meeting challenge and suggests a deliberate seeking out of meaningful activity and new knowledge. Sometimes this is evident through the embracement of technological advance as seen in Louisa's changing work demands or

Christine's desire to use her computer to its full potential. There is an emphasis on cultural activities, which can include a social component such as Louisa bumping into old friends at private views. Christine describes the cultural explosion that characterises this stage for her:

> *And if you live in London...I mean I said in particular I didn't want to live in London but now...we do live in London, so you know, I've been going to galleries and exhibitions and things that...concerts we've done quite a lot of that - joined the South Bank and there's always something there that, you know, we've been practically every week almost gone to some new concert or exhibition or something. So we certainly didn't do that before we retired. (Christine, I, 19: 20-32)*

All of this is in addition to: *"Um, activities...oh we have got a book club and a wine club, yeah that's in our street that we do actually go to."* (I, 47:7-9)

Academic prowess also has a continued role for these women, most of who have multiple qualifications. Janet is excited about the thought of completing her MA whilst Louisa continues to add to the list of qualifications that she has and to learn more about the world around her: *"Very broadly, It's kind of...yeah...I have a massive comfort zone at about... the second year of an undergraduate degree is kind of my perfect sort of special interest holiday level."* (I, 3:14-17)

Helen's description of her life displayed a taste for adventure that she has not lost and is something that she uses as a motivating factor:

> *You know, so that's because that's sort of ...yes, so, that's.... if you turn that, the other way round er, if we could see the future as an adventure, we would get out of bed. Do you know what I mean? So that's what I sort of, that's what I would try and do is always look for the next adventure. (Helen, I, 57:13-21)*

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It suggests that for Helen, adventure can be found in small ways and in novel everyday activities. For others, the sense of adventure is met in travel - Sonia finds cruises are useful way to mediate the difference between her physical capabilities and those of her husband and they travel on a regular basis:

Yeah.... I think the next trip coming up is 10 weeks. Which isn't the longest that we've done but it is 10 weeks and then next week we go off. Next thing, next summer we've got a five-weeker and I think that's the last… -the longest we'll do in the future is five weeks because um, we went to the Aegean for instance in July…. (Sonia, I, 42:20-43:3)

Whilst Christine relishes the opportunity to be spontaneous, for Elizabeth travel offered excitement and a chance to experience her husband in a more rewarding way than is often the case at home.

You know and then we went to New Zealand for ten weeks and it was...you know something we wanted to do and...Richard wanted to do but I found myself organising it all….Because he didn't and then...so I was like...copped a lot of work really but it worked out, I mean, we were very happy when we were there and we, you know, we got on well and it was nice, you know, it was really interesting and it was adventurous and it was amazing and we came back and… came back in January... (Elizabeth, I, 22:24-23:9)

So yeah, we've done a few little trips - we went to Budapest and things like that, quite "Let's do that next week" (laughs.) Which is great, you know, I've never been able to do that. (Christine, I, 34:3-6)

Work offers a source of meaning for all the participants, whether this is in the past, currently under consideration or still part of everyday life. All the women had been or

were still engaged in careers that appeared to provide more than merely the means of earning a living.

Elizabeth retired from her job but was yet to decide whether to completely close the door on her career. She recognises what work might offer her and nurses a sense of unfinished business but does not have the emotional, intellectual or physical energy to engage further.

> *I don't know whether to pursue work and keep up the training so I can continue, but I seem to run out of time, and medical problems and appointments for this and that, time seems to go. (Elizabeth, D, 4:15-18)*

> *I thought the themes of my dreams were of feeling excluded and of envy – or and I remember feelings of regret at leaving work at the things I hadn't done, or had been excluded from doing. Also the feeling, that others thought I couldn't do stuff, the competition for upgrading themselves, and my feeling that despite what others seemed to be projecting, I would be very good at that work. (Elizabeth, D, 24:11-17)*

For Louisa, Helen and Janet, work is a continuing source of stimulation. Although all three have financial motivations to continue working, these appear as secondary to the other needs that are being met. Helen is explicit about what work offers her: *"I like to work, have a purpose and get paid in exchange for my efforts. I'm still working (at a part time job which is quite responsible) and I want to keep that up as long as I can."* (D, 3:14-16)

> *I've recently taken this job which is - last year - which is another band higher than I was so, um, rather than stepping down I'm still stepping up I suppose.... You could say, for the next 5, 6 years. (Janet, I, 8:29-9: 6)*

Janet is the youngest of the participants and is just beginning the process of making sense of what retirement might look like. Although she is clear on how important work has been to her so far, she is striving to understand what role it may play in the future and what might offer future fulfilment:

> *Um (pause) - a part of it might be that I don't want to be on my own and so, living on my own, the thought of get.... I think it's what gets me up and gets me going in the morning... is going to work. I'm not very good at sitting around and not having.... and I like company and I like feeling I'm, I have a purpose and I'm doing something. And I'm sure I could find that in clubs and groups but I'm not sure yet. (Janet, I, 9:6-18)*

In response to a comment on slowing down, she replies: *"That's not me. No, I'm afraid I don't experience that. I'm not wanting that and I'm not looking for it. I've been talking to a friend about looking to going into a small business…."*(I, 18:27-30)

3. 4. 4. Meaning through accomplishment

In addition to continuing curiosity, many of the participants pursue and voice satisfaction at their accomplishments. Louisa's description of the liberating effects of the menopause has resonance in a childlike sense of pleasure that her accomplishments engender. She engages in both instrumental and vocal musical challenge and her diary offered several descriptions of her pleasure in a sense of achievement:

> *Then headed off to sing for the rest of the day. Rehearsal, carol service. … candlelit – churches are pretty much exempt from H&S so handheld naked flames everywhere. Cake and mulled wine. Then our concert. We were rather good – and (resident nephew) came AND enjoyed it. (Louisa, D, 19:11-16)*

> *Went out fiddling – extraordinary session – had no idea I'd learned quite so many E. European tunes in the last few months. (Louisa, D, 16:15-16)*

The drive to find meaning is apparent even when it appears to be thwarted:

> *I don't feel like I should feel - as a retired person, I should be able to sort of read*
> *in the daytime and I should be able to play the fiddle and I can't. (Elizabeth, I,*
> *43:16-18)*

Elizabeth's opportunities are curtailed by her physical conditions, leading to a sense of frustration and resentment that she cannot live the retirement she desired which, for her, includes the pursuit of accomplishment. However, in Christine this desire is met by her interest in couture:

> *And er, I made my daughter's wedding dress and everything and her.... all her*
> *bridesmaid's things and my own outfit for the wedding and that's summer two*
> *years ago. Um, and I went to a class, I went to a bridal wear and eveningwear*
> *class, um, and I really loved that, really enjoyed that so.... I've been doing that,*
> *well I've been doing this one day a week class. (Christine, I, 12:22-29)*

> *I quite like to say that's it, I'm not doing it if I don't want to do it. (Christine, I,*
> *15:27-28)*

For her, there is fulfilment that comes from learning a new and complicated skill but she is also clear that the pleasure partly lies in the ability to pursue it for her own ends and to her own timescale.

3. 4. 5. Meaning through self-care

The desire to look after their health and wellbeing was apparent among the participants, perhaps offering a means of control over the observations of increasing physical challenge. Louisa enjoys walking significant distances around London whereas Janet runs up to 4 miles at a time as well as attending exercise classes - an interest shared by Helen and Christine.

I'd be interested in….well, I think sort of more time, things like keeping...I don't know things like fitness, like things that when you're working you never feel there's time to go to the gym.... Or to a class or anything like that. Even though they're quite nice and they don't take that long. Um, so yeah, I can go to Pilates a couple of times a week or Zumba or to the gym. (Christine, I, 16:16-26)

For Christine, the time investment in health and wellbeing is something she identifies as a priority and is grateful to have time for. Alma uses walking as a means of self-soothing but also feels individuals need to be proactive in the maintenance of their health rather than subsiding into infirmity:

But it set me thinking that it is imperative to keep oneself fit - to get out, walk learn new things, meet new people. To be as healthy mentally & physically as one can & to try very, very hard not to become reliant on hospitals & carers. It isn't easy getting older & staying positive! (Alma, D, 6:16-22)

Elizabeth and Sonia echo this "use it or lose it" attitude - Sonia describes her determination to combat ailments as they arise, contrasting it to her husband and sister's attitude:

If I get a problem, I'll go and see an osteopath, I'll go and see a doctor, I'll go and see somebody and I'll go and get it sorted… If his shoulder stops working, just stops using it. (laughs ruefully) (Sonia, I, 41:10-17)

At this age if you don't maintain it you lose it and things don't repair as quickly. (Elizabeth, D, 11:5-6)

For Elizabeth, who is managing cumulative medical conditions, this may be one of the limited ways by which she can assert control over her body.

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3. 4. 6. Meaning and connection with others

Connection appears to play an important role for the sample with all the participants seeking and nurturing links with family, friends and the wider world in general. For Elizabeth, the severing of the meaningful bonds between work and herself is one of the most difficult aspects of retirement and possible mediation of this is grasped at gratefully: *"And all of a sudden you're, you're not connected to anything to do with your job anymore."* (I, 58:22-23)

> *And the consultants were really nice, one of them said: "Please stay in touch" and he really meant it. And I said: "No I mean it, I really mean it. (Elizabeth, I, 59:13-17)*

Sonia feels that her gift for care has no outlet but her volunteer work appears to offer an opportunity to reach out to others: *"Yeah, I go out and help in charity shops.... And do an awful lot of counselling standing in the charity shop."* (I, 39:5-10) Alma articulates a fundamental need to connect as well as what she gains from it. She is pro-active in seeking out opportunities, both big and small, to achieve this:

> *And I'm looking at the bird and listening to it and I'm thinking: "You tiny little thing. You can be heard." And I get quite emotional about it, you know, I really get emotional. And I connect. I feel that I really connect. (Alma, I, 45:26-30)*

> *I've joined a church - I'm not religious. I don't know - that's where we met, Ben and I met. Um, and he's a devout atheist, absolutely devout. But I go to the Unitarians, our minister is Jewish and an atheist. You know (laughs). It is...and there's a whole group of people there who are.... they're just different and it's just become very much part of life. Sunday - I go to church and I take flowers for church and....Yeah, my sister's saying: "Alma, you haven't joined a sect, have you, joined a cult?" She got very, very worried so I said: "Google us, look us up on the internet, you know." They...they've become very important. Yeah, that's*

very much part of my life now. I sort of.... they, I've become much more tolerant

but not so tolerant that I don't see what's wrong. (Alma, I, 45:30-46; 20)

Familial bonds offer meaning for all the participants, evidenced by their efforts to
maintain these relationships and the pleasure and solace they draw from them. The
care and support offered to family members has already been examined and offers a
way to demonstrate connection. For some, siblings provide a measure of essential
reciprocal support. Louisa is effusive: *"My sister is.... I don't know what I'd do without*
the sister she is. She's fantastic. We're a good double act." (I, 29:1-2)

And I'm close to my sister and we phone each other and she knows I can rely on

her...she...I know I can rely on her, she know she can rely on me. (Alma, I,

4:6-10)

Others describe the social pleasures of spending time with family - Christine enjoys
being the accessible centre of the family whilst Louisa makes time to bring together
different branches and generations of the family:

Yes, definitely. I mean I still sort of feel that we're, you know, we're quite central to

the family, you know? Sort of...my husband and I, I'd say we tend to - you know -

it's Christmas: we enter...we do the cooking and we do entertain and nobody

asks...invites us to ……(smiling) So it's er...you know, we don't get invited to their

houses for Christmas (laughs) - they just automatically come...which is great, you

know it's nice, we can do it, we don't mind because they do help. It's not like…

(Christine, I, 5:12-27)

Did some mother admin and a bit of Early Music (festivals) research before

shopping/cooking proper 3 course dinner for the household i.e.: me, nephew and

b-in-law. V. successful and allowed for a bit of not too overt male bonding / family

catch-up. (Louisa, I, 19:4-7)

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Family can be complicated for Elizabeth as she manages the challenging nature of the males around her. She describes a difficult situation with her brother but she feels boosted by her decision to reach out:

I felt sad though when he decided to leave rather suddenly. I felt the separation, and thought it sad we couldn't do more things together as he is lonely. So I went after him to the shops and I found him having coffee, which I thought he might do so I was able to wait with him at the bus stop. He said this wasn't necessary, but it made me feel better to have seen him again. (Elizabeth, D, 17:4-9)

For Janet, proximity to family is desired but requires carefully negotiated boundaries:

But I am not ready to be um a grandmother that will take over the care of... um, the grandchild so that my daughter can go back to work full time, for example and ... And I've met lots of people my age who are, who are desperate to be grandmothers, they see that as being the next step in their life and....I don't. (Janet, I, 13:2-14)

However for Helen, the pleasure offered by her involvement with her family and new grandson is far less complicated: *"I do have moments of pure bliss. Like when I am holding my 8 month old grandson, or when my husband holds me when we both drift off to sleep."* (D, 2:7-8)

Friendships and socialising also carries weight for the participants. Christine recognises that shared interests can prove rewarding:

So you know...yeah I think they're...they are important to me. Um, and you can...yeah it's nice to have people that you can bounce ideas off or that, you know, because they've got similar interests like we go to museums - there's a

knitwear exhibition at the Fashion Museum. I don't know if you've been there?
(Christine, I, 49:6-10)

Alma makes explicit her continued prioritisation of friendships. She has a wide circle of shared interests including singing, knitting and book clubs and along with Christine, is prepared to invest time in nurturing her friendships:

I think the.... always, always, always been important. I've always had close friends. Um. (pause) Yeah, it's, it's always important and I think as a single woman um without children.... You make probably stronger bonds than women who have got their partner and children and that. And you've got more time to perhaps as well. (Alma, I, 26:16-26)

Louisa notes a change that age brings to the quality of connection - not only a softness but also a circularity where people come back into one's life. She, Christine and Janet note how the internet and social media bring people together offering greater opportunity for connection:

I'll tell you one of the things that is quite nice actually is when you find you've, one of the things that has happened quite frequently over the last couple of years in terms of relationships, not like sort of intimate relationships but among friends who haven't seen for 15 or 20 years, you know suddenly reappear because they've been living somewhere else….or they've got onto Facebook or LInkedIn or something. And how incredibly easy it is to pick up with people you haven't seen for a very, very long time. So that's been….quite sweet actually. (Louisa, I, 80:19-22)

Helen's conception of connection is also linked to a sense of kindness: *"The older I get, the greater value I place on human kindness so I…I'm kind"* (I, 6:7-8). She identifies this as increasingly important, seizing opportunities to bring it into others lives and

recognising what it offers her:

> *I like doing what I think of as my own "outreach programme" (being available and open) – e.g. I walk most days (I offered to) with a neighbour who is older than me and is having treatment for cancer. So it has a double reward, I like walking and talking with him, and his wife is grateful that he has company while she is at work. (Helen, D, 3:1-5)*

This is also true for Sonia who, despite feeling frustrated at being forced into carer's role at home, uses the opportunity to help counsel others when volunteering in the charity shop. For Alma, support and connection goes beyond family and friends and is demonstrated by financial aid to carefully selected organisations, fulfilling her desire to:*"….Put more in than I take out".* (I, 54:24)

> *And now I want to enjoy it so um with my money - and I'm not saying this being a good person BUT I've become a patron of the Chelsea Physic Garden, because it has been so.... all my time in London, it's been important to me. Um and the Natural History Museum - I'm a patron of that too because I just love that place with a passion, these two places. I support women's charities because women are important to me and I support environmental charities…. So...and I can do that, I've got the money to do that. (Alma, I, 47:9-23)*

4. Discussion

4. 1. Overview

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experience of women who were in the blurred edges (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1985; Staudinger & Bluck, 2001) of late midlife and older adulthood. I had chosen to focus on women from the baby boomer generation, as they had been witness to the transformation of opportunity and expectation throughout their lifestyle resulting in contextual experiences that differed greatly from those of earlier cohorts. It was hoped that the analysis arising from the narratives of these women would not only offer insights reflecting their current situation but would also serve to illuminate aspects of their future and that these findings could then be used to inform ways in which counselling psychologists and other health professionals could understand, formulate and offer support for the challenges that late midlife and older women may face. The analysis generated three master themes drawn from my interpretation of the participants' own expressions. These were: an appreciation of transition; the expression of age associated perceptions, assumptions and judgement; and finally, a sense of time limitation connecting to an increased importance of and enhanced commitment to creating meaning in their lives. As befits a hermeneutic approach, as well as examining the existing theory and literature around these topics, I will also attempt to demonstrate how the themes interweave, foregrounding meaning as the theme that stood out for me. There will be an examination of the relevance of the findings to Counselling Psychologists and an evaluation of the study, contemplating the limitations of the research as well as recommendations for future studies. This will be followed by a section on reflexivity, outlining my endeavours to work with reflexive processes throughout the research process and the chapter ends with a conclusion that draws all the disparate strands together.

4. 2. A shift to something different

The first theme that arose was constructed around the way that participants perceived their current existence as different to earlier incarnations of adulthood. For some this was expressed as standing on the cusp of something new, whereas others appeared to feel more settled and accepting but no one dismissed this period in their life as a mere repeat of earlier experience. The human lifespan is characterised by movement and change - Sugarman (2003) describes these as shifts within the framework of the life course and this embraces an ongoing, non-linear interpretation of the process of adaptation from how one understood oneself and behaved in past situations to a new environment. Hopson and Adams' (1976) work on transitions includes the identification of stages that could occur concurrently or separately, affecting different areas of life at different times. They point to the occurrence of disruption and a gradual acknowledgement of reality as core processes within transition, recognising the role of change as less directional and more incremental than might be assumed. This suggests that the idea of transition or shift may be a more appropriate reflection of the participants' experience.

The perception of shift was manifested in many areas of life including work, personal relationships and leisure. An important factor in shaping response to shifting concepts appeared to be how these movements are perceived by individuals and a sense of opportunity and freedom of choice can facilitate acceptance and engagement, as is seen with Christine and Helen. A sense of opportunity and choice is connected to personal context and in this study it can be seen through the participants' descriptions of a good pension, increased leisure, being relatively healthy and mobile and only being required to offer a manageable amount of care (Guberman, Lavoie, Blein & Olazabal, 2012). A sense of the disappearance of the known in this section has undercurrents of loss with the feeling of distancing suggesting a link to Cumming and Henry's (1961) theory of disengagement. However, whereas they would envisage this as the start of severing ties in order to retreat from the world, this research would suggest that letting go is a precursor to reshaping one's place in the world in a different

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form connected to new roles and new understandings. It resonates with Baltes and Baltes (1990) selection process for living optimally - as other defining characteristics fall away, an opportunity emerges to reshape one's sense of self and self-worth through new roles, accomplishments and ways of perceiving the world. This could be seen in the narratives concerning retirement where its differing forms (Byles et al., 2013) were apparent, allowing for individual interpretation of how the shift could be experienced. Care-giving also played an important role for the participants and Barnes and Parry (2004) have noted a gender bias towards women assuming this mantle.

The complex blend of continuity and change, which characterises shift seen in this age group, is demonstrated in the participants' descriptions of their marriages. Kulik (2002) points to improvements within marriage on retirement but also acknowledges that these require the negotiation of jobs and space, allowing the relationship to evolve and thrive in an altered context. For some, this space was important in order to pursue new interests and accomplishments whereas for others there was also sometimes a sense of quiet companionship, contentment and mutual understanding - the reciprocity that was also apparent in other relationships in the participants' lives. Kulik also pointed to the issues of health as being a destabilising issue in post-retirement marriage - this would appear to be the case for Sonia who appears frustrated by her husband's ailments and inertia which she feels prevents her from being involved in stimulating activities and adventures, with the notable exception of travel. This was not always the case - for Helen, her husband's medical condition has affected their sex life but their ability to adapt to physical limitations, in conjunction with her expressed increased sense of quiet mutual contentment, meant that the relationship has evolved rather than become a source of frustration. Interestingly, none of the married participants referenced the menopause and echoing Walter's (2000) findings that single, childless women were more likely to conceptualise the menopause as a marker event opening up opportunity. Whilst the single participants were, at best, ambivalent about engaging in future intimate relationships there was an expressed sense of renewed clarity and freedom about engagement in other areas of personal growth.

The sense of perceiving oneself to be in a different space was established through observations of generational difference, such as Alma's recognition of baby boomer power, or by comparison with the experience of earlier adulthood. In addition, the sense of difference was informed by a sense of circularity expressed by some - this is apparent in the idea of a return to play (Vaillant & Vaillant, 1990) although this should not be considered infantile play but openness to creativity. It is also echoed by Thomason (2006) who acknowledges it as a facet of ageing: "*It took sixty years to remember my body, my mind, my soul. They have been with me all my life, I just never took notice*" (p.16). This circularity does not appear to be an attempt to hold onto a younger self but rather a reflection of the increased sense of perspective, allowing these aspects to be incorporated into one's current context-bound self and acting as a reminder of the non-linear character of shift.

The human life course is characterised by movement and change and the process of adaptation in midlife women has been previously noted in midlife women (Arnold, 2005; Beth & Howell, 2002). All the women in this study had been the beneficiaries of greater access to education and careers and a continued sense of choice and opportunity was strongly reflected in their expectations of older adulthood. The spectre of dependence has never been a welcome aspect of ageing but it appeared as part of a distant and disturbing future, particularly - although not exclusively - for the single participants. However, the narratives of the women would suggest that those whose lives have been characterised by increased independence may struggle more than previous generations to come to terms with the reverse position.

4. 3. Perceptions, assumptions and judgements concerning age

This theme dealt with how participants managed their own sense of age and their reactions to the perceived judgement of others in relation to age. The struggle to understand oneself is a necessary precursor to identifying what can offer satisfaction and how one can best meet situations (Frankl's, 1962). Although all the participants in

this study displayed levels of self-awareness about themselves, their needs and their behaviours, it was notable that their response to enquiries about age and ageing was more conflicted. Age cannot be understood in purely chronological terms as is apparent in the literature concerning actual and subjective age (Montpare & Lachman, 1989). Furstenberg (1989) highlighted the discrepancy between women's chronological and subjective age whilst Ward (2010) recognised another definition, studying the differences between chronological and felt and ideal age. It is maybe important to note that the variance of individual age perception is not conclusively identified with the need to deny ageing (Ward, 1977) but it has been seen to have an effect on meaning - Barak and Rahtz (1999) observed that personal growth was more apparent in those who identified a low felt age but expressed an ideal age more closely resembling their chronological age.

Factors in how the participants appraised themselves included social comparison (Festinger, 1954) and understanding oneself through the interplay with others (Clarke & Krotchenko, 2012; Covan, 2005; Coupland and Coupland, 1994). In this study, the use of comparison was used with reference to peers as well as across generations and deployed in both positive and negative ways and with reference to peers as well as across generations. Comparison can be linked to stereotypes and has been associated with the midlife and older adult period (Bauer, Wrosch & Jobin, 2008; Kreuger, Heckhausen & Hundertmark, 1995). It was apparent within the study that self-esteem was sometimes vulnerable to perceptions of stereotyping and external judgement. The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology (2006) defines a stereotype as:

> *A relatively fixed and oversimplified generalisation about a group or class of people, usually focusing on negative, unfavourable characteristics although some authorities recognise the possibility of positive stereotypes as well. (p.726)*

Stereotypes are representative heuristics (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) that facilitate decision-making on how we wish to operate in the world and they are inherently

reductive. They link to Tajfel's (1978) theories on social categorisation and are reflected in the perceptions and behaviour of in-groups and out-groups. Tajfel described social identity as the point where an individual's self-concept is informed by their membership of a group. This can function as a both a desirable and protective factor (Ethier & Deaux, 1994: Garstka, Schmidt, Branscombe & Hummert, 2004) if the group membership is one that is readily embraced and, in this study, the participants who identified with their peer group often displayed noticeably less discomfort around ideas of age and ageing. However, if individuals reject some of the commonly held characteristics of their group or perceive themselves to be at risk of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), social identity can become perceived as dangerous, problematic and unwanted. Levy (2003) found that self-perception was affected by stereotypes and noted that older adults were the only in-group that held negative out-group opinions about themselves. In this research, the internalised negative assumptions of age were apparent in some of the language and ways in which the participants chose to express themselves, such as the idea of oppressive emotional weight being associated with the experience of being 100. Townsend, Godfrey & Denby's (2006) found that older adults passed negative judgement on contemporaries who appeared to choose to surrender to expectations of inevitable physical decline and this is echoed in Sonia's frustration with her husband and sister's response to the challenges of ageing. Stereotypes feed cultural attitudes and Gullete (2004) notes that these affect response to change suggesting that a society that primarily values youth will see repercussions in the way that individuals respond to ageing.

Social identities cannot fully convey how different identities intersect (Bowleg, 2008) and Breakwell (2010) argued that they might explain more about group processes than individual identity. However, I would argue that in this study social identity and stereotyping affected the participants and the way they understood themselves and that this was reflected in the participants' ambivalence towards age. One possible response to stereotyping is to hold onto one's individuality and the participant, whose life had been characterised by her drive to overcome the limited expectations of others,

expressed the hope that people would be able to recognise her for who she was. Another common reaction is to challenge stereotypes, aside from the way one chooses to live, is by querying the relevance of current stereotypes (Teuscher, 2009) - the latter choice is seen in Christine's annoyance at an NHS advertising campaign and Sonia's frustration at insurance companies. Another common reaction is disassociation as Weiss & Lang (2012) found amongst their research participants when negative age stereotypes were made salient. Disassociation was expressed by the rejection, downplaying or avoidance of characteristics that identified one with the group and this was clearly demonstrated in this research by the reluctance to look in the mirror or at photographs or the use of creams. Pines (2010) recognises the reassertion of the importance of the body in older women, noting its increased relevance at this time: " A woman's subjective body image is of the greatest importance, and the mirror is a narcissistic woman's greatest enemy." (p.140)

The manifestation of the signs of old age have been connected with increased instances of feeling old (Logan, Ward & Spitze, 1992), suggesting that attempts to avoid this may be internally generated. The concept of older adulthood refers to decades of life and the wide age range and developmental possibilities make "feeling old" decidedly subjective particularly when there is such disparity in the ways in which older adults may choose to perceived themselves (Roth et al., 2012). However, these ideas still portray old age as an undesirable prospect suggesting that there is a cultural influence at play, an idea given credence by the idea of attempts to stay youthful being repackaged as successful ageing (Byrski, 2014; Hinchcliff, 2014). Westerhof & Barrett (2005) made connections between the western society's current prizing of youth and the marginalisation of old age and Clarke (2011) recognised that the judgement of older women's looks was a tool to implement this. She argued that it was a continuation of how women are judged throughout their life but that age now placed them at a double disadvantage - an idea echoed in the transcripts. It was notable that in this research, reactions to changing physical appearance provoked some of the most emotive moments for particular participants. However, it should also be noted that stereotypes

can sometimes have a useful indicative function - even though they are reductionist in character, they do reflect aspects of social categories. Concepts of age are shaped by historical and contextual experience (George, 1980; Goffman, 1963) suggesting that it has a different meaning for each generation and I have argued in the introduction that this may be particularly true of the baby boomers. However, the rejection of established assumptions appeared to sometimes engender confusion amongst the participants about how they should present themselves and how emerging roles could be constructed. This confusion could also be exacerbated by the lack of representations of midlife and older adult women within western society - Arnold (2005) referred to these as roadmaps or indicators of possible ways to be and noted their absence from television screens and other media.

 These findings raise questions rather than providing answers - if society embraces youth in preference to age and the baby boomers originated and are identified with youth culture (Gilleard & Higgs, 2002), are the external indicators of age identification becoming increasingly problematic for women of this cohort? And if this generation is questioning established assumptions about older women, how can they be supported to create new ways of being?

4. 4. Time limitation and meaning

Meaning and living meaningfully are necessarily subjective concepts. Yalom (1980, 2008) identifies meaning in life as one of the four givens of existence alongside death, isolation and freedom - the themes that underpin existential therapy. Meaning and meaning-making cannot exist in isolation - suggesting connections with Buber's (1970) I-Thou perspective and echoing the work of Gilligan (1982) and Miller (1986) in depicting the enhancement of growth and personal understanding through relationships rather than separation. Meaning has been identified with ideas of transcendence (Coward, 1996; Wiggs, 2010); self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943); the retention and maintenance of values in addition to the sense of well-being and connection with others (Schnell, 2010). It presumes an access to self-knowledge and ideas for growth as well

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as the motivation to achieve them, whether this is innate or environmental. Frankl (1962) believed the yearning for meaning is the most important internal motivator that humans possess and that it can find expression in the bleakest of circumstances through the retention of the perception of choice in how situations are met. However, Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs would argue that the search for meaning can only be embarked upon when more basic needs have been attended to. Schnell (2010) suggested how a meaningful life might be created: "*A personally meaningful life ensues from commitment to sources of meaning consistent with personality and worldview."* (p. 364)

However, she noted that there was a third position between the presence and absence of meaning - that of existential indifference, suggesting that although a meaningful life can lead to deeper levels of life satisfaction and positive mood, it may not be as essential to everyday existence as previously imagined. Meaning-making has been conceptualised as a lifelong process (Wong & Fry, 1998) that makes an important contribution to an individual's well-being (King, Hicks, Krull & del Gaiso, 2006; Steger & Frazier, 2005). Krause (2007) examined the relationship between forms of self-expression and depressive symptoms in later life, making a series of deductions from his findings. He pointed to the idea that better levels of education led to a greater capacity for self-expression and connected this with findings that older adults who displayed an ability for self expression were more likely to create a sense of meaning in life. He went on to suggest that meaning in life gave older adults a sense of gratitude which may, in turn, protect them from depressive symptoms - ideas that were echoed in Cohen's (2006) noting of the effect of creativity on health and well-being in those aged 65 upwards. A greater level of satisfaction has also shown to be correlated with older adults engaged in volunteering (Van Willigen, 2000) - the inference being that choosing to do something purely for company, pleasure or curiosity rather than for experience or for financial gain, provides its own reward. Meaning is inherently idiosyncratic (Frankl, 1962) and in this study I have applied the term to the participants' expressions of adventure, curiosity, connection, care and accomplishment.

4. 4. 1. Meaning with reference to this age group

As Wong and Fry (1998) noted, meaning is a life long process and has relevance across the life course although the form and expression may differ in how it is perceived or pursued in diverse age groups (Devogler & Ebersole, 1983) and across cultures (Kiang & Fugligni, 2010). However, it does appear to have a particular resonance with the narratives of the late midlife women who formed the sample for this study and this is corroborated in Steger, Shigehiro & Kahsdan's (2009) study that found midlife and older adults placed greater emphasis on roles that meaning played in their lives. Schnell's (2010) work noted that although the presence of existential indifference was apparent in older participants, there were larger proportions of retired people for whom there was meaning, in comparison with some of the other groups. Erikson (1990) considered generativity as connected to creating and nurturing the next generation but also acknowledged in Childhood and Society (1963) that this could be augmented, although not replaced, by a drive for creativity and productivity. Vaillant (1977) focused even more closely, specifying a period, between Erikson's (1990) concepts of generativity and ego integrity, that positioned midlife adults as the keepers of meaning - another intimation of increased resonance at this time. For Jung (1957/2006) and Sugarman (2001), midlife offers an ideal opportunity to reflect on the past and contemplate the future - Jung also suggested that the second half of life was centred less around external concerns and more about one's internal interests, reflecting a shift in focus that was apparent in the participants. This does not mean isolating oneself as in Cummings and Henry's (1961) disengagement theory but finding a way to relate to the world that connects with internal meaning rather than external display. For these participants, there was also an appreciation that there was more time behind than ahead of them and this is reiterated in Lachman's (2004) recognition that midlife signals the awareness of limitations being placed upon time. If one subscribes to the epigenetic aspect of Erikson's theories, the ego integration of the 8th stage cannot take place unless the tasks of the 7th stage are accomplished and for those in the later stages of midlife adulthood, time might be considered to be running out. Other factors that have been considered to inspire the search for meaning include personal

crises such as retirement (Coleman & O'Hanlon, 2004), health scares (Coward & Kahn, 2005; Rubenstein, 2002) or loss (Bickerstaff, Grasser & McCabe, 2003, Wayman & Gaydos, 2005) and these become more pronounced in midlife and escalate in older adults.

4. 4. 2. How meaning was reflected in this study

The sense of time limitation was experienced in a similar way to the findings of Arnold's (2005) study where time was viewed as "*a two-edged sword*" (p.645), a phrase which captures a sense of poignancy that was often inherent in the narratives and has been identified with ageing (Carstensen et al., 2011). Acceptance of impermanence of life was not necessarily joyful or welcomed but neither was it met with despair - rather with a sense of living in the present in line with Yalom's (2008) suggestion that whilst the physical concept of death focuses on an ending, the psychological concept of death may opens up other opportunities. As Frankl (1962) noted, meaning is a subjective concept, suggesting that the ways the participants in this study found to grow beyond themselves cannot be considered an exhaustive list. Participants described various ways of living meaningfully - such as continued curiosity, challenge, adventure and accomplishment - as well as an interest in self-care linked to wellbeing and connectedness. Some of these concerns overlap with those identified by Mellors, Erlen, Coontz and Lucke (2001) in their small scale qualitative study of AIDS sufferers. The interest in health and wellbeing has been echoed elsewhere - Carr (2004) noted the resistance to physical change as characteristic of baby boomer cohort. Lachman and Firth (2004) consider the engagement with physical and cognitive decline as having an adaptive function and as a means of retaining a sense of mastery and this seems particularly evident in the case of Elizabeth who suffers with several medical conditions. Biggs, Phillipson, Leach and Money (2007) also suggest that body maintenance and continued involvement in physical activity may be a way to bridge the gap between generations, particularly grandchildren. This attention to the self is not merely grounded in physical upkeep but in presentational ways and references by the participants to the visibility of certain older women such as Helen Mirren or Brenda

Blethyn, seem to suggest that the aim may sometimes be to look "good" rather than "young" (Biggs, Phillipson, Leach & Money, 2007).

Curiosity, adventure and accomplishment also provided sources of meaning and were pursued in many ways. The sense of pride in accomplishment was often discernable amongst the participants. Buhler (1968) saw midlife as a time of achievement, arguing that accomplishment reflected looking to the future and that comfort was associated with living in the present. In this study, the two concepts seem fused, with the sense of accomplishment contributing to the sense of feeling at ease with oneself in the here and now. The sense of curiosity pursued through formal and informal learning, travel and general adventure reflect the possibilities of this time (Staudlinger & Bluck, 2001) and reference Heidegger's (1962) appreciation of what limitation of time might mean.

Meaning was also apparent in the importance the participants attached to connection with the world and others and this has been identified as a potential means of growth by Surrey (1991). Maslow (1943) would suggest that a sense of connection needs to be established before self-actualisation can be addressed, positioning it as a more essential need for human wellbeing. Each narrative was interwoven with stories of family in the past and present, as well as addressed in hopes and fears for the future. This was not restricted to parent and child dyads but evident among siblings and cousins and inter-generationally with nephews and nieces. Gilligan's (1982) theory of female growth through relationships is also apparent in the description of connection with those outside the family. Friendships and support networks were recognised as an important facet of later life by the participants (Boehmer, Clark & Sullivan, 2010) and can seen to be drawn from differing sources - sometimes former or current work colleagues, long-standing friendships which had evolved over time (Radina, Lynch, Stalp & Manning, 2008) or connections made over shared activities. Nasadan's (2008) study of line dancers found the pursuit offered physical activity, accomplishment and opportunity for social contact, inferring that sometimes connection can be seen as a by-product of seeking meaning through challenge or accomplishment (or indeed vice

versa). Other research has noted how shared activity can offer a means for social support as well as companionship (Piercy & Cheek, 2004) whilst Peters' (2012) study of an outdoor swimming group suggested that it could be an opportunity to engage in cultural practices, cementing identity and permitting mentoring as well as a means to keep fit and have fun. All the participants nurtured these outside connections but they had a particular contemporary resonance for the single participants that may be applicable at a later time - namely widowhood - for those who were married (Radina et al., 2008). Throughout these studies and in the accounts of the participants in this research runs a thread of reciprocity that further strengthens the concept of connection.

Connection was not only demonstrated through social engagements and activities. Alma's expressed need to connect and delight in hearing birdsong or tending her garden is very closely echoed by some of the participants in Mellors, Erlen, Coontz and Lucke (2001). Care for others, particularly family members, was also a concept that played an important part in the participants' lives. As members of the "sandwich generation" or intergenerational care-givers (Miller, 1981; Grundy & Henretta, 2006; Putney & Bengtson, 2001), coupled with the added complications of distance, divorce and work (Fingerman, Pillemer, Silverstein & Suitor, 2012), care was always likely to have relevance to a female sample. Barnes and Parry (2004) noted that: *"Caring in retirement, and caring as a significant influence on adaptation were distinctively feminised trajectories."* (p.221). Other researchers have commented on the lack of recognition that is given to unpaid carers (Bonder & Martin, 2000; Nesteruk & Price, 2011; Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006) which continues the tradition of undervaluation of women's work and perspective both in terms of pay and in respect (Miller, 1986). Indeed, some suggest that the delivery of care should be considered a component of successful ageing (Bonder & Martin, 2000; Nesteruk & Price, 2011). For the participants in this study, there was an awareness of the pressure to offer care and the stresses that came with this but there was also a willingness accompanied by self-efficacy and satisfaction that portrayed this as more than mere obligation. Miller (1986) notes that the capacity for care does not hinder female growth and change - this is

partly because caring stimulates personal development and because women have always been expected to juggle their own needs in conjunction with the needs of others. Guberman, Lavoie, Blein and Olazabal (2012) felt that this cohort were unprepared to be solely identified as carers and would expect higher levels of support and services. This can be seen in the narratives of the participants, particularly Louisa and Elizabeth, in their engagement with services to help their relatives suggesting that whilst there may be an acceptance of a role as a carer it is not the only way they choose to identify themselves nor is it necessarily characterised by passivity. However, the need to connect expressed amongst the participants should not be confused with fear of being alone - there were many examples given of the pleasures of solitude. This could be seen in Alma's description of tending of her garden, which played on literary references but also reflected where she found contentment. It was seen in the narratives of being absorbed in meaningful pursuits and it was apparent in a sense of simply feeling at ease with oneself such as Helen, who enjoyed the companionable aspects of her marriage but also stated: *"I'm absolutely content being with myself, alone and I, er I kind of relish in that whole "me time" thing."*

4. 5. The connection of meaning with a sense of shift and perceptions of age

Part of the difficulty in teasing out themes from the narrative of others is that life experience does not occur in discrete categories and this appreciation formed part of the rationale of considering these women through a more holistic perspective. Although the themes have been discussed separately, there is a need to understand how they fit together in women's lives - perceiving the different challenges and discoveries in a broader context, such as suggested by Sugarman's multidirectional life space (2001). Hopson and Adams' (1976) work on transitions includes the search for meaning being integral to forming a new understanding of oneself as well as a need to accept change and let go of the past in order to facilitate adaptation to a new world. The idea that these stages can be concurrent and occur in differing dimensions of life can be seen in the life experiences of the women, where the shift allowing them to relinquish past roles and to re-evaluate relationships offering a space to focus on other

activities. As meaning-making has been noted to be salient for adults in their age group, this is often where the focus may be found. The undercurrent of loss that runs through the perception that life is shifting and is expressed through the death of friends and family, retirement or in a more pervasive sense, may promote a need to make sense of what remains (Bickerstaff, Grasser & McCabe, 2003, Wayman & Gaydos, 2005) and reflects the increasing capacity of individuals to manage poignancy - the blending of positive and negative emotion (Carstensen et al., 2011). Worden's (1991) final task of grief is focused on the refashioning of a relationship, rather than a complete severance and is referenced in Sugarman's (2003, 2007) interpretation of "letting go". I would suggest that, within this study, "letting go" needs to be understood in this way - the attempt to make sense of what is not longer there, in order to be able to continue with the task of living. It has a resonance with Helen's description of how family relationships have changed and her acceptance of the need to relinquish responsibility for her (adult) children's safety and happiness, yet still remain closely connected to them. Important new roles emerging as part of the shift to something different also link to meaning. The evolution of life as a couple - which was represented by the state of marriage in this study - was a feature in the perception of shift. In Schnell's (2010) work, a high proportion of married couples (compared to other groups) professed life as having meaning, suggesting that investment in the relationship itself may be considered a meaningful act. In this research, continuing curiosity and adventure were identified as means of living a meaningful life and one way of pursuing this was through travel. It was notable that within the married section of the sample, this was a shared meaningful and satisfying pursuit even amongst the couples who were struggling to renegotiate their relationships in a new context. Care is mentioned in both the theme of shift and in terms of meaning - Kwee's (2013) work on Buddhist psychology notes the role of compassion and care in creating meaning. The women experienced the demands for involvement in care-giving, whether this was for elderly parents, grandchildren or even spouses but on the whole this was met with acceptance and invested with something separate from duty and social expectation, suggesting it had a reciprocal function. For one participant, there was resentment that the role had

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been thrust upon them and this was very clearly linked to the sense that it was denying her the opportunity to create meaning through other activities but for most it offered reciprocal benefits and a chance to connect.

The theme examining perceptions and assumptions connected with age might appear, in some ways, to be unconnected to meaning as it dwelt on associations that often had a negative and unwelcome effect on the participants. Although Frankl (1962) and Gilligan (1982) would suggest that opportunities for meaning exist in every aspect of life, Maslow (1943) would argue that self esteem needs to be established before self-actualisation can be contemplated and in some ways, it would appear that the self-esteem of an older adult, particularly women, is frequently under attack by social and cultural norms. For these women, feelings about age were complex and whilst there were painful expressions of the effect of cultural and institutional assumptions, there were also spirited rejections of them. Goclowska & Crisp (2013) propose that counter-stereotypes have a role in promoting creativity - there may be a connection between the participants' ability to questioning stereotypes and to create new meanings. However, the process of meaning-making may have more significance precisely because of stereotypes and age-related prejudice - if meaning lies in something other than youthful physical perfection, then a sense of self-worth can be generated from other sources (Wiggs, 2010).

The drive to make meaning is evident all facets of the participant's stories, reflecting increased salience to midlife and older adults. The sense of opportunity suggested by the perception of a different stage of life is linked within this study to the creation of new sources of meaning and growth. Opportunity and creativity were apparent in the histories as well as in the future hopes of the participants in this study. The construction of meaning through accomplishment, adventure, connection and caring offers an alternative means of evaluating worth to rigid ideas of youthful physical perfection (Wiggs, 2010) and Pepin & Deutscher (2011) found that engaging in what has meaning as one means of maintaining identity in later life. However, it is important to have an

awareness of the significance of what might happen if the desire for meaning-making is thwarted such as when the demands of care-giving begin to overwhelm other roles. If meaning-making has such resonance for women of this age and its connection to well-being has been established, there needs to be acknowledgement of this in the way health professionals approach psychological distress in midlife and older adult females.

4. 6. Relevance to counselling psychology

My interest in studying adults at this age grew partly from my observations of clients that I met at my placement at a GP's surgery, where I still work on an honorary contract. My request for older adult referrals was met by surprise - apparently few trainees are interested in this area - and I observed that a notable proportion of the clients who were referred were in their early 60s. This led to an appreciation that sections of the life span - in particular, post-menopausal women who were not yet older adults - were relatively understudied, both in general and in counselling psychology literature. Counselling psychology takes a humanist, developmental approach (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003) but this is not always reflected in the breadth of our approach. There may be a perception that post-menopausal women do not face the same level of adaptation and struggle as early midlife women or older adults. However, a counselling psychology focus on development, wellbeing and the enhancement of human functioning (Altmaier & Ali, 2011) embraces the idea that that humans face continual ongoing shifts to adapt to new contexts and this would suggest that all stages of the lifespan are worthy of focus and have a relevance, irrespective of individual presentation or pathology. Furthermore, with reference to the research topic, studies have established that the mid section of the life holds a significant position in the life course offering perspective (Staudinger & Bluck, 2001; Sugarman, 2001) as well as being connected to later life experience (Alpass et al, 2007; Britton, Shipley, Singh-Manoux & Marmot, 2008; Defina et al., 2013; Fingerman, Pillemer, Silverstein & Suitor, 2012; Guberman, Lavoie, Blein & Olazabal, 2012; Hartmann-Stein & Potkanowicz, 2003; Miche, Elasser, Schilling & Wahl, 2014; Morris, 2002).   However, this information needs to be balanced with a life course perspective that allows for multiple potential

outcomes, recognising that any predictive suggestions are possibilities rather than certainties (Sugarman, 2001). Our holistic approach and commitment to the therapeutic relationship places renders us uniquely poised to contemplate the myriad shifts, adaptations and emerging concerns of those in late middle life who stand on the cusp of older adulthood. Counselling psychologists formulate in a way that acknowledges the multiple contextual issues that these adults might face, for example, pressure in personal and public spheres, family and parental issues and gender imbalances (Biggs, 2003), and their fears for the future.

The wide range of settings that counselling psychologists work in means that we may often encounter this population and this research might offer a way to understand the contextually situated concerns of women of this age. Although low social economic status and other factors play an important contributory role, mental health needs to be considered as context specific (Nandi & Welsh, 2013) and Walsh (2009) has called for closer attention to be paid to occurrences of depression between menopause and older adulthood. If more than half the older adults suffering from major depression experience their first episode after the age of 60 (Rudenstine, 2013), it would suggest that there may be a need for reassessment in how we consider this period. Our training encourages us to look beyond the anxiety and depression that is so often the trigger for referral in primary care or personal therapy. The findings of this research suggest that meaning plays an important role in the lives of these women and it may help practitioners to hold in mind potential outcomes when this motivation for making meaning is frustrated, both in terms of the narratives of the clients and in the parallel processes that occur within the therapeutic relationship. The role of regret has been linked to reduced life satisfaction in older adults (Wrosch, Bauer & Scheier, 2005) - supporting individuals to live meaningfully at this stage may offer a mediating influence on this. If we recognise that the life course is not about rigidity and fixed trajectories but constructed on shifting boundaries and patterns, this sense of fluidity might help us recognise the effect of assumptions and stereotypes in this and other populations. Whilst the ambition to move beyond older adult stereotypes should be supported, this

study helps us understand that the removal of assumption may lead to a sense of confusion and suggests that supporting adults, particularly women, to discover their own way of being could prove a useful aspect of therapy with this age group. In our hospital and clinic-based role, the study can inform us about issues of illness and dependency for emerging older adults and how the on-going process of making meaning might offer a way of introducing choice and opportunity back into lives. The research may also prove useful in assisting counselling psychologists and other professionals to support the needs of the growing number of ageing carers. Despite the willingness expressed and the potential benefits that were being drawn from caregiving, there were indications in the study that there are also stresses involved. An important factor appeared to be the concurrent presence of other roles and separate sources of individual fulfilment and psychologists may provide support in helping caregivers maintain these - Wiggs (2010) argued that the fundamental role of health professionals was to facilitate the means of living optimally and this has resonance with counselling psychology's commitment to wellbeing. However, if the findings of the study support the importance of family, connection and caregiving, it also helps us as practitioners to appreciate the psychological implications if these are lost or absent in lives (Beal, 2006; Marston, 2010).

4. 7. Evaluation of the research and opportunities for further study

Whilst acknowledging the possible contribution that this research can make, it is also necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the work. One main criticism might be that the study attracted a white middle class response meaning that the findings reflect a privileged group who has enjoyed access to educational, occupational and social opportunity and that it did nothing to address the white educated bias that Arnold (2005) identified as an issue to be addressed. The racial bias of research has been noted as problematic in the case of older adults (Feliciano, Yochim, Steers, Jay & Segal, 2011) and in terms of midlife research (Kim & Moen, 2001; Wray, 2007). This study acknowledged the effect of being doubly disadvantaged by age and gender and it

would be disingenuous to ignore the ramifications of adding an extra source of discrimination such as sexuality (Averett, Yoon & Jenkin, 2011) or race. I would acknowledge that these arguments have merit and that the findings of this study cannot be assumed to have cross-cultural relevance or reflect the experience of women with a lower socio-economic status. As Villa & Bagdasaryan (2012) point out in their study on Hispanic baby boomers, the disadvantages that have been present in adult life persist into later stages of life. Cultural influences may also make a difference - Wray noted how attitudes towards the menopause diverged with Afro-Caribbean women exhibiting more acceptance and less turmoil around biological change and this may be reflected in how they and other groups approach older adulthood. However, part of the rationale for this study was formed by my interest in how a life of opportunity might mean that older adulthood was conceived differently for the cohort currently approaching or reaching that age. If perceptions of age are shaped by context and experience (George, 1980; Goffman, 1963) and the midlife period is accepted to contain a variety of lifestyles and events (Miche, Elasser & Schilling, 2014), then it makes sense to study the group that represents my interest - in my case, those who had benefitted from increased opportunity. Social mobility has been associated with baby boomer experience (Leach, Philipson, Biggs & Money, 2013; Phillipson, 2007) and the life narratives of over half of the participants reflected this. What the study offered was an opportunity to explore in depth the experience of one part of the cohort and future research might choose to replicate this or examine the relevance of choice, opportunity, stereotypes and forms of meaning for those in this age group but from different cultural, sexual and gender groups. A replication study might also like to consider using audio or video diaries instead of written materials as this might attract those who were discouraged by this aspect of the method.

The social characteristics of the participants may also have contributed to the emergence of meaning-making as a master theme in this research. Although Frankl (1962) and Gilligan (1982) suggest opportunities for meaning can be accessed in every facet of life, Maslow (1943) would recognise this group of participants as having their

basic needs met, allowing them the freedom to focus on connection, self-esteem and self-actualisation. Krause's (2007) research suggested a link between education and a capacity for self-expression that would facilitate meaning-making. This suggests that the pursuit of meaning may not be as prevalent in populations who have not benefitted from educational opportunity. There may be also elements of self-selection in the sample as the decision to participate in research asking you to talk about your current context might also be construed as a form of making meaning. The subjectivity of meaning requires a recognition that not only might it be manifested in different ways but also that meaning itself could be understood as something different in other cultures. Steger, Shigehiro & Kahsdan (2009) suggested that meaning-making could be understood in developmental terms for older adults and I would agree with their suggestion that more research is needed in this area but I would suggest that any further study might also need to address the implications of existential indifference (Schnell, 2010) with specific regard to later life.

Another way in which the findings of this research could be developed would be through a follow-up study. I noted that younger participants in Arnold's (2005) study would be in the age range for this research and it would be interesting to observe the experience of a similar sample aged around 70 in another decade's time to highlight perspective on continuity and change within a cohort. Similarly, Beth and Howell's (2002) research uncovered themes that had resonance with the ones found in this study although I would argue that the intimate nature of the interviews in this research and the addition of participant generated topics and the diaries may have allowed for greater depth and form of expression. This research was able to relocate those findings to a contemporary context and demonstrated how the intersection of continuity and change characterises our lives. It would be interesting to note if that same continuity of themes emerged if late midlife women were to be studied in another 15 years. Finally, there may also be more to be learnt about the role of care and care-giving in the future - as social support continues to be extolled in political rhetoric but devalued in social and economic terms, it will be interesting to see how this might affect the meaning that care for others carries.

4. 8. Reflexivity

In line with the subjectivity and acceptance of the interactions that shape any hermeneutic endeavour, I have sought to work reflexively throughout the process. Sometimes I have addressed this explicitly in the text, reflecting on the process of reflexivity as I do here and as I have done in the methodological section. However, I also hope a reflexive attitude has characterised my interactions with participants, the analysis and is weaved into how I have written up the account of the research - a process described by Salzman (2002):

> *Reflexivity is thus the constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution/influence/shaping of intersubjective research and the consequent research findings. (p.806)*

Finlay (2003) suggested that reflexivity was a tool to discover one's own subjectivity, using the hermeneutic circle to understand yourself through the attempt to understand others. Salzman took the view that the function of reflexivity was to be able to recognise a shift in position as a precursor to, rather than a producer of, new knowledge. It should not be used within research as a means of gratifying impulses for self-absorption but focused on how subjectivity affects each step of the process (Finlay, 2003) and should not be used as a blanket excuse for observed limitations (Lynch, 2000). For me, a reflexive approach offered the opportunity to both understand myself better through the attempts to make sense of the participants' narratives of their world but also acted as a signpost to emerging ideas. However, I would also subscribe to the idea that whilst subjectivity should be an ongoing process during research, one can never assume that a complete examination of subjectivity can be achieved (Crawford, 2013).

My starting position on this research was that I was curious to find out more about a future that, at the outset, felt much further away than it does at the conclusion and I recognise that my personal curiosity and assumptions affected how the study was

designed, the perspective through which I analysed the data, the conclusions I drew as well as my interactions with participants (Finlay, 2003; Heidegger, 1962). My own age acted as a means of connection with the participants - as a woman firmly identifiable as being in midlife, I represented less of the "other" than a younger woman or man of any age might have done. Not only does feminist-influenced research call for an appreciation of female perspective but also suggests women might be best studied by other women (Archer, 2002; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986). It had not escaped me that the demographic of the participants closely resembled my own in terms of education, class and aspiration. Race can have an impact on the research process, particularly terms of understanding and power assumptions but in this study the participants were white and middle class which can often confer an inherently powerful position. In addition, my mixed race identity has often had limited impact, both for me and for others - something I am alternatively comfortable with or conflicted about. In the research situation, the sameness that I shared with the participants (Bhopal, 2001) - in terms of gender, class and academic ability - as well as their social position appeared to minimise the effect of race, echoing Bowleg's (2008) observation that social identities are more complex than their constituent parts merely added together.

The sense of familiarity or sameness (Bhopal, 2001) may have facilitated the process of research. Whilst I would not attempt to claim that the power imbalance could ever be fully absent from the relationship between two people, and particularly not in a research interview, none of the participants appeared to be overwhelmed or intimidated by my educational aspirations or by the research process. The majority had engaged in Masters level academic challenge and this may have reduced the level of suspicion or mistrust. The sense of familiarity was also apparent in a presumption of shared cultural capital that was present in the interviews and often expressed explicitly. For example: "*There's a knitwear exhibition at the Fashion Museum. I don't know if you've been there?*" (Christine) In some ways this might be seen as an indication of the participants' level of comfort, allowing them the freedom to open up to me as a researcher and to feel that they might be understood. I suspect it may have facilitated

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more painful parts of the interview, particularly as I was attempting not to put forward my own experience and opinions explicitly. However, I wonder if this level of ease may have obstructed my perspective - although traditional notions of scientific objectivity are rejected by IPA, there needs to be a perception of boundary in semi-structured interviewing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I always made entries in my reflexive diary immediately following interviews, recognising the nuances between reflexivity and reflection as described by Finlay (2003) and these not only noted what went well and what did not but my feelings and impressions. Finlay also suggests that reflexivity during the data collection can assist the analytic process and there was an occasion noted, where the smudged boundaries and my relative inexperience in the art of research interviewing left me feeling distinctly unsatisfied and as if I had lost control over the situation. The sense of connection might also account for some of the struggle I experienced during the analysis section - particularly in the theme of age perceptions and assumption. I felt a strong urge to counterbalance this section because I felt protective towards the participants and uncomfortable about depicting the vulnerabilities of these women in case it fed existing stereotypes of quavery older women, rather than being perceived as simply one part of their experience. Henwood (2008) acknowledges that when researching issues of marginality, it is important to work with the data in a way that does not offer confer a fixed position and to understand that you have an opportunity to give voice to someone. I reconciled myself to doing so through reconnecting with the embracing of vulnerability in feminist thought (Miller, 1986) but also by following Seidman's (2006) tenet that the words and expressions of the participants need to be valued, even if they uncover uncomfortable meanings. Whilst interpretation is subjective, a commitment to honesty is also important and a little more sense of "other" may have allowed me to feel less protective about the participants.

In addition to a sensation of familiarity, in the analysis stage, I also experienced a curious sensation of parallel process and I wonder how this has affected my interpretations. I was, during the analysis of Elizabeth's transcript and diary, aware of a

sense of confusion as well as experiencing muscular-skeletal discomfort that disturbed my sleep. My reflexive diary entry for Elizabeth's interview confirmed a sense of dissatisfaction and a lack of clarity. This has resonance with Finlay's (2006, 2008) idea of reflexive body empathy where the researcher's empathic impulses lead them to embody the data they are working with. Working with Janet's data left me feeling anxious and unsure about the future and direction of my research, mirroring her questions about how her future might look. I was aware at the time of feeling impatient to be finished with the analysis of both of these participants and I wonder if this translates into my findings. When participants were sanguine and/or comfortable about their experience, working with their data offered me a sense of efficacy about completing this project and many of these feelings were echoed in the notes I had made immediately after the interviews. Finlay (2003) describes the co-constructive nature of any meanings that arise in the research because they are generated as a result of the relationship between researcher and participant and this parallel process appears to underline this distinctiveness. In some ways, the process has reminded me of the first therapeutic encounters I had at the beginning of my training - the struggle to create and keep boundaries, understanding the relationship that is being constructed and reconciling the need to maintain focus on the person and their narrative with the reason the interview is taking place.

I have also been aware that since embarking upon the original idea for this research, back in 2013, I have edged closer in age to the group that I was investigating and that this has undoubtedly sharpened the resonance of certain facets of the narrative and shaped the way that I chose to view the data. This may be another contributing factor to why I struggled with the theme of perceptions, assumptions and judgements of age. Language concerning "old" and "age" became a challenge for me, not only because I was becoming more aware of the debates around these terms through the focus of my reading but also because I became increasingly attuned to the capacity of language to generate assumptions. Casalanti (2008) described the ingrained ageism of western society such as that seen in the automatic response "No, you're not old" and as two of

the participants acknowledged, we are conditioned to recoil away from the prospect. I certainly struggled with the use of "age", "ageing" and "old" both in the questions I posed to the participants and in the writing up. I recognise that the increased salience of age in my thoughts may have contributed to this awareness of my own position, much as the illness and death of others can focus one's thoughts on mortality but I am not clear on whether this salience was the sole basis of my own altered behaviour that emerged during the research process. I had not really been aware of a conscious sense of my age since childhood and this had been one of the personal motivations to research my chosen topic. However, as research progressed, I found myself squinting in the mirror looking for wrinkles and experiencing an unfamiliar and uncomfortable awareness that I, too, was no longer "young". This was accompanied by anxiety-provoking speculation about the assumptions that others might be making about me. Whilst recourse to the transcripts has confirmed that there is a notable level of distress in the way that some of the participants discussed age and physical appearance, I cannot ignore the resonance with my own feelings and cannot say definitively whether my personal concerns shaped the findings or if the reverse was true.   Maybe it seemed important, not only to protect the participants from being characterised by readers of this research as vulnerable but also to avoid confronting that aspect of myself.

There were other ways in which the findings of the research merged with my life and interests. My increasing curiosity about existential ideas meant that meaning-making stands out for me in my reading, my practice and also in the research. Once again, it was important to return to the transcripts and confirm that I was reflecting the participants' concerns as well as my own. I was also aware that the last 18 months has seen me take my position as an intergenerational caregiver as my widowed mother has become increasingly frail and dependent. This has had an effect on my everyday life and on how I have managed my studies. Bhopal (2001) identifies meaning-making as a role of the researcher's interpretations rather than the data itself. Whilst examination of the transcripts corroborates the repeated expressions of care and care-giving amongst

the participants, I cannot help but wonder to what extent my expansion into intergenerational care shaped my interpretations around its meaning for the participants. The overlaps between research and my life seem to bear out Salzman's (2002) suggestion that the attempt to learn about others and learning about yourself are connected.

4. 9. Conclusion

The study sought to augment the existing literature on the experience of women who were somewhere in the overlap between midlife and older adulthood. It aimed to look in depth at experience and did so through a privileged sample that reflected the optimal benefits of being a baby boomer woman. The findings included: an expression of the sense of shift towards something different, the difficult negotiation of the perceptions and judgements of others and the appreciation of time limitation leading to a focus on living meaningfully. The findings shared some overlap with those in Beth and Howell's (2002) focus group research but this study was able to relocate the themes into today's context and relate them to more recent studies, demonstrating the blend of continuity and change that characterises the life course.   As these are among the first wave of baby boomers to reach this age, there is a possibility that the experience of the last of the cohort will be very different and this will undoubtedly be true in terms of retirement and pension provisions. Age was mostly a sidebar to the participants' lives rather than a defining feature as has been noted in other studies (Petry, 2003; Sugarman, 2007) with "old" emerging as a potential issue rather than "age" (Townsend, Godfrey & Denby, 2006). The participants provide a snapshot of contemporary concerns, presenting women of this age as resourceful, resilient, engaged with the world and leading rich, multi-dimensional lives. However, findings that over half the older adults suffering major depression - whatever the other contributing factors - experienced their first episode after the age of 60 (Rudenstine, 2013) and the links that connect meaning-making and well-being (King, Hicks, Krull & del Gaiso, 2006; Krause, 2007) suggests that mental well-being at this time cannot be ignored or taken for granted The importance of meaning-making, an improved understanding of the ways in which

meaning is created, a fresh perspective on contextual pressures within this group of women as well as the appreciation that age both does and does not matter (Sugarman, 2007), offers health professionals another dimension for consideration when formulating the psychological distress of midlife and older adults.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Suggested questions/prompts

N.B. This a semi structured interview so these questions will not all be asked but can act as prompts and to guide the conversation rather than restrict it.

Initial questions: to relax and elicit biographical information and a sense of their perspective:

- Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

- How would you describe yourself?

- What has been important in defining who you feel yourself to be?

- What matters most to you?

Questions on perspectives of age:

- What comes to mind when you think about ageing?

- How do you feel about the term "pensioner"?

- Does age matter?

- How do you think older adults are regarded in our society?

- What are the disadvantages of getting older?

- What are the advantages of getting older?

- What might contribute to a satisfactory old age?

- How do you feel older people are supported and how do you feel this could be improved?

Questions on own's ageing:

- How do you feel about the future?

- What are your hopes and fears for the future?

- Do you feel optimistic for the future? If so, why?

- Do you feel pessamistic for the future? If so, why?

- Does this feel like a significantly different stage in your life and if so, can you describe in what way?
- How do you think you might change as you get older?
- Do you think age is a factor in how others see you? How do you imagine this might affect your relationships?
- What might become easier for you in this stage of life?
- What might become difficult?
- What are your interests? How will these be sustained?
- What aspects of your previous life do you feel might influence how you deal with the challenges you will face in this stage of life?
- What qualities do you have that might help you?
- How would you feel about approaching someone for help if you were struggling psychologically and do you feel this is important?

Relationships and older adults:
- (If single) How do you feel about starting a new relationship?
- What is important to you in a relationship?
- What concerns, if any, do you have over romantic relationships as you get older?
- How important is sex and physical intimacy to you?

Career/work:

Tell me a little bit about your career.

How important has work been in your life?

Will you retire - if so, how do you picture your retirement?

If you will continue to work, why will you do so ?

Appearances:

How do you feel about the changes in your body as you age?

What does grey hair mean to you?

How do you feel others see you physically?

What pressures do you feel to combat natural physical ageing and in what ways do you meet this challenge if you feel obliged to do so?

How visible do you feel?

Is there anything that we have not yet discussed that you think is pertinent to this topic?

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Department of Psychology
City University London

FEMALE PARTICIPANTS REQUIRED FOR RESEARCH INTO CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCES OF AGEING.

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study which seeks to understand what it might feel like to be a woman approaching or reaching pensionable age. We are seeking female participants born between 1948 and 1955 who would feel comfortable talking about themselves.

There would be a one to one interview lasting about 90 minutes discussing and you would also be requested to keep a brief diary for two weeks before and two weeks after the interview, noting experiences and feelings connected with this subject. The information gathered will inform my doctoral research.

Interviews will take place either at City University or at another mutually convenient location.

For more information about this study, or to take part, please contact:

Deborah Samson or Dr.Aylish O'Driscoll (supervisor)

Email: ███████████████

███████████████

Appendix C: Gransnet advert

Hello,

I am looking for women aged 59-66 who would be interested in talking to me about what and how they feel about this stage in their lives. Interviews would take about an hour and I am asking participants to keep a brief diary/notes of any relevant experiences in the fortnight preceding and following the interview - please note, this does not have to be a lengthy daily diary unless you enjoy writing those! I am looking for women based in London as the interviews - which will last about an hour or so - would take place at City University in Islington. I am happy to reimburse for bus/tube expenses if necessary. I am hoping it will offer you a safe and inviting opportunity to talk about yourself and your experiences and that it will give me data - which will be anonymised - for my doctoral research. I think it might be interesting for both of us!

If you are interested or wish to know some more, please email me.

Thank you for taking time to read this.

Deborah

Appendix D: Email to friends/acquaintances with the leaflet attached.

Do you know anyone who is female and aged between 59-66 and who might be interested in being interviewed? Probably not your immediate relatives as that might be a bit close to home and they might feel uncomfortable talking to me but work colleagues, friends, mentors etc. Everything will be anonymised to protect their confidentiality but if they contact me directly via my university email ████████████████████████, then even you can be in the dark as to whether they took part!

They would need to be willing to talk to me about what it feels like to be at this stage in their life. I am looking for different types of women - those for whom work has played a part in their life and those for whom it has not been a factor. They can be working or about to retire or retired but this will not be the sole focus of the interview. They would need to feel comfortable talking about themselves as there will be personal questions and exploration of feelings (you may need to stress anonymity at this point!). They do need to be in London - I can interview them at the university which is in Islington/Clerkenwell or at another mutually convenient place. If they are unsure whether to get involved or not, they can email me directly and I can give them some more information without any further expectation of their participation.

If you have any questions, let me know - otherwise, please forward the leaflet if you can think of anyone who might be up for it. If they don't wish to participate, would you mind asking if they could forward the leaflet to anyone they know that might be interested?

Thank you, thank you - if I ever qualify, you will be invited to come and celebrate!

Appendix E: Detailed explanation of study

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

A counselling psychologist's exploration into contemporary experiences of ageing.

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?
This study is an attempt to understand current experience of ageing and attitudes to ageing amongst women who are approaching pensionable age. It will form the basis of a doctoral thesis.

Why have I been invited?
This study requires the participation of 6-8 British women aged around 59-66 to share their individual feelings on and experiences of age and ageing.

Do I have to take part?
Participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to choose not to participate in this project without being penalised. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to avoid answering questions that you feel are too intrusive and may withdraw at any time. In the event of your withdrawal, all records of your participation - diaries, transcripts and recordings - will be destroyed.

What will happen if I take part?
- You will be required to take part in an informal one to one interview, which will last for approximately 90 minutes and to keep a diary for a period of four weeks around the time of the interview
- Before the interview takes place, the researcher will be available to respond to any queries surrounding the process.
- At the interview, you will be asked questions which will allow you an opportunity to share your feelings and experiences.There is no rigid agenda but rather a collection of topics that the researcher is interested in. These will be recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. We ask that you also keep a diary for two weeks before the interview and two weeks after, noting experiences and feelings which feel connected with ageing and the experience of ageing.
- All the information that you share with us will be subjected to a type of analysis called Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis which is a method for examining speech or text to gain a better understanding of what underpins the content. We are interested in the richness and depth of what is communicated in the interview and diaries and seek to understand it in terms of how it feels to you rather than seeking concrete explanations.
- The interviews will take place at the university buildings at City University, London EC1 or, if you prefer, at your workplace or home.

Expenses and Payments
- **T**ravel expenses will be reimbursed.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
You may find that the interview raises issues that had not previously occured to you. We will be asking you questions that will force you to think deeply and answer honestly and this may leave you feeling uncomfortable. You may be concerned that you have said more than you wish to or not enough. Alternatively you may find yourself dwelling on issues that we have discussed. There will be an opportunity to discuss the interview and I will be able to inform you about sources of support, if necessary.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
Participating in this project may help consolidate some of your feelings at this point in your life and may identify areas that you wish to think about further. Your contribution may help towards a better understanding of what women at this stage of life are experiencing, as well as a better appreciation of this cohort as individuals. The results may help inform how and when varying types of support are offered.

What will happen when the research study stops?
When the research ends, all of your original material, held by the researcher, will be deleted/ destroyed. You may wish to have your diary returned to you - if not it will be destroyed. If you wish to see a summary of the results, please request this from the researcher.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
- Only the researcher will have access to the original material which will be anonymised.
- The audio recordings will be not be named but coded. Only the researcher will know the real identity.
- The researcher will keep contact details until the study is over unless you have requested a copy of any later publications.
- Anonymised transcripts may be appended to the final report otherwise they will be deleted.
- The interview is confidential - however if it contains any revelations of danger to oneself or others or of criminal activity, I may need to break confidentiality.
- All records will be kept in password protected files or locked cabinets until the end of the study.
-

What will happen to the results of the research study?
This research is being carried out as part of my doctoral thesis. It may be submitted for publication in one of the journals associated with psychology such as Counselling Psychology Review or The Psychologist. If you would wish to receive a summary of the results or a copy of any published article, please indicate this to the researcher and leave details of where information can be sent.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?
You are free to withdraw from the study at any time - all participation is voluntary.

What if there is a problem?
If you wish to discuss a problem, please contact me (████████████████████████) or my supervisor for this project , Dr Aylish O'Driscoll (███████████████████) or ████████████

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, City University London has established a complaints procedure via the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: A counselling psychologist's exploration into contemporary experiences of ageing.

You could also write to the Secretary at:
Anna Ramberg
Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee
Research Office, E214
City University London
Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0HB
Email: ████████████████████

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City University London Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee.

Further information and contact details
If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at Deborah.Samson. 1@city.ac.uk or my supervisor Dr Aylish O'Driscoll at ████████████████████████.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on ███████████ or via email: ██████████████████████.

Appendix F: Consent form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Title of Study: A counselling psychologist's exploration into contemporary experiences of ageing.

Please initial box

1.	I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I understand this will involve : • being interviewed by the researcher • allowing the interview to be videotaped/audiotaped • keeping a diary for a limited time to record thoughts and experiences that will be shared with the researcher.	
2.	This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s): -analysis in the named study I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.	
3.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.	
4.	I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.	
5.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Appendix G: Sources of support/information:

www.ageuk.org.uk   Their website is full of useful information for anyone 50 plus and offers advice on a range of topics including work, money and wellbeing including depression. They also run local groups which may be able to offer specific information and opportunities.

www.bacp.co.uk: website of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. It offers guidance on different types of psychological support as well as an online search facility for registered practitioners.

www.bps.org.uk : website of the British Psychological Society, offering information about psychologists and psychology as well as an online search tool for finding registered psychologists.

www.depressionuk.org

Fitness/health: Many local councils offer fitness sessions - you can check individual websites or go to your local library for information. Some gyms also offer special concessions to older adults.

www.olderfeminist.org.uk   Social and political activists who can offer support and advice.

refuge.org.uk   For help and advice for dealing with domestic violence

www.ukcp.org.uk: website of the UK Council for Psychotherapy offering information about psychotherapy and psychotherapeutic counselling as well as links to its members.

http://www.u3alondon.org.uk: University of the 3rd Age in London offering a range of courses.

If any of the issues raised continue to be of concern to you and have a persistant effect on your mood, you may wish to contact your GP.

Appendix H: Example of coding

1 **Interviewer:** And what sort of comes to mind
2 when you think about ageing?
3
4 **P7:** I think the main worry about ageing - if it's a
5 worry - is getting ill and being reliant on other
6 people. And having seen what happened to my
7 parents who were both strong, um, and that's the
8 biggest fear. Er, I'm fairly comfortable with - up
9 here (taps head) - with ageing in that (pause) I
10 know more about what I want and what I don't
11 want and what I won't accept now which I...I think I
12 accepted a load of crap when I was younger.
13
14 **Interviewer:** So there's a clarity?
15
16 **P7:** There's a clarity with age now and you think
17 what have I got to lose? Nothing. You know. Um
18 (pause) I'd like to say that I'm comfortable with the
19 ...the wrinkles and the, you know, the ventriloquist
20 dummy chin (indicating with her hands) but I'm not,
21 I'm not. Um, I'm honest, I'm not and yeah, I do use
22 creams and I don't want to be seen as an old
23 woman and I think it's a...and in our society,
24 there's no value to age. There really isn't any value
25 to age. I think we're pretty powerful - baby
26 boomers are a powerful lot because there's lots of
27 us and we've got money.
28
29 **Interviewer:** Mmm.
30

Handwritten codes (left margin):
Dependency
Fear
Decline

Perspective

Perspective

Disgust? Dislike of physical appearance

Importance vs Power

Handwritten annotations (right side):
→ suggestion that it does NOT have to be like that
dependency + decline :
possibility already
developmental to her
→ separation of physical + mental
acceptance   intellectual + emotional
perspective : advantageous aspect
of development
→ dismissive suggestive of waste.

sense of having ourself, motivation in
need to prove herself   fear
honesty / dissatisfaction ?
→ exaggerated grotesque   shame ?
− rejection of appearance of old
negative prospect
denigration   NB devaluation
NB strength of statement   vs financial +
→ peer identification   numerical power
→ what gives influence.

P7: But everything is youth-orientated. You know.
I was looking, I was just going up the escalator
yesterday and I'll write this down in the diary and I
saw an add for a film. Can't remember what the
film was. But there were about 6 guys in a v shape
- their faces - and they were all middle-aged to
elderly men.

Interviewer: Mmm

P7: You know, grey hair and with the wrinkles -
gravitas. And one young girl. And that really pissed
me off.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

P7: Because that's the image that we get all the
time. All the time. Um, and I think, I was aware of
that when I was younger. I was a very, very, very strong
feminist when I was younger and I still consider
myself a feminist. And we have made progress.
But we haven't made enough progress and
sometimes I think, you know, how can men and
women really be real, genuine friends when there
is such an attitude towards us. You know.

Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.

P7: I do find that difficult. I do find that very
difficult. I also um, you know, I realise that I'm
conditioned. One of the men who has become a

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Handwritten annotations (left margin, red):
Ageism

Ageism & Sexism

Social Conditioning

? Plus ça change...

Intellectual vs emotional
Internal vs external

Handwritten annotations (green):
→ focus of...

Ageism

never usually + sexism seen in women —visibility

sentence worded differently

invitation for women

Easy acceptance of this by media/society

anger

force-feed: choice removed. saturation

political awareness

long term: not tied to age + perspective

acknowledgement of some change

naivness

two tribes / misunderstanding! Male animosity

struggle

recognition of the final intellectual vs emotional processing.

aspect of choice removed

1 very close friend of mine - he was, we always were
2 close actually but he, he's 8 or 9 years younger
3 than me and he would quite happily have had an
4 affair with me. And we did have a little fling. But I
5 couldn't hack it because of the age gap. I really
6 couldn't hack it because of the age gap because I
7 thought I didn't want to be standing next to him
8 and people think: "Is she your mother?"
9
10 Interviewer: Mmmm
11
12 P7: You know. Um. And I know that's stupid and
13 why shouldn't a woman have a younger lover
14 when it's quite acceptable for men to have
15 partners who are 20, 25 years younger than
16 themselves, you know. Um, George Clooney
17 marries someone who's 15 years younger than
18 him. You know it would be great if George Clooney
19 married a 60 year old woman.
20
21 Interviewer: Mmm (laughingly)
22
23 P7: But he wouldn't, he wouldn't because they're
24 not attractive. They really aren't attractive. Um,
25 they're dried up, they're past their best, you know.
26
27 Interviewer: So does that ......I'm wondering how
28 much . I mean you've said a little bit about it but I
29 wonder how much that influences about how you
30 feel about yourself physically. Because you've said
31 "I use the creams, I don't want to look old" but I'm

Uneven
rules for
society

Insecurity -
internalised
beliefs
about older
women

sense that between
them it is fine –
that society
thought is the
problem.
vulnerability

> suggestion of fun

for difference ... with
negative tied to
external perceptions.
hurt

> separation of emotion + intellect

unfairness

nb 20/25 as apposed to 8 or 9.

> resignation

> redressing suggestion

Buying into the assumption
insecurity

> imagery   withering / nature

UNDERSTANDING & ACCEPTANCE OF SELF	
-return to self	*"I'm aware, um, that as I get older that there is a kind of return to self for me" (I,8:3-4)* *"That I'm reconnecting with the person, the child that I was. Um, and yeah…so I think this who I have always been…" (I,8:8-10)* *"You had to learn to embroider and knit. I still knit today and it's and incredibly soothing activity for me. Um, although I didn't for years and then I went back to it" (I,14:1-4)* *"I'm aware of a "return to self" – I have become the person I was always meant to be (hope that makes sense) – having gone full circle, I again recognise the "me" I was as a child, and I like her. I'm aware of my essence." (d2:13-15)*
-self knowledge through others	*"I pay more attention these days to what people say about me" (I, 6: 2-3)* *"I'm perhaps more able to accept, er, things, compliments " (I, 6:4)*
-acceptance/sense of being at ease/content	*"(Blows out) Quite happy with it. Yes….. Yeah, yeah, you know I er….I mean everybody would like to have less of a double chin or not everybody but a lot of women of my age or um, thing but again, you know my Mum had very good skin and I'm aware that compared to some of my friends, I'm lucky. Again, you know I'm quite unlined, um comparatively. I could be a lot worse because I lived in Australia I lived on the beach and went to the beach and I do have a lot of sun damage but I'm not….I'm much more careful these days. Um, I er…yeah….I don't again, coming back to what I see on Gransnet, I don't do that thing of ….I go for all the screenings and all the well-woman stuff but I don't run scared…." (I,22:7-23)* *"Happiness is wanting what you have, like my brother says." (I,47:8-9)*
-	*"Um, what we haven't spoken, perhaps haven't spoken about is… in me describing everything, is that I am extremely happy when I'm on my own…." (I,48:17-18)* *"From a young age and I still have that but again I didn't always have that - there were times in my life when I was having difficulties that I wouldn't be able to be on my own. I'd be nervous, I'd be anxious, I'd be restless but again, you know, from the way that things have worked out for me, I'm absolutely content being with myself, alone and I, er I kind of relish in that whole "me time" thing." (I,49:4-10)* *"Being on my own = good. I like my own company. I like being with myself. I love having the house to myself. Sometimes I actually want to be left alone. " (D4:3-5)*
otherness	*"People often assume I'm English, I'm not English" (I, 4: 12-13)* *"she said "Once an immigrant, always an immigrant" and I didn't quite understand what she meant but I think I do know now so er, yeah, it's home but it's not my tribe" (I, 5: 9-12)*
-self-management	*"if I sort of allow myself to go down the anxious route, I can become very anxious about certain things but I know how to pull back" (I, 7:13-16)* *"I have learnt what soothes me, so I know where to turn when I need calming. Knitting is one, because I think of it as*

"doing maths" (counting the stitches and interpreting patterns). It's meditational because requires concentration." (D2:9-11)

When that happens I turn to music, to happy memories, think of good things. I remind myself that "if we could see the future, we would never get out of bed". So I put one foot in front of the other and force myself to live the life that I have for that day. Whatever that day brings. (D3:9-13)

AGE AS A CHALLENGE/TRANSITION -her perspective	"I wouldn't say I am daunted by it but obviously, you start thinking about it because people around you pop off and get ill and have to face major things so a theme for me is um to er, look for a point to it in the sense that you know you've got this new found freedom" (I,19:5-10) "I think that whatever comes, you have to deal with it as it comes, when it comes and how best you can." (I,23:3-4) "....and you do what you can with what you've got at the time and take steps to you know to live your life in the best possible way and you know, take whatever comes." (I,23:12-15) "I've had lots of practice in , in dealing with transition so ageing is just another one of those...." (I,55:12-14)
-learning through strife/weathering storms/resilience	"Which I didn't recognise because I was so incredibly naive and it was only after about, you know, when I realised he actually wasn't the life and soul of the party but he was actually drunk and couldn't hold his drink that I thought: "What the hell!? "(I,27:1-5) "So, so I thought er, erm...these people are so sophisticated and after a while, I very quickly I realised: No, they're not, they're a bunch of drunks." (I,27:16-18) "And um, then when we came to this country, I went to an agency and they sent me to a drug service which I now realise, once again babe in the wood, um, I went..." (I,30:6-8) "You know, they, they...I wouldn't say they're not damaged by it erm because I think that would be a little bit of me...denial by me, not to fake...I wouldn't say out...They, both of them cannot tolerate drunkenness...." (I,29:4-8) "The "Oh shit" moments, um, and how do I work with this situation now to make the best of it because I want a good outcome for myself and my children, you know. Um, which sounds selfish when I say it like that....." (I,37:5-9) "we get our resilience from our mother, we get our um er, er...tough, toughness with a touch of ...of gentleness from our mother. It's actually really nice doing this because I can see this, you know. I mean I've been aware of it and I sort of thought that we had that mixture of resilience and tenderness from her. Um, you know, and not needing loads...of stuff.." (I,47:22-48:3) "You know, but, there's no way through it but to come out from under the duvet and the dark corner and...."(I,53:8-9) "So this knowledge - you can't avoid things, you know, you can't deny things, you can't avoid things, um, you've got to face them....." (I,55:18-20) "Mmm, yeah, I wouldn't like to live my life avoiding things . I wouldn;t like to be one of those people that er...what was I going to say "run scared". Not sort of judging people that are .....that don't, don't have the ability to cope and meet challenges and things but I'm glad I'm not like that." (i,56:5-100
-active seeking of change/adventure/openness -previous successful experience of adapting to challenges/resilience -role models pro-active:self-efficacy	"he sort of sold me on the adventure" (I, 1:22) "I do like adventures. So I sometimes make my own." (D,1: 12) "You know, so that's because that's sort of ...yes, so, that's...if you turn that, the other way round er, if we could see the future as an adventure, we would get out of bed. Do you know what I mean?Interviewer: Yeah P2: So that's what I sort of , that's what I would try and do is always look for the next adventure (I,57:13-21) " I know that I'm a very open person- an example by me just coming to take part in this research project" (I, 6:5-7) "So I'm not, I'm not terror struck. I find a lot of people are paralysed by anxieties and fears, you know. I don't have nebulous fears that I can't control." (I, 7:6-8)

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| vulnerability | "Yes, exactly, so my kind of position on that is to exercise, is to keep myself as healthy as possible, um be very aware of balancing all aspects of my life." (I,21:21-23)

""m aware when tragedy strikes, um, I have to guard against it because in an instant everything can be stripped away from me and I can feel absolutely burdened by everything that's every happened to me in my life and , and, and I can feel 100 years old. You know...." (I,50:25-51:5)
"and if I allow myself to dwell on the tragedy that is waiting....Interviewer: Yeah.P2: That we cannot avoid, that's when I will, I just kind of .....I just want to go and ....sit in a dark corner and pull a duvet over my head and not have to face life.(I,52:22-53:4)

I feel hundred years old when tragedy strikes, as if the weight of all the troubles I've ever seen, are on me at the same time.(D3:8-9) |

AGE IS LIKE THE REST OF LIFE OFFERING BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS	
-life as a mixed bag	"because of various life experiences, I can tend towards anxiety but maybe that's just normal because life is scary" (I,6: 25 & I, 7:1-2.)
-	"I kind of identify with their shame, you know, because we were, we were the only divorced family in the village" (I,9:6-8)
advantages of age	
- perspective	"As an adult I sometimes think:"How much of her slightly strange behaviour had to do with having had ECT, having had that huge breakdown, you know..we'll never know, you know." (I, 18:10-14)
- like skills/experience/efficacy	"Um and..and um, the other thing that we sometimes laugh about is er, my husband and I ....is ....younger members of our
- subverting stereotypes/humour	family, not our own children because they know us well enough obviously, um but um, young nieces and nephews will
-	come and ...they come and visit us on a Sunday afternoon in a sort of duty bound way, bring a cake for the old folk which
-	we recognise that we might have done at one time and then we'll chuckle because what they don't know is that we want
	to go and get into bed and have an afternoon session (laughs)" (I, 24:17-23)
- liking it	"I like being with people of my own age. I have fun with my exercise class." (D,2:12)
- knowing who you are	"at the ripe old age of 65, I became a grandmother" (I, 2:14-15)
- new roles	"Grandad is there today, actually" (I, 3: 7)
-	"...so people do treat you differently, um, but people also treat you with more respect, greater respect, you know which is
- respect	nice...." (I,25:3-6)
disadvantages of age	
- memory failure	"I have daft old women moments – like finding an envelope of money and not knowing where the heck it came from.
- negative connotations	Eventually I remember – so I don't tell a soul about the not remembering." (D,2:3-5)
-	
- ageism & inevitability	"...the thing about being ignored because you're a little grey haired lady and you know, so young people sometimes they
-	don't know me. Like for example if I'm in a shop and they'll focus on the younger customers with the latest phone,
-	whatever and will leave me standing there. But I think the difference between me and other people as far as that goes is
-	that I don't care.."(I,23:24 -24:8)
	I don't personalise it, it's just the way it is. Perhaps maybe when I was 23, I would have ignored a 65 year old. (I,24:12-13)
- fears of the unknown form and extent of physical change and decline.	"..I think that the the thing...people say they're not afraid of the physical side of ageing, then I think they're telling lies, you know. That I think is what is....What's scary." (I,21:2-9)
-	"I suppose it's a slight fear of the unknown or you know...." (I,21:15-16)

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- mortality (practical response:head on rather than avoidance)	"I do think about death quite a bit as there has been a ripple of acquaintances who have died recently, some quite suddenly. I'm not anxious about it though, it simply spurs me on to get my "affairs in order" so have scheduled a review of our wills." (D,1:3-6) "I don't like ticking the last box (Age: 65+) on the list of age groups on most forms! Especially because they are usually open ended." (D,1: 10-11)

PRIORITISING WHAT IS IMPORTANT AND WHY /WHEAT FROM CHAFF	
-knowing what matters to her and prioritising this	"I can't keep up with everyone, so I drop the ones that don't serve me (that sounds incredibly selfish)." (D,2:1-2)
-family: (what it gives her:refuge, models, survival through closeness, meaning, extremes of experience)	"...they welcomed us into their home with such love and warmth..."(I,10:10-11)
	"...that sometimes when I think of it now - because I'm the age that they were then and you know, times have changed and I'm thinking: God, what if one of my children had to come home and say"I'm coming to live with you with my three children under the age of 4, I'd head for the hills." (I, 10:11-16)
	"...because I just totally mirrored my mother. Er, married a womaniser, had two little kids then he divorced me when my daughter was 8 months old" (I,19:18-21)
	"Ya, I just completely mirrored what they did, what my Mum and Dad did".(I,20:1-2)
	"I'm, I'm, I'm out of here as much as it will break my heart but this is not my journey, you know." (I,27:21-23)
	"but sort of the first 8 or 9 years of my marriage was really difficult for me but um, I kept my children close, I absolutely looked after my children, put their needs first, protected them from it a lot of the time so they." (I,28:1"8-22)
	"I do have moments of pure bliss. Like when I am holding my 8 month old grandson, or when my husband holds me when we both drift off to sleep." (D2,7-8)
	"big bonus" (on birth of grandchild) (I, 2:24)
	"...the kind of the downside of that was that she absolutely dedicated her life to us" (I,12:8-9)
(downsides/vulnerabilities of family)	"Because we couldn't extricate ourselves" (I,12:15-16)
	I need to know that my children are safe (they are adults of course). And now my little grandson has stolen my heart. (D4:1-2)
-learning to let go	"Um, but as you go on through life, you have less...you less have the ability of keeping your family unit close because people go off and they have relationships, they...my children have had relationships , um, that have...my son in particular has had relationships that have failed, um, and that he's ...come close to having a breakdown himself that I've thought : Is what happened to your gran genetic or whatever.....So, the sense of - it's not unravelling isn't the right word. This kind of, the great big....you're a river and then tributaries join , then you go into this great big delta of life...
	Interviewer: Mmmm yes, yes...

	P2: Into the ocean. That you cannot contain it. Um, you know and um, so...what was I going to say? So that's another part of ageing that for me anyway is that ....of letting go, letting go... "(I:38,8-25)
	"Ya, ya. I ...er, I ...this Bristol mum who jumped off the cliff, you know , I have to sort of talk myself out of getting so involved in that - I know it's because I've got a new grandson....." (I,39:19-22)
-relationship (what it gives her: benefits, real vs fantasy & struggles leading to something deeper, together but separate, companionship/friendship/physical intimacy/passion/acceptance of change)	."I'd had heartbreak for er, er...the first part of my, well I wouldn't say the first part but sort of the first 8 or 9 years of my marriage was really difficult for me " (I,28:17-20) "He met the challenge, you know, so but in a sense that then, is something that really made us even more close, you know...." (I,41:16-18) "We do, we do care a lot about each other. In a...in a ...because we're also quite independent, we're very independent as a couple, we're like a venn diagram, we overlap in the middle but we do our own thing...." (I,42:2-6) "but I'm very aware that both my husband and I are extremely happy with just the two of us in the house and hours will go by and we won't speak but there's that sort of together alone stuff, that I would say is increasing." (I,50:14-18) ""I love my husband, we're very good friends, er we love each other..." (I,19:11-12) "Um, but we're really good friends." (I,42:10) "And then I , I married very quickly this husband of mine that I'm married to now. Er, madly in love..." (I,20:19-20) our mad love affair, our magnificent obsession with each other was that we always related extremely well on a physical level, you know we were very much in love and lots of passionate sex which now, in our dotage, we smile about and laugh and say "God, you know, where were the days when we were bouncing off the walls" but....um, then and so that's kind of...that continued but Jonathan had a heart attack, um, five years ago now..... (I,34:21-35:4) "you know there's not that much vigorous sex going on but because our history of having had that, I think we've had a really good innings and we , we absolutely just take so much pleasure in just lying in bed together...... Physical intimacy, we have a lot of you know, he'll ....we'll put the world to rights with my head on his shoulder, um, you know and if something...if...if it ends in a sex act, that's a bonus."(I,35:19-36:5) "And we both, we're both content with that... Because yeah, you know, it's, it's got a place in our lives but it doesn't , it's not er, er a deal breaker." (I,36:9-14) "When some things fall away, e.g. passionate love making, I am quite happy with the intimacy that replaces it." (D3:6-7)
(how it leaves her vulnerable:without it money worries)	" they come and visit us on a Sunday afternoon in a sort of duty bound way, bring a cake for the old folk which we recognise that we might have done at one time and then we'll chuckle because what they don't know is that we want to go and get into bed and have an afternoon session (laughs)" (I,24:18-23) "Yeah because a lot of my friends - and again, you know, I might have felt differently about ageing if I was on my own. A

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	lot of my friends are on their own.... *Interviewer: Mmmm* *P2: And they, you know, lonely....* *Interviewer: Mmmm* *P2: Or more fearful....* *Interviewer: Mmmm* *P2: Or, um, don't have double...the double income....*" (I, 42:14-43:4)
loneliness etc)	"*So my life is the way it is because I've got my partner as well, you know*" (I,43:14-15)
-work	"*I like to work, have a purpose and get paid in exchange for my efforts. I'm still working (at a part time job which is quite responsible) and I want to keep that up as long as I can.*" (D3:14-16)
-kindness/softness/empathy	Grandpa had a ..."*Small holding - chickens and vegetables and all this type of thing. He had a popcorn business going to supplement his income*" (I, 11:1-3) Mother after breakdown: "*...she rallied sufficiently to come back, get a job as a secretary or a receptionist, um, moved us out of our grandparent's house after about 2 years but still close to them...*" (I, 11:20-23) They sort of said to me, you can do whatever you like for us but just don't go. (laughs). So I still work for them." (I,33:13-14) "*Yeah, I like it because now I kind of self-select. I just do the bits that I really like so that's really good. i work for them 10 days a month, 12 days a month...I've told them this month I'm going to hardly work for you so er...that's......*(I,33:22-25)... No, I'll think I'll probably carry on because my husband's four years younger than me. Um, and you know he's going to carry on working until about 67 and plus we've got a massive pension deficit to make up because you change countries in your early 50s you....(I,34:5-9) "*the older I get, the greater value I place on human kindness so I...I'm kind (I, 6:7-8)* "*Kindness is spontaneous often and it's just the way you respond to humanity*" (i, 6:19-20) "*Um, the patients loved me, um and I thought...I think it had to do with the fact that I just treated them as equals.*" (I,30:17-18) "*I like doing what I think of as my own "outreach programme" (being available and open) – e.g. I walk most days (I offered to) with a neighbour who is older than me and is having treatment for cancer. So it has a double reward, I like walking and talking with him, and his wife is grateful that he has company while she is at work.*" 9D3:1-5)

"And also my mother, despite her own experience, she sold us on the knight in white….the prince on the white horse…"
(I,20:10-12)

Appendix J: Frequency table of themes across participants

THEME	Louisa	Helen	Sonia	Christine	Elizabeth	Alma	Janet
I. SOMETHING ABOUT THIS FEELS DIFFERENT							
Disappearance of the known							
Work	X		X		X	X	
People	X	X		X	X	X	
General	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Changing roles							
Retirement: Choice and Freedom		X	X	X	X	X	X
Grand-parent		X	X	X			X
Care-giving	X	X	X	X	X		X
Intimate relationships							
Sex & intimate relationships	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Physical change & fears of dependency							
Increasing physical challenge	X		X		X	X	X
Sense of unreliability and vulnerability	X		X		X	X	X
Fears around future dependency and care	X	X		X	X	X	X
The means of perceiving change							
Generational difference/ solidarity	X	X			X	X	X

Distinction from or return to earlier self	X	X	X			X	

II. PERCEPTIONS, ASSUMPTIONS AND JUDGEMENTS ABOUT AGE							
Internally generated perceptions of age							
Self-awareness	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-acceptance	X	X	X	X		X	X
Role of Perspective	X	X	X		X	X	X
Internal referencing	X	X	X	X		X	X
Age is in the mind/ challenge		X	X	X	X	X	X
Internal perceptions: comparison with others	X	X	X	X	X		X
The judgement of others: Institutionalised stereotyping							
Observations of stereotypes	X		X	X			X
Judgement of others: examples in everyday life							
Everyday experience	X	X	X		X	X	X
Judgement of others: Physical appearance							
Physical appearance						X	X
Judgement of others affecting judgement of self: Negative age-related assumptions							

Dissatisfaction/ physical appearance	X					X	X
Negative assumptions of age	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

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| Ageing without a roadmap | | | | | | | |
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Removal of the template			X	X			X

III.TIME LIMITATION AND AN INCREASED EMPHASIS ON MEANING

Time limitation and living in the present

Sense of Time Limitation	X	X		X		X	
Living in the present	X	X		X	X	X	

Time limitation and letting go

Impermanence/ Letting go	X	X	X	X		X	

The importance of meaning

Individual importance and meaning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Meaning through curiosity, adventure and engagement

Cultural	X			X	X	X	
Academic & other learning	X			X	X		
General	X	X		X	X	X	X
Travel	X		X	X	X		X
Work	X	X			X		X

Meaning through and pleasure in accomplishment

Expressions of this	X			X	X	X	X
Meaning through self-care							
Health and wellbeing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Meaning through connection with others							
Family	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Friends and social activities	X			X	X	X	
Technological connection	X			X	X		X
In the wider world		X	X		X	X	

Appendix K: Example (across participants) linking master and sub-themes with quotes

Theme	Sub Themes		Examples of Quotes
How this stage is perceived as distinctive from others	*A new stage: The disappearance of the known*	*Work*	**Sonia:** *But, it came to a stage that I was feeling more and more, more and more, more and more tired doing paperwork when I should be caring for ladies and gentlemen (I, 26:16-18)* **I couldn't....the system within the health service now would drive me nuts because it's all paperwork rather than caring. It's become so risk aversive....um, that the caring's gone out the window.(i,33:1-3)* **I had a position and status.I,8:19)* *It's not mine anymore.(i,36:11)* **That feels all right because....I sometimes think to myself "Oh I wish I could go back to..." I only gave up my registration this year, yeah….(i,32:11-13,)* **Elizabeth:** *Well I never kind of wanted to do any other work on top of things so I'm sort of cut loose really, I ...it's a kind of strange feeling, I feel like I haven't got any boundaries now and ....And I've started to go to bed really late and then get up really late and then feeling tired and (I,22:15-23).* **No, I was thinking about the ending that I've just had, you know. Because you're...you talked about coming to the end of your jobs, retirement, coming up to retirement and that's a big thing, a big debate going on (I,58:9-13)* **Louisa**: *I noticed a few years ago that, um, one person I used to do a lot of work with died. Um, (laughing) 2 or 3 more retired so suddenly all the normal people I kind of rang up and said "Um, there's this interesting brief going around" , said "`Well, you know, I'm dead, I've retired, I want to spend a bit more time with the grandchildren...And um, so professional peer groups have sort of disintegrated so that's kind of....that's definitely an age thing. (I,11:12-25)* **I need to have associates and if they've gone, you've...it's not that I've stopped, it's just that my working world has disappeared from around me so ....er which is slightly ghost-like sensation, (I, 71:17-21)*

| | | | People | **Louisa:** *And felt more relaxed in spite of the fact that actually all sorts of traumatic things were happening like you know people were dying because you know, there's a bell curve about the death of your friends and relations and you know, I def...hadn't been to many funerals before I was 40 but you know, I've been to an awful lot since then. (I10:7-11:5)*

* But (long pause) most , yes, mostly it's the ...you know the usual, yeah, there's all the grief and bereavement, all that sort of stuff but not particularly um, you know, mortality doesn't sort of....That's going...it's an inevitability. (laughs) (I,24:22-25:6)

*....Actually walking around Crouch End which is a place I have known for 50 years... 40 years, 45 years - there's quite a lot of people I would have...used to see on street corners are dead now, you know, so there's the...there's the thing about time passing and some of the population of your life moving away and that goes ....that goes for family and friends, that's a sort of ...It's kind of,it is a mortality thing perhaps not about death per se…..(I,71:21-72:4)

Helen : *I do think about death quite a bit as there has been a ripple of acquaintances who have died recently, some quite suddenly. I'm not anxious about it though, it simply spurs me on to get my "affairs in order" so have scheduled a review of our wills.(D, 1:3-6)*

*Yeah because a lot of my friends - and again, you know, I might have felt differently about ageing if I was on my own. A lot of my friends are on their own....And they, you know, lonely....or more fearful....or, um, don't have double...the double income…. (I, 42:14-43:4)

*So my life is the way it is because I've got my partner as well, you know (I,43:14-15)

*And he's, he's very ill at the moment and so I've been sort of in contact with her, in the last week(?) supporting her and if I allow myself to dwell on the tragedy that is waiting....that we cannot avoid, that's when I will, I just kind of ....I just want to go and ....sit in a dark corner and pull a duvet over my head and not have to face life. (I, 52:20-53:4)

Elizabeth: *"You know, if I end up with Richard...that sometimes I feel very sad because I think that he'll die and then I'll think "Oh, I'll be on my own then" and what would that be like and you know.(I,48:19-22)* |

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		General	**Alma**: Um, yeah and I do sound old. But I probably felt that when I was younger as well. I thought you don't do that to people. You know you respect other people. Um....I do feel it's quite an alien world actually. Um….(I,21: 27-22:2)

A new stage: Changing roles and demands	Retirement: choice & freedom	**Christine**: Yeah, quite exciting in a way. Um, yeah it is liberating to have those choices because you....I feel that I haven't had...been in that situation before, really....(I,4:13-16)
		*So in a sense, it is like a new , new stage of life so it's a bit like...in a sense, like being a student. You've got all these choices of things you could be doing...(.I 2:31-3:2)
		*And it's...in a way it's sort of overwhelming. You think: "Well, I'd be interested in doing this, interested in doing that". Um, so in a way that's quite exciting really so there are opportunities that arise, (I, 3:6-9)
		*I expect when you're...when you're not at work, you're um, your world does constrict a bit because obviously when you go out to work you're meeting all these, you know, having these interactions everyday with different people... Interviewer: Mmmm P4: Um, and you know, you've got all these email requests to answer and whatever and you don't have that so your world shrinks in that sense. That's why I said I thought it was....actually I looked at it as an opportunity because you've got lots of choice and you have...it's like um, a whole new er..era because you have to...you've got all these choices of things you could do with that time, um, so I sort of felt it was a bit like being a student or school or whatever and you think "Oh well I could do this, I could do that"...lots of clubs you could join or whatever....(I, 42:9-27)
		Helen: "Yeah, I like it because now I kind of self-select. I just do the bits that I really like so that's really good. i work for them 10 days a month, 12 days a month...I've told them this month I'm going to hardly work for you so er…that's……(I,33:22-25)…
		Elizabeth: Meeting people who are still working, makes me feel envious, I think. I don't seem to have a lot of structure to my day without work (D, 7:11-13)
		*You know so I've written down a dream about a dress that I put it on and then I noticed that my boobs weren't filling it and I thought this is about age….(I, 53:27-29)
		" It sort of feels like I've got to say no to everything. I can't play the violin, I can't do anything….(I,44:3-5)
		Sonia: "And from my perspective, I am my age but I don't have to be in some ways but I can look at other people my age and they're wallowing in it…"(I, 52:4-6)
		Janet : Panicky. I can't imagine it at the

Being a grandparent	**Janet :** *(sigh, pause) I think : it was a great shock becoming a grandmother. Much as I love my grand-daughter, I can't actually believe I am a grandmother. Maybe I'm just in denial about getting older, I think, (I,5:18-21).*
	*But I am not ready to be um a grandmother that will take over the care of... um, the grandchild so that my daughter can go back to work full time, for example and … And I've met lots of people my age who are, who are desperate to be grandmothers, they see that as being the next step in their life and ....I don't (I,13:2-14)
	Helen: *"And we've got, and at the ripe old age of 65, I became a grandmother." (I, 2:14-15)*
	*I do have moments of pure bliss. Like when I am holding my 8 month old grandson, or when my husband holds me when we both drift off to sleep. (D,2,7-8)
	Sonia: *"How I will feel in 10 years time......I don't know what the future holds. I don't know. Um, I've got grandchildren who are 10 down to 4, um, I'm hoping that some of my life skills will be of use to them. Probably not, they'll be saying "Silly old woman" "(laughs)(I,60:12-16)*
	Christine: **Got 4 children, 4 grandchildren and they're...that's quite important to me (I, 2:20-21)*
	*UM, and yeah, I think it's important to be there for your children and you know....But I mean they're quite happy, you know, if we say: "Sorry, can't do babysitting - we're going on holiday" .(I,5:32-6:2)

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| | | Care-giving | *Louisa:…And I mean business business, not anything else and I, yes, I don't want to predecease my mother as I'm looking after her and nobody else is going to be able to sort out stuff I'm doing so….that's kind of the practical, the practicalities."(I, 25:22-26:2)*

Louisa: "Well, it would have been….it was mostly that we wouldn't have been able to look after her the way that she needed to be looked after. (I,39:2-4)

**And so, that was….that I would say was by far the most stressful sort of thing that has happened to me in my life...never….the cancer was nothing compared to that. (I, 36:21-23)*

**She's always depended on me to sort of, you know, she kept saying I'm a stalwart, "very splendid". I'm splendid.(I,26:25-27:2)*

**But it is ..it's been incredibly difficult and two years of that was unbelievably stressful because both my sister and I had this sister-in-law sending us really obnoxious emails, text messages, phone calls. Both of us stopped answering the phone. Both of us were suffering from stress so that wasn't the stress of my mother, dementing, that's kind of sad but it's something that happens, is happening….you know you can work with that and look after her. But my sister in law's attitude, stirring everybody else up and actually saying things about both of us, I know discover which were both in the end untrue and actually libellous but would make….it would actually mean that you….you know,it was seriously worrying in case social services or the...*
Interviewer: Oh right.....
P1: ....Court of Protection believed what they said and then decided that Jemima and I weren't suitable people to be looking after our mother.(I,35:15-36:10)

**So when she runs out of money which she will sometime next summer, she will have to move out and she will have no money left at all. Not a penny. And so, what's on the agenda at the moment is me trying to find a decent care home.Um, um, and all the ones, all the really nice ones cost a lot more than social services would pay "(I,32:19-25)*

 **The stroke was only about 18 months ago and although R's life and work has been disrupted in the intervening time and for a bit before that with her father, the chaos bit has been relatively (to me) short lived and without the family fireworks…. And it's now over so she will be able to get back to normal work and productivity and income, as well as enjoying the granddaughter – makes me feel incredibly tired with no good outcome in view. (D,1:3-11)* |

	Intimate relationships & sex	Existing relationships	**Sonia**: *Now when he was first retired, I was working full time, um, and so it's only really in the last couple of years if you like that we've lived together (laughs).(I,40:8-10) "annoying" (I, 41:5):*
			Um, I think it's becoming, in a way, I'm turning into a nurse to my husband…(I, 38:18-19).
			Yeah. So well, you know, I do my thing, he does his lack of thing….(i,40:17-18)
			Because he's 75, 76 , 75....and he's becoming er, er well-settled into old age and ...not interested in keeping fit and not interested in being active and not interested in ....all sorts.(i,38:23-25)
			Christine: *"So um, yeah I mean it's nice in a way and I think, as I say, he complains....he's only been retired for a year, well is it a year? Yeah, just over a year. He would say...he complains that I'm out all the time and it's all "I retired to be with you and you're never in" I mean it's only joking but I think because he's....I could be at home all day in my sewing studio and he's down in his garage....And we never see each other anyway, so.....If we're both at home at the same time, unless we're doing something like maybe we sometimes do the garden…."(I, 22:26-23:7)*
			It's quite nice. I don't mind and yeah, we've done...decorated the house and done things that, you know, we've ....hadn't had time for for a long time.(I,21:1-4)
			He said: "You're never in." Mmm, that's true - I mean he's quite happy to stay at home and potter about in his garage and all that stuff, you know... Interviewer: Mmmm P4: *Because I'm...I'm the one that says: "Well we've got to go out, we've got to go on holiday" or something like that. (I21:27-22:3)*
			We get on, we talk.(laughs) That's helpful. Um, I...I don't know. I mean I do like my own space...And I do like, you know, being...going out and about more than he does....Um, so he's got his elderly mother to run about, he has to sort of...fortunately, well I say fortunately I mean you know well...but she doesn't live very far from us so he can pop in most days....(I,24:12-26)
			I mean my husband likes to plan things, well he used to, I don't think he does it quite as much. You know "Well if this happens, we ought to do it and we ought to do it..." you know. Well, you don't know what's going to happen, you know you can't (laughs). You can't say you're going to do X,Y, Z - you know,

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| | | Future relationships | *Alma:* Erotic sensation. Because that's all gone now. (laughs) That's the thing with age, you just - the eroticism, it's just not there.(I, 37:18-20)
| | | | *Talked about the benefits (very limited) of ageing. Told him how had I been younger I'd have fallen hook, line & sinker for someone we both know & how I would have been very, very hurt too, because although this person is very, very bright he does not converse: he tells me things. Yes, they are interesting and he is one of the most interesting & therefore attractive men I know, but he doesn't value my contributions. Been there before & can see the inequality in relationships now. Couldn't see that when younger - so age does have some positives. I feel I now have some idea of what is not good for me and where I will not go even if it means I'm on my own. (D, 1:25-D, 2:14)*
| | | | *So going into another relationship, he would have to be, he would have to be fairly (pause)...he would have to be a man who is in tune with his emotions and I've found very few men are .....(I,34:29-35:2)*
| | | | *And that could happen to me because I've got the potential and I think that's what I've realised about myself. I have always been anxious - it may have been the reason why I've never actually maintained a relationship, I don't know. Um, so yeah with age has come more of a self-awareness.(I, 55:28-56:3)*
| | | | *Someone that I can actually talk to and someone who bloody listens to me as well.(I, 35:19-21)*
| | | | *So, um, no I would be much more discriminating now about what I'd accept and also, I don't - you know, men of my age aren't looking at women my age. They're looking at women 10, 15 years younger than me. Um (pause) and also you know, you don't want to be with someone who may be ill....(I, 36:28-37:2)*
| | | | *Janet:*Um, yeah - more I'm not interested, who knows? Yes, I'm not closed to it and I'm not against it and I'm not feeling bitter that...but I suppose some part of me, if I'm honest, does sometimes look at myself in the mirror and think: "No, well you're probably a bit too old now."
 Interviewer: Mmm, mmm.
 Janet: Mmmm. Who's going to want someone looking me? (laughs ruefully) Yeah, um...(I, 27:7-17)
| | | | *And yes, I, I've....I'm not interested at all actually. My daughters are pushing me to do*

Physical change & fears of dependency	*Increasing prevalence*	**Sonia:** *I find it a bit annoying - I've had cataracts, I've had a detached retina, um, really bad one but I've been really lucky (bangs table). When I come back from my next holiday, I'm having floaters taken out of this eye.....because...bad floaters in this eye. Um, I understand what's happening.Yeah, the ends of the DNA are basically wearing out and was explained to me as ...as it's a shoelace and the plastic bits at the end get shorter and shorter and shorter as you get older.... And as you get older...so that the DNA in each cell doesn't replicate quite perfectly and you start getting all these.... various things go wrong with you. So in one way, I accept it because I inte...(slowly) intellectualise it……(I, 45:4-46:2)* **Louisa:***Tired & stiff (fingers, shoulders, hips, knees….feel truly ancient)" (D, 8:11-12)* **I just, um...I ...there are bits that, you know, there are slightly...and I'm slightly horrified by you know....Some of the things that happen to your body happen incredibly suddenly and when you're 11,12 if you've got good parents, they tell you this is all about growing up and it's puberty. What they don't tell you is that it actually happens in reverse at the same speed so that ...it's not a long slow thing, it happens really suddenly, you know. The skin on my arms changed in ...from one summer to the next, I thought.(I,65:19-66:4)* ** I think there's sort of...the thing I am really noticing is the kind of um, not sort of "Do I look good?" but actually how incredibly stiff my joints get.....Sitting at a computer too long and knowing that, sort of, friends of mine are ...some, you know, some of them suddenly started getting shorter because they've had their first osteoporosis breaks....(I, 68:14-23)* **Elizabeth:** *I might go to the band though, but just to watch. If I take the violin and start playing I know i will get enthusiastic and won't be able to stop even if in pain.(D, 11:16-18)* ** She told me about her physical problems and I shared mine. I told her that I tolerated the pain well for a well, subdued myself to it, but after a time, I just wanted it to fuck off, and it made me irritable. (D, 9:5-8)* *All these things take time and that's got a bit better now and um, you know it's just an awful lot of things to keep up with, just maintenance....And it just feels like it's taking over my life" (I,56:23-30)* **Just when you have got time to do the things you didn't have time for, then you find your body gives out.(D, 11:7-8)*

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| | | Vulnerability & unreliability | *Janet:* So it doesn't, it doesn't really feel any different but there are times when you get that cold reality that you're not quite as agile as you were....Though I still run, I still exercise, um, opening a jar suddenly becomes a challenge and then it's frustrating because you feel that it's due to your age. Or I do. That I haven't got that same strength for example. (I, 5:26-6:6)

Louisa: "Yes and you get sort of worried about if you did trip over, um, you wouldn't just hurt, you might well break something you wouldn't have broken a few years ago, you know um...You know, you wouldn't fall, you wouldn't fall in a sense, you'd bounce but, um, and that I think is (pause) ....that's something...and that does kind of affect the way that you ...yeah, I wouldn't ....I'll run up stairs but I wouldn't run downstairs in case I missed my footing because that would be scary (laughs)." (I, 70:13-22).

* I think there's sort of…the thing I am really noticing is the kind of um, not sort of "Do I look good?" but actually how incredibly stiff my joints get….Sitting at a computer too long and know that, sort of, friends of mind are… some you know, some of them suddenly started getting shorter because they've had their first osteoporosis breaks (I, 68:14-23)

*It's like...it's not so much the mortality and worrying about we're going to be dead, um, or that...whether you look younger than you do, if you can still go out and pull. It's actually, I think it was that sort of thing about sort of bits, you know the body becoming less reliable and you don't know what's going to go, you don't know what's going to go wrong next. And I think that's , er, I think I've now suddenly thought ....I used to go on holiday on my own quite a lot so I could go somewhere I could stay, see friends and then go off and do stuff and I'm...you know ten years ago I would go and stay in some really quite rough places on my own. I wouldn't do that now. I'd be afraid of something happening to me and ....um, yeah and I think there's something a bit more about needing… needing to know that somebody's going to notice if you um, don't appear at breakfast or need to have access to medical services or things like that because it's physically getting stiffer and more fragile and less able to lump...jump out of the way of oncoming traffic and things like that.... (I, 69:2-22)

Elizabeth: I might go to the band though, but just to watch. If I take the violin and start playing I know i will get enthusiastic and won't be able to stop even if in pain.(D11:16-18)

*Because I can cook and I can do quite a lot of things and I can feel what's...hurts me. |

		Fears around future dependency and care	**Janet**: "Yes, because I think I'm fiercely independent - this is the problem. And that's part of the reason I have always wanted to work is that because I wanted to be .....I wanted to have that independence" (I, 15:18-21)
			*Unsettling NHS programme tonight. Caring for people in the community. Made me start thinking of the future again. Some of them were only 10-15 years older than me. (D, 2:1-3)
			*And I think when I was saying about going up to the Elderly Care ward and you see so many elderly people that really are, um, they, they have.....I don't know how to say this without sounding really awful but they're there in bed and they're dependent on people to help them get out and people to um, ...and people to....yeah, I think it's very sad. And that's frightening for me, very frightening. (I,14:28- 15:7)
			*So yes there's something in me that is very independent and I don't want to lose that. And I wonder because I....my work is to give care and to give support...But obviously, I don't really want that....I don't want that back. I don't want someone to do that for me.(I, 15:26-16:3)
			*Yes, yes, yeah. Now. And we'll think about those far away things later (I, 30:12-14)
			*Yeah, I don't go too far into the future because it can be quite bleak and scary.(I, 16:9-10)
			*Mmm, yes - maybe I don't want to think about this because if I don't think about it it's not going to happen. Or not going to happen yet and we'll face it when it really does happen. (I, 29;11- 18)
			*Had to go up to the Elderly Care Ward in the early evening. Everyone settled in bed. Will I be here in 20 years time? 20 years is not that long. Is keeping this diary making me think about it more? (D,2:21-28)
			*Feeling very upset today as received e-mail in regards to end-of-life planning. Suggesting we should approach all patients over 50 yrs of age in regards to decisions on End of life. First reaction what!! Very angry - so how must patients feel. On one hand 50 is considered young. Then on the other side of the coin - should be thinking about end of life (D, 7:10-17)
			*Um, there's the ideal of having enough money to retire and being able to travel but

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Modes of perception	Generational difference/ peer identification	**Louisa:**But you know, never mind, sort of… and they're still being sort of looked after and bailed out by their parents. That I find absolutely extraordinary but it seems to be quite normal. (I,77:1-4) *And thinking that 40 years old seem terribly young and um, don't understand some things that seem to be blindingl obvious to me. (I, 9:7-9) *I think that's really weird. I also think it's quite dysfunctional, that I…that'll just sort of…you know, you'll be dead before you're grown up if you don't….(I, 77:8-10) *So I...I was with a friend I was having a drink with last night and ...we were talking about his son, son's girlfriend, um, and they're both....one's has just, the girlfriend's just given up her job and the son wants to because they both don't like their jobs very much. I said: "But how are they going to pay the rent if they do that?" He said "Oh well, I think, you know, parents will donate" You're thinking: "But they're 30, these two, they're 30. You know. They're actually physically old enough to be grandparents, never....You know, not legally. But you know, never mind, sort of.....and they're still being sort of looked after and bailed out by their parents. That I find absolutely extraordinary but it seems to be quite normal.(I,76: 12-77:4) **Helen:** But as far as the ageing goes, I've got a lot of things in my life about being older that are good and that provide me with structure and with....I have a life as an older person that I like and I enjoy. And I'm very grateful for that and I'm aware of that and appreciate that. (I,20:22 - 21:2) *I like being with people of my own age. I have fun with my exercise class. (D, 2:12) **Alma:** I think we're pretty powerful - baby boomers are a powerful lot because there's lots of us and we've got money".(I,13:25-27) *Because we've gone back to the flawless, sort of digitalised image . I'm sick and tired of that, i really am so if you project that I'm not going to buy your stuff". (I,19:30-20:2) *8 women of "a certain age" having a really good time together.(D, 3:5-7) **Janet**: Yesterday evening I went down to Tunbridge Wells to my cousins for dinner. Missed last train so stayed over & then caught first train back. Felt quite exciting wandering around city in night befores clothes. God must have been 40 years since I did this. Had to go straight to my daughters to

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		Distinction from or return to earlier stages	**Alma**: *Er, I'm fairly comfortable with - up here (taps head) - with ageing in that (pause) I know more about what I want and what I don't want and what I won't accept now which I….think I accepted a load of crap when I was younger (I, 13:8-12)*
			Louisa: *It's like being about 9 again, it's sort of - I don't know - 40 years of hormonal, er, insanity suddenly stops "(I, 12:8-10)*
			*Yes, that's...I think I feel much more of a veneer. So it does feel quite different. It does feel like being 9 or 10 again.(I,13:17-18)
			*Does this feel like a different...stage in your life.... *Louisa: Yes.* *Interviewer: And if so, how?* *Louisa: Ah, well, yes. Um, yes. Well...one...about three ways actually. One is...I'm a...I'm pretty sure there is something about thinking I'm 60 rather than 40 and...(I, 8:17-9:3)*
			*so I think there is a ….I do think there is a different perspective. A lot of my sort of peer group, that kind of 50 something to 70 something sort of….their whole approach to life, the universe and everything seems to be quite different to what it was like about 20 years ago: (I, 9:23-10:3)
			Helen: *I'm aware of a "return to self" – I have become the person I was always meant to be (hope that makes sense) – having gone full circle, I again recognise the "me" I was as a child, and I like her. I'm aware of my essence. (D, 2:13-15)*
			You had to learn to embroider and knit. I still knit today and it's and incredibly soothing activity for me. Um, although I didn't for years and then I went back to it (I,14:1-4)
			*I'm aware, um, that as I get older that there is a kind of return to self for me (I,8:3-4)
			That I'm reconnecting with the person, the child that I was. Um, and yeah…so I think this who I have always been… (I,8:8-10)

Part II: Journal Article

"But I just feel that the limited amount of time that I've got - I want it to be meaningful": Exploring transitional experiences of late midlife women.

Deborah Samson   Dr Aylish O'Driscoll

Department of Psychology,

City University

Whiskin Street

London EC1R OJD

deborah.Samson.1@city.ac.uk

Aylish.ODriscoll.2.@city.ac.uk

Abstract and short title

Transitional experiences of late midlife women (short title).

New research used interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the lived experience of women living in Britain, aged 59-66, in order to better appreciate contemporary life on the cusp of older female adulthood. Major themes included an awareness of a different stage; the conflict between assured self-perspective and vulnerability to stereotyping and the judgement of others as well as the recognition and pursuit of meaningful activities and behaviours. These findings are considered through Bridges' (1980) model of transition and may signpost ways in which the emerging cohort of female older adults may be understood and supported.