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**Older women as occupational beings:
exploring the meanings of occupations
within the home environment for older
women living alone**

by

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**Thesis submitted
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

There is a discrepancy between the life expectancy of men and women of approximately two and a half years (Taylor Nelson Sofres 2014). This suggests that women are likely to spend a period of time in the latter years of their life living alone. It is anticipated that this will lead to a unique experience of later life for women, which to date has received little attention.

This study is concerned with exploring the experience of living alone for 11 women aged 70-80 years from the South East of England. A particular emphasis is placed upon the experience of being an older woman, the activities that they engage in when they are at home alone, and the environment of home as a place for occupational engagement.

Influenced by interpretive phenomenology and feminist principles, this study focuses on capturing the lived experiences of the 11 women in their own images and words. To achieve this, the methods of unstructured interviews and photo-elicitation are used.

The women in this study describe a predominantly positive experience of living alone in later life. They value being busy, engage in a range of meaningful activities, and maintain their independence in everyday life. They provide compelling evidence that later life is a time for self-growth and development. This appears to link to the decline in the gender related roles and occupations which are expected of them in later life.

This indicates that it is essential to provide bespoke support to older women that focuses on prevention of future decline but in a way that values their ongoing abilities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It has long been recognised that women have a unique experience of life due to their gender; a view consistently reinforced since the inception of feminism in 1830 (Vincent 2010). Feminism is concerned with identifying and addressing inequalities that exist in society, primarily those that contribute to the ongoing oppression of women (Walby 2011; Hooks 2000). Whilst there have been considerable changes implemented in an attempt to enhance the opportunities available to women, there are still observable inequalities between the experiences of men and women today. These inequalities and their impact are complicated by the societal developments that occur during the life course of each person that mean different experiences for different cohorts. With each woman's unique experience there is a unique story to be told and captured.

Within this study I wanted to understand what it was like to live alone as a woman aged 70-80 years. I was particularly interested in exploring the activities in which women engaged when they were at home alone, how home influenced or was influenced by these activities, and how I could best capture this information to facilitate an understanding of older women as occupational beings. In order to reflect my feminist values it was important for me to ensure that I used research methods that would enable the voices of the women to be accurately captured and presented; to this end I used the research methods of unstructured interviews and photo-elicitation. The findings from this study will make a unique contribution to understanding the experiences of this cohort of women in later life and the future of occupational therapy practice with older women who live alone.

1.1 My Nan, feminism and me

When adopting a feminist approach in research it is essential to identify the positionality of the researcher (Creswell 2013). Within feminist research the prior knowledge, values and beliefs of the researcher are seen to influence the research relationship, how information is gathered and how the findings are analysed (Primeau 2003; Creswell 2013; Holloway and Wheeler 2010). My positionality in this study is informed by my personal experience, my professional practice as an occupational therapist, and my broad world view.



Figure 1

Everyone has a unique personal experience during their life course that influences who they are and who they will become. When I was growing up I spent a lot of time with the female members of my family, specifically my Nan who was extremely influential during my formative years (figure 1). My Nan lived on her own for 44 years following the death of her husband with whom she had had a turbulent relationship. The man I knew as my Grandad was a very close friend of my Nan and considered a member of our family. They had plans to marry however my Grandad lived with and cared for his mother and my Nan believed that whilst she was alive they should not marry. However, shortly after his mother died my Grandad developed cancer that proved quick to progress and sadly led to his death. My Nan faced numerous challenges during her life course, including a challenging marital relationship, having and raising 5 children, the loss of siblings, the untimely death of adult children and the loss of her partner. However she dealt with these experiences in a way that reflected her strong and independent nature. My personal experience informed by my relationship with my Nan led me to regard ageing and older women in a positive light.

My positive observations of ageing and older women were challenged by my professional experience as an occupational therapist. During my first job as a basic grade occupational therapist I worked in acute physical health care. Whilst I worked with everyone over the age of 18 years the local demographic meant that the majority of the people on my caseload were over the age of 65 years. The older women that I came into contact with at work were experiencing varying degrees of frailty, dependent on others to fulfil the most basic of their needs, and often facing a transition from their own home into a long term care establishment. As a result of my professional experience my view of later life became increasingly negative and resulted in me developing a personal fear of ageing, illness and death. At this time my Nan was still alive and independently living alone but this was not enough to help me to

rationalise the professional experience I was having. As an occupational therapist and granddaughter I found myself becoming increasingly concerned about the risks that the older women I worked with, and my Nan were taking; this resulted in me acting in a way that restricted their engagement in everyday life. The incongruity between my personal and professional experience of older women has been an area of interest throughout my career to date and inspires this study. By completing this study I am hoping to discover the real experiences of later life.

As an occupational therapist I view the world through an occupational lens. I regard all people as 'occupational beings' with an inherent need to engage in personally meaningful activities (occupations) to develop and maintain their health and wellbeing (Law et al 1998).

Occupational therapists see this need to 'do' as lifelong, however the way in which older women are often represented in occupational therapy literature and by wider society would suggest otherwise. Emphasis is often placed upon later life for older women being characterised by poor health, decline, frailty and a decreased engagement in activities. Other disciplines have much to contribute to our understanding of the lived experience of older women as occupational beings and I need to be open to exploring an understanding of the world beyond my occupational lens. Drawing on the theory generated by other disciplines will act to highlight the complexity surrounding later life for women and to strengthen the nature of occupational therapy theory and practice.

I believe that all people are unique, should be treated with equality, and valued for any contribution that they are able to make. This is akin to the person centred approach that is inherent in occupational therapy practice. In this study these values are captured in the use of interpretive phenomenological philosophical principles and a feminist approach to the methodology. Interpretive phenomenology holds the view that a phenomenon can only be defined by the person that is experiencing it in the context in which it occurs (e.g. Creswell 2013) and a feminist approach to methodology assists with putting this into practice. A feminist approach to methodology promotes the use of research methods that capture and value the voices of those living the experience of interest (Scholtz 2010) and by enabling these individuals to take the power in the research relationship (Hammersley 1992). I need to ensure that my practice as a researcher is conducive to the achievement of this person centred ideal.

My motives for pursuing this study are clearly embedded in my personal experience, my practice as an occupational therapist, and informed by my world view. However, the findings

of this study will have far reaching implications that will be of interest to the wider world and a range of academic disciplines, including gerontology, feminism and occupational therapy. Understanding the wider implications of this study further contributes to the justification for completing this piece of work.

1.2 We should all be concerned with the way ageing and older women are perceived

In the United Kingdom (UK) there are currently 11.6 million people over the age of 65 years, with 1.5 million over the age of 85 years (Office for National Statistics 2016). For those currently aged 65 years there is a life expectancy of 85.9 years for women and 83.4 for men (TNS 2014). Whilst an ageing population is celebrated in many forums (United Nations Population Fund and Help Age International 2012), in others it is associated with increased levels of dependency and the cost to the economy (Government Office for Science 2016). Statistics are often drawn upon to demonstrate the negative implications for the rest of society. For example, care for older adults is currently estimated to stand at £22.2 billion (Laing and Buisson 2013), and in information that could be used to demonstrate that Government monies are directed to this group to the detriment of others (Robineau 2016). Whilst demographic information may justify the need for ongoing research exploring later life, steps need to be taken to ensure that people in the later stages of their life are not seen as a homogenous group with identical experiences and needs.

With growing numbers of people living for longer it is imperative to ensure that these additional years are a positive and fulfilling experience, with older people valued for their individuality and viewed as equal citizens with equal opportunities. This is challenged by the way that the majority of statutory services are organised in the UK to focus on supporting older people when they are facing a time of crisis, rather than working in a preventative manner to enable a positive life experience for all (Oliver et al 2014). If older people are allowed to reach a state of crisis the implications are likely to be far reaching and have consequences for their independence and subsequent care needs. As a result of natural ageing the body needs to work harder to maintain a state of homeostasis (internal balance), consequently when faced with illness the body has to work harder to recover and it may not be possible to achieve the exact previous healthy state (Marieb 2013). Providing bespoke support to older people that focuses on prevention of future decline would facilitate a positive experience of later life.

To provide bespoke support to older people it is important to understand the factors that contribute to their unique lived experiences. This study is specifically concerned with the influence of gender and embraces this by focusing on the experiences of older women. There is a discrepancy between the life expectancy of men and women, with women likely to live on average two and a half years longer than men (TNS 2014). As a consequence, it is anticipated that women will spend some of their time in the latter years of their life living alone as a result of widowhood (Martin-Matthews 2011). 36% of people over 65 years of age live on their own, with women making up 70% of this number (Office for National Statistics 2015). However, these figures are not just a consequence of widowhood. Changes in society and cultural expectations mean that women are also more likely to enter old age as either single or divorced further contributing to the number of women over the age of 65 years who are living alone (Martin-Matthews 2011). I am interested in enabling women to voice their own unique experiences of living alone in later life and anticipate that their gender will influence the experiences they share.

Enabling older women to have positive and fulfilling experiences in later life has consequences for the perceptions held of ageing by wider society. It has been demonstrated that assuming later life will be a time characterised by negative experiences informs how people will behave in later life (Coudin and Alexopoulos 2010; Karpt 2014). This has been referred to as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Nelson 2005) where people will inhabit the assumptions that they have made, whether they are embedded in fact or not. By demonstrating the positive nature of later life for women I hope to be able to begin to challenge these long held negative assumptions and subsequently the behaviour that they illicit.

1.3 Anticipated contribution of this study to fields of research

This study draws on and can be seen to contribute to a number of academic fields including gerontology, feminism and occupational therapy. This interdisciplinary approach has contributed to both the depth and breadth of this study. The way in which this study is linked to the academic fields identified provides further justification and warrants further explanation.

Gerontology is an interdisciplinary field that is concerned with improving the understanding of the process of ageing, older people, and their experiences in later life (Stuart – Hamilton 2011). Gerontologists aspire to challenge prevailing negative assumptions associated with, and enhance the overall experience of, the latter years of life. The interdisciplinary nature of gerontology means that the range of issues that have already been explored is vast. However

there is always scope for new areas of interest to be identified and considered due to the ever evolving nature of society. This study will contribute to the discipline of gerontology by enabling 11 older women from a single cohort to share their personal experiences of later life.

The central focus in this study on the unique experiences of women is informed by the philosophy and discipline of feminism. Feminism is concerned with enabling equality of experience regardless of the gender of the person, although the emphasis is primarily upon ensuring that women have the same opportunities available to them as men (Walby 2011; Hooks 2015). Feminists regard society as being inherently patriarchal where the needs of men are favoured; this acts to restrict the opportunities and experiences that are available to women (Usher 1996). As a means of challenging the oppressive nature of patriarchy, feminist approaches to research methodology strive to use methods that enable the experiences of women to be captured in their own voice. Drawing on the principles of feminism, this study will use research methods that value the voices of women to explore how oppression faced by women across the life course can influence their experience of living alone in later life. This study will contribute to the understanding of the unique experiences of older women and how they are informed by experiences they have had throughout their life course.

The theoretical underpinnings of occupational therapy are based on the understanding that occupational therapists view all people as 'occupational beings' with an inherent need to engage in personally meaningful activities (occupations) to develop and maintain their health and wellbeing (Law et al 1998). Recently occupational therapy research has been concerned with generating evidence to support the unique role of the occupational therapist in health and care services, including the theory used to inform the process followed and the interventions that are used. This is indicative of the current emphasis being placed on reclaiming our core ethos of occupation by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (UK) and the need to demonstrate the efficacy of our practice in a climate of financial austerity (e.g. College of Occupational Therapists 2016). People currently engage with occupational therapy services at a time of crisis when their ability to engage in occupations is impaired usually in response to a decline in the body or mind. I believe that much can be achieved by taking a more preventative approach within occupational therapy practice that focuses on enabling engagement in occupations for all; to date this has received very little attention in occupational therapy literature. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will give an indication of how occupational therapists can use occupation with older women to maintain their health and wellbeing as a means of avoiding a crisis.

The interdisciplinary nature of this study means that the contribution it is able to make expands across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Gerontology, feminism and occupational therapy all provide a unique perspective when considering the experiences of living alone for older women. These unique perspectives enable new discourses to emerge and subsequently contribute to expanding the knowledge base informing each of these disciplines. I am particularly interested in understanding the contribution that gerontology and feminism can make to inform the practice of occupational therapy with older women who are living alone; a relationship that has not previously been explored.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Within this chapter, I will be presenting a discussion of previously published literature that explores issues which contribute to developing an understanding of older women who live alone. I will use the person, environment, occupation model (Law et al 1996) used in occupational therapy. That is older women (person), and what older women do (occupation) within their homes (environment). This chapter will examine what it means to be an older woman, the nature of older women as occupational beings, home as the context for the occupations engaged in by older women, and how it is possible to capture the complexity of occupational engagement using the occupation of photography.

The Literature Search

My initial search of published literature pertinent to my areas of interest occurred when I was drafting my first formal study proposal. At this time I was interested in challenging the representation that appeared to be gathering momentum of older women being lonely. This assumption appeared to have become well established in academia, the media, and society in general. I began this literature search by using Google Scholar to search for research articles and opinion pieces relevant to my topic. This process produced vast amounts of literature, even when a 5 year date restriction was applied and literature that was not produced in the United Kingdom was excluded. After reading a selection of the documents that were identified during this search I became aware that my search had generated literature which reinforced the very perceptions that I was trying to challenge; that older women living alone would inevitably experience loneliness in the latter years of their lives. At this time I reconsidered the focus of my study, which led me to conclude that in order to understand the experience of living alone for older women I needed to enable them to define their own experiences; regardless of whether they were aligned with my views, those presented in published literature, or a combination of the two.

By removing the parameters provided by initially focusing on loneliness, I opened up a wealth of additional relevant literature drawn from numerous different academic disciplines. I began searching the literature using Google Scholar and the 'Search it' facility provided by Canterbury Christ Church University library services; both of these sources allowed me to access vast amounts of information. I initially restricted my search to literature that was published in the past 5 years. The first search terms that I used derived from the phrase 'older women living alone'. As I read pertinent pieces of literature I identified a number of alternative search

terms. These included elderly, women in later life and widowhood which were used to describe older women, and isolation, solitude, and loneliness that were used interchangeably with the concept of living alone. With a sense of the academic discussions that already existed concerning the experience of living alone for older women, I narrowed my search to focus on any attempts that had been made to enable older women themselves to define their own experiences of living alone. To achieve this I focused on the research methods that were being used to gather information, all of which were qualitative. This search elicited a far more limited amount of literature.

When conducting my literature search I chose to exclude literature that was concerned with exploring and measuring quality of life. I believe that quality of life is open to subjective interpretation and that measuring such a personal experience holds little value. I also omitted material that emphasised the application of psychological theory to explain the experiences that the women were having as I was interested in how women perceived their own experiences.

Once I had completed the analysis of my findings I returned to the literature, undertaking additional searches to ensure that the literature I cited was relevant to the outcome of my study and to ensure that I had not omitted to include any recently published material. To complete this literature search I repeated the process I had followed previously but also conducted searches using terms that had expectantly emerged from my findings. These new search terms included women and occupational justice, how older women feel about the way that they are perceived by others, how older women evaluate their own experiences by comparing themselves to others, and how later life for women can be a time of self-growth. Completing these additional searches enabled me to view my conclusions in relation to existing literature and establish the unique contributions that my work was able to make.

The literature that I have drawn upon in this chapter takes a number of formats.

Each time I searched for pertinent literature the process organically developed. This can be observed in the way that the search terms I used emerged from previous searches.

2.1 Being an older woman

2.1.1 The age of an older woman in the United Kingdom

When considering the experiences of older women, it is important to be clear about who is included in this group of people. Age holds a prominent position in British society; being marked through rituals such as celebrations of birthdays and used to inform the organisation

of public life including access to services, funds and institutions (Vincent 2003). The way in which people perceive age within society facilitates an image of a woman to be constructed (Bytheway 1997) and influences the assumptions which are made about that her. These assumptions include the experiences they imagine she may have had and the abilities that she currently possesses (Cuddy and Fiske 2002). Whilst there may be some similarities amongst older women, it is essential to recognise that, each woman is unique and will have encountered different experiences at different ages.

The point at which a woman is defined as entering old age is influenced by numerous factors including (though not limited to) the political climate, economics, the physical abilities of the individual (Reed et al 2004) and the prevailing culture (Bytheway 2000). Old age is socially constructed (Vincent 2003) with the age of 65 years commonly cited in developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, as the time at which someone becomes an older person (Kite and Wagner 2002). Previous indicators of entering old age in the United Kingdom have included retirement from paid employment (Bright 1997; Seabrook 2003; Reed et al 2004) and the arrival of grandchildren. However, the age of enforced retirement is now obsolete, with the time of the transition from work into retirement being at the discretion of the individual and their circumstances. In terms of the arrival of grandchildren, women now often opt to have children later in life, if at all, and this has consequences for when or if grandchildren will be part of their life (Seabrook 2003; Office for National Statistics 2013b). Research studies that focus on older women do not add any clarity as to when a woman enters old age as they can include participants from as young as 50 years of age. If we decided that women are older at 50 then we would be spending almost half of our lives in old age. It appears that women do not enter old age at a specific chronological point (Kite and Wagner 2002; Seabrook 2003). Therefore, the point at which a woman enters old age should be seen as unique experience for each individual.

2.1.2 Ageing as an inevitable process for women

Whilst there is a lack of consensus about when a woman is older, there is agreement that with increased age comes changes in the body and mind. Ageing is a biological fact (Beckett and Taylor 2010) and whilst there can be considerable variation in the way that the body and mind of a woman ages there are many universal features. As a woman ages the anatomy (structure) and physiology (function) of her body systems begin to change. The rate and extent of age related changes varies depending upon the genetics of the woman, her lifestyle choices across her life course, and environmental factors (World Health Organisation 2015). The consequences of these changes in body and mind are observable in the thinning and greying of

hair, skin that is thin, sagging and wrinkled, a decline in stature, as well as a general slowing of both the body and mind (Ashford et al 2005). In the developed world these age related changes are seen to be undesirable and as a result a lot of attention is given to how women can prolong their youthful appearance. If she is unable to maintain her 'flawless' youthful appearance she is attributed less value by society (Garner 2013) and perceived as a failure even though the ageing process is natural and cannot knowingly be reversed. With so many influential factors, the extent of the impact of the age related changes in the body and mind will vary resulting in a unique experience of later life for each woman.

The majority of age related changes of the body and mind are not sex specific; however, a unique part of the ageing process for women is the menopause. The menopause usually occurs around the sixth decade of a woman's life (Chahal et al 2007) and is a direct result of the ageing of the endocrine system, the body system that is responsible for the release of hormones (Marieb 2013). During the menopause release of the hormone oestrogen, responsible for the stimulation of the production of eggs by the ovaries, declines and indicates the end of a woman's fertile years (Marieb 2013). In a patriarchal society, women are valued for the role that they play in producing and raising their family (Scholz 2010). When a woman enters the menopause, this valued role is no longer accessible to them and may lead to them feeling less valued (Scholtz 2010). Of course, there are women who choose not to or cannot have children and so the menopause may elicit different feelings in different women. The menopause demonstrates how age related changes in the body and mind have consequences for women beyond their physical or mental abilities.

2.1.3 Ageing and illness

Age related changes of the body and mind increase the chance that a woman will experience illness and disability in later life. As the human body ages it is unable to maintain the same level of internal stability and efficiency as it could in the earlier years; this means that the body struggles to deal with any stress placed upon it including the ability to fight off illness (Marieb 2013). The prevalence of conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes is seen to peak in the latter years of life (López-Otin et al 2013); however there are no conditions that only effect older women (Becket and Taylor 2010). For women over 65 years of age living in the United Kingdom the most common causes of death are currently shown to be ischemic heart disease, cancers, chronic lower respiratory diseases, cerebrovascular diseases, dementia and Alzheimer's disease (Office of National Statistics 2013). These are all long-term conditions that are associated with a prolonged period of illness rather than being a result of a sudden medical event (Lloyd et al 2013). Statistics support this notion that whilst women usually live

for longer than men, they often experience a longer period of their life where they are living with illness and disability (Office for National Statistics 2014). This will contribute to the unique experience of each woman in the latter years of her life.

The long-term nature of the illnesses commonly faced by older women may indicate the need for ongoing support from health and care services. This has financial implications for the economy as highlighted in a report written by Silcock and Sinclair (2012) on behalf of the International Longevity Centre UK. This report is entitled 'The cost of our ageing society' and predicts that by 2016/2017 the growth in the number of older people will require an increased spend of £36 billion to meet their associated health care costs and an additional £14 billion to fund the subsequent growth in long term care needs. Establishing and implementing the most effective and timely means of managing these conditions could help to reduce the associated economic burden and more importantly maintain a good standard of quality of life for older women.

In the United Kingdom, we are living in a time of financial austerity where funding of health and social services is under constant scrutiny. The majority of the people using health and care services in the United Kingdom gain access at a point of crisis when they have sustained an injury, received a new diagnosis or are experiencing exacerbation of a pre-existing condition. The services that they will access fall under the umbrella of urgent and emergency care that work in a reactive rather than preventative way. 'The Five Year Forward View' (NHS 2014) document, which is concerned with enhancing public health practice in health and care services, emphasises the need for the development of preventative services to reduce the pressure currently faced by emergency and urgent care facilities. The focus and timing of these services is yet to be established. Health and care provision that focuses on the development and maintenance of a positive health and wellbeing across the life course could be an effective response to the need to reduce spending on public services.

2.1.4 Perceptions of ageing women

In the past, perceptions of older women were predominantly negative because they were judged only on the deficits that they appeared to have. These deficits were assumed to lead to increased dependency which had implications for wider society, particularly in terms of the additional pressure that this placed upon shared economic resources. However as highlighted by Robinson and Howartson-Jones (2014), since the 1980s and the development of the social model of disability less emphasis is placed upon personal deficits as barriers to participation in everyday life. The social model of disability promotes the notion that the barriers to

participation in everyday life exist external to the person, in the environment that surrounds them. This has paved the way for more positive assumptions to be made about older women. Hummert et al (1994) and Swift et al (2013) suggest that these positive assumptions are informed by the desirable traits that older women are seen to have; these traits are being wise, generous, caring, loyal, experienced, and moral. The move towards more positive assumptions being made about older women has not led to the total eradication of negative perceptions of older women, suggesting that perceptions of older women have grown in complexity.

The assumptions that are made about older women, whether positive or negative, inform the attitudes that exist towards them. It is these attitudes that inform the construction and application of stereotypes. Bruce and Yearley (2006) explain that stereotypes see people being placed in different categories based on the assumptions made about them, and are favoured in society because they help people to make sense of the complicated world in which they live. Stereotypes can be positive or negative, however both can be problematic because they rigidly promote all older people as the same and inform the behaviours of others towards them. As indicated by Abrams et al (2015), it is often the more negative assumptions about older women that receive the most attention and act to inform the attitudes held by the other members of a society; this leads to the construction of negative stereotypes.

Negative stereotypes mean that older women may experience prejudice and discrimination as they age. Prejudice refers to attitudes and opinions about older women that are not factually justified (Bruce and Yearley 2006) but that may still inform how others treat them; this is discrimination (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2016). Prejudice and discrimination in relation to the age of a woman is ageism (Bytheway 1997). According to Nash (2014) ageism, unlike sexism and racism, prevails in a world where other prejudices no longer have a place. Whilst ageism can occur at any age (Bytheway 1997; Greenberg et al 2002), a search for literature pertaining to ageism returns that predominantly concerned with ageism in relation to older people. Particularly in relation to the provision of health and care services (e.g. Kagan, and Melendez-Torres 2015), in the workplace (e.g. Macdonald and Levy 2016), or through the representation of older women in the media (e.g. Jermyn 2013). Ageism draws on and acts to reinforce the prejudice and discrimination faced by older women.

Exposure to negative stereotypes about older women can prove problematic for all women. If a woman is told often enough that when they are an older woman they will have a wealth of negative experiences, it is suggested that the behaviour of the individual will change to reflect

this stereotype (Coudin and Alexopoulos 2010; Karpt 2014). Nelson (2005) explains that this creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where they accept that this experience is inevitable. This has been explored in a number of earlier studies including an experiment conducted by Levy (1996). He demonstrated that exposure to negative stereotypes of ageing prior to engaging in an activity exploring the quality of a person's memory resulted in poorer performance by the older person thus fulfilling the expectation put upon them. Nash (2014) suggests that this process of fulfilling the negative stereotypes of being an older person has consequences for the overall wellbeing of an individual as it inspires further decline.

Action has been taken to challenge the prevalence of negative stereotypes of older women and the ageism that arises as a result. Organisations such as Age UK, Centre for Ageing Better, and Independent Age, campaign for the acknowledgement and eradication of ageism. The work that they engage in includes generating documents such as 'A Snapshot of Ageism in the UK and across Europe' Age UK (2011). These organisations also involve themselves in ongoing debates concerning ageism by providing opinion pieces and position papers, such as a piece by Morrison (2017) (the Chief Executive of Independent Age) entitled, 'The latest example of NHS unintentional ageism is a surprising one', and the manifesto paper, 'General Election 2017: Priority actions for better later lives' compiled by Ageing Better (2017). Whilst the work of organisations such as these has made a considerable impact upon the scale of ageism in the UK, ageism continues to prevail.

The existence of stereotypes and attitudes that inspire ageism fails to acknowledge the complexity of later life. Rich (1985) and Pörtner (2012) remind us that ageing is an individual experience. Reed et al (2004) acknowledges that differences between women in the same age group or in the same stage of life exist across the life course, and this is no different in later life. Whilst there are common features of the ageing process, there are also many variables resulting in ageing being a unique and personal experience. Feminist thinking contributes to this observation by not only acknowledging that women will have a unique experience because of their gender, but that there are additional factors that inform their lived experience such as age, class and ethnicity. Feminists refer to this as intersectional feminism (e.g. Scholz 2010). Within this study, I will be focusing on how the age and gender of older women influences their experiences in later life. Whilst the influence of class and ethnicity upon the experiences of women should not be ignored, they are not a particular focus within this study. The experience of being an older woman is complex and I believe that the only way to capture the true nature of this experience is to enable older women to provide their own narratives, an

approach that reflects my feminist values. It is in recognition of the individuality of each older woman that this study aims to examine each woman's experience of living alone at home as unique.

2.1.5 Ageing research and the voices of older women

Feminists argue that the invisibility of women exists across the life course. Where material does exist, it is from the perspective of academics who are rarely older or women. Twigg (2004) offers a challenge to this opinion by stating that much of the work in social gerontology that aims to tackle the representation of older women is often the focus for academics that are in their 50th decade. She believes that their motivation to engage in this area of research is because they are facing the real experience of ageing and anticipating the personal transition of becoming an older woman. There is a need to expand the availability of research that explores the experiences of older women from their own perspective.

Few studies capture and present the personal views of older women regarding their experiences in later life. Studies that do exist tend to focus upon the views of older women about ageing in relation to the menopause (e.g. Strauss 2011), living with a particular medical condition (e.g. Roberto and McGraw 1991) or their relationship with health and social care service providers (e.g. Tannenbaum and Mayo 2003). Even fewer studies present the views of older women concerning their experience of normal ageing or positive aspects of being older.

Studies that strive to capture the voices of older women commonly draw on qualitative methods. The most commonly used methods are interviews, with different types of interview preferred by different researchers. For example, Boneham and Sixsmith (2006) completed semi-structured interviews to explore health and social capital of older people, 19 of whom were women. Whereas Leith (2006) used unstructured interviews in her study that explored experiences of living in congregate housing. There is also a trend emerging in the use of participatory methods, for example, Hogan and Warren (2012) describe four projects that were conducted using visual methods to explore the way that women engaged with images of ageing. All of these qualitative methods attribute value to the voice of older women. In my study I will use qualitative methods with minimal structure to enable the women to share their experiences in their own images and voice.

2.1.6 Concluding remarks: Being an older woman

Ageing is a natural and inevitable part of the life course though can vary considerably in how it is experienced. In order to capture the individual experience of ageing for older women there needs to be an emphasis on the voices of those who are experiencing it. The limited number of

studies that present the voices of older women means that their lived experience of ageing remains underrepresented. Older women have a valid and important contribution to make in enabling others to obtain an understanding of their lived experience. Feminists are concerned with enabling older women to tell their stories in their own words, to make sense of their experiences and to ensure they are visible and valued members of society (e.g. Hooks 2000). This concern requires far more attention. In this study, I hope to contribute further to this area of work by actively engaging with older women to explore their narratives from across the life course and now as they find themselves in the latter years of their lives in their own words.

Therefore one of my research objectives is;

To understand how participants define their own experience of being an older woman

2.2 Older women as occupational beings

2.2.1 Occupational Therapy: the core concepts

As an occupational therapist, I view people and society through an 'occupational lens'. An occupational lens assumes that all people are occupational beings with an inherent need to engage in occupations regardless of their individual differences, such as age and gender. This inherent need relates to the premise that engagement in occupation is central to the achievement of health and wellbeing, as discussed by Law et al (1998). They conducted a critical review of 23 research studies and found that there was 'moderate to strong evidence' to support this relationship. The link between engagement in occupation and the health and wellbeing of a person is further evident in the findings of a primary research study conducted by Rudman et al (1997). They found that the older people in their study spoke of how engagement in activity elicited a number of positive feelings that contributed to their sense of health and wellbeing. My occupational lens contributes to the unique worldview that I hold and will therefore be a guiding feature in this study.

The concept of 'occupation' is central to my occupational lens and to the practice of occupational therapy, it is therefore necessary to establish its meaning. Numerous attempts have been made to define this concept; however, there is not one particular definition that has been adopted by the profession. Fisher (2013) suggests that the inconsistent use of language

by occupational therapists has consequences for the development of the profession because if we are unable to define clearly our area of practice we cannot expect others to comprehend our value. Part of the challenge in creating a definitive definition of occupation is in the ability to capture the complexity of the nature of the concept. In a macro sense, occupation has been defined as everything that people do (Chard 2010) however; such a simplistic definition fails to acknowledge the individual meaning and context, which are key to the complex nature of occupation (Molineux 2010). Perhaps the most useful way to consider occupation is to look at it alongside two related concepts, task and activity.

Creek (2010) explains that a task is the smallest element of things we do, for example picking up a pen or opening a notebook. Taken together a series of tasks create an activity, continuing with the example the activity might be writing. An Occupation emerges when the activity is viewed within a context; it is this context that provides the meaning to the activity. Writing in a notebook at university provides a different meaning to writing a list of things that need to be done at home; these are two different occupations. The meaning of an occupation is often associated with the roles that a person is fulfilling. These roles contribute to her uniqueness as a person and define who she is (Law et al 1996; Chard 2010).

Occupations are commonly presented as being divided amongst a number of categories that usually include self-care, productivity and leisure (Creek 2010). In a qualitative study exploring the potential of occupation from the perspectives of older people, Rudman et al (1997) found that the categories of self-care, productivity and leisure were not used at all by their participants; the preferred categories emerged as physical, psychological and social. Pierce (2003) argued that the traditional categories of self-care, productivity and leisure hold little value for those not engaged in paid employment; this may include older women. She suggests that occupations should be viewed instead in terms of their characteristics, namely “pleasure and productivity and restoration” (Pierce 2003:45). These characteristics do not require the occupation itself to be categorised but requires the individual person to define their own personal experience of engaging in the occupation. Pleasure can be seen as the experience of enjoyment when engaging in an occupation. Productivity is characterised by striving towards and the achievement of goals, and restoration is about how energy is restored within the individual. Occupations may include all three characteristics though usually at varying degrees. Attempting to categorise occupations assumes that there is a shared understanding of terms, concepts and experiences that can be problematic when striving to achieve person centred practice.

Wilcock (2006) suggests that occupation revolves around the four dimensions of doing, being, becoming and belonging. 'Doing' occurs when a person engages in an occupation. When a person is 'being', they are taking time to reflect on their experiences as an occupational being; this helps them to ensure that they are being true to their personal preferences. 'Becoming' is characterised by a person striving for achievement in their future which is facilitated by their ongoing development. Finally, 'belonging' is concerned with a person having the opportunity to feel included, supported, and part of something greater by engaging in occupations. Little has been written about how these processes occur for those in later life. Whilst these processes go some way to provide a better understanding of occupation as a dynamic process, Wilcock (2007) fails to acknowledge how the past, present and future will influence the extent to which individuals achieve these dimensions. Within this study I intend to consider the extent to which 'doing, being, belonging and becoming' can be used to understand the occupational lives of older women.

2.2.2 Occupational Choices of Women

Inherent to the dimensions of occupation of doing, being, becoming and belonging defined by Wilcock (2007), is the assumption that people have the freedom to choose the occupations in which they want to engage. This freedom of choice is referred to as 'occupational choice' (Whiteford and Hocking 2012). Discussions about occupational choice predominantly refer to the factors that are intrinsic to the individual person and might include their values, beliefs, motivation and interests.

Occupational Therapists believe that a person does not exist in a vacuum and that it is therefore essential to consider the influence of the environment on the occupational choices that they make. The environment is more than the buildings and natural world that surround us; it also includes social, cultural, and political elements that are dynamic and change over time (Creek 2010). People often make occupational choices that enable them to fit into these structures. This study will explore the factors that inform the occupational choices of women across their life course and the consequences of these choices on their past, present and anticipated future life as occupational beings.

The expectations placed upon a woman because of her gender impact upon the occupational choices available to her. Marsh (2006) suggests that for women in the United Kingdom roles have commonly centred on the home and include mother and wife, whereas men have traditionally fulfilled the role of breadwinner by engaging in paid employment outside of the home. He explains that fulfilling these gender related expectations influences the occupational

choices made and the experiences that people will have across the life course. There is an observable difference in the roles that are fulfilled by women and men at all stages of life, each of which will vary in the barriers and opportunities that they afford (McPherson 2004). Over the past 30 years in the United Kingdom there has been a reported change in attitudes with regards to the traditional allocation of gender roles (Park et al 2013), and since the 1980s women have increasingly engaged in paid employment beyond the home (Scott and Clery 2013). The women in this study will have lived through a minimum of seven decades and been raised during a time when traditional gender roles were prevalent. I am interested in exploring how the women in this study have been influenced by the traditional expectations of gender roles and how much the changes that have occurred during their lifetime are embedded in their experiences.

The family structure at the time at which the women in this study were raised, during the 1930s and 1950s, is likely to have been governed by the culture of patriarchy. King (2015) explains that the father of a family would have been at the head of the household, primarily fulfilling the role of breadwinner. He would have been responsible for discipline which enabled him to maintain a sense of authority over the family. He would have been involved in nurturing the children but his focus would be on their entertainment and development; the more enjoyable aspects of childcare. The opportunities and occupational choices available to the women would have been significantly influenced by what their father expected of them as a girl and subsequently a woman.

The women in this study would also have learned about the roles expected of them from their family and wider society. Bradley (2013) explains that prior to the Second World War (1939-1945) social expectations for women prioritised domestic activity and caring for the current and future workforce. He adds that if women engaged in paid employment this was on a short-term basis until they got married. Once married women were expected to end their paid employment and remain at home to tend to the needs of their family. During the Second World War women were encouraged to abandon this notion of the “domestic ideal” (Allen 1983) to engage in paid employment beyond the home to support the war effort, commonly on lower wages than men would have been paid for the same type of work (Purvis 2004). Shapira (2012: 72) refers to this call for women to work as being a means of achieving “collective citizenship”. However once the war was over women were expected to return to their roles as housewives and mothers, having fulfilled their ‘temporary’ engagement in jobs

which belonged to men (Purvis 2004). This move was seen as essential in regaining normality in the United Kingdom following the war (Shapira 2012).

Most women at this time dutifully changed their roles and occupations to fulfil the expectations of a society and government who attributed considerable value to the role of homemaker (Holdsworth 1988). Psychoanalysts, such as Bowlby (2005) also stressed the negative consequences of a child being separated from their mother, which led to a wealth of information concerning what it meant to be a good parent (Shapira 2012). Propaganda and advertisements were used to promote these roles for women (Turner 2006); this enabled the ideal to filter to all parts of society and be accepted as the norm. Oakley (1985) has since critiqued these expectations of women, to be housewives and mothers, as a way of reinforcing the patriarchal society based on unpaid labour that kept women economically dependent on their husband.

The post-war expectation for women to fulfil roles and occupations entirely in the home was short lived as it soon became apparent that the injuries and the loss of life from the war had caused a shortage in labour. Women were once again encouraged to become part of the workforce outside of the home but were discouraged from taking jobs that belonged to men (Turner 2006). The jobs considered appropriate for women reflected the nature of the occupations that were expected of them as housewives, these included typing, nursing and teaching, and as such the occupations performed by women within and beyond the home continued to reinforce traditional gender roles.

The introduction of the Education Act in 1947 led to school attendance becoming compulsory, for both girls and boys, up until the age of 15. However, for girls the pursuit of qualifications and a lifelong career was deemed unnecessary because they were expected to marry and settle down into a life focused on the home (Turner 2006). Consequently, girls were directed to subjects that would enable them to fulfil their expected future roles of a wife and mother (Charles 2002). These subjects also conveniently equipped them with the skills that were required for the jobs considered appropriate for women. Girls who demonstrated an interest in reading or engaged in play activities that were seen to be 'for boys' were considered problematic and unlikely to settle down into family life (Turner 2006). Until the 1960s it was not commonplace for girls to be encouraged to continue into higher education; this restricted their opportunity to enter a profession that would have provided them with greater career prospects (Turner 2006).

Being a full time housewife significantly restricted the degree to which women were afforded the opportunity to engage in paid employment. Women did not commonly have access to her own money until the introduction of family allowances in 1947 and after much debate, this was paid to the woman of the household for each child she had beyond her first-born (Turner 2006). Those in paid work were more likely to have part time jobs than full time and the wages that they received were far less than those paid to men. The lack of opportunities for women to earn a good wage across the life course (Robinson 1986; Pinquart and Sörensen 2001; Vincent 2003) meant lesser contributions being made to pension funds (Macdonald 1985) and many women being disadvantaged materially in later life (Hogan and Warren 2012). This also might have implications for their ability to engage in activities and to maintain their overall quality of life, particularly when they find themselves living alone.

Today social expectations still affect women's occupational choices. It is common to see women participating in higher education, pursuing professional lifelong careers and working in fields traditionally considered as male environments. However, the experiences of women in the workplace continue to be plagued by a number of inequalities, including receiving lower wages than their male colleagues, having limited opportunity to progress in their career or to achieve senior positions (Olchawski 2016). Women continue to take the greater share of domestic duties (Slaughter 2012). In 2008, the BBC reported the findings of a poll of 4000 women conducted through an online social networking service. It was calculated that the work that a woman completes in the home should attract an annual salary of £30000. The expectation that women will continue to fulfil the roles traditionally expected of them in the home alongside their paid employment, that is at least two full time jobs, is described by Slaughter (2012) as experiencing a 'double burden'. It seems that society's past and present expectations of female roles place limitations on the occupational choices of women, which could have lifelong consequences.

There is an assumption that once a woman has raised her family she can refocus on developing her career outside of the home. However, rather than no longer existing, the roles she is expected to fulfil within the home and family merely change focus. Where emphasis would have previously been upon nurturing of her children and husband, she would now be expected to care for ageing relatives (this may include her husband) (Scholtz 2010). This suggests that limitations imposed on the occupational choices available to women and the "double burden" that they face are lifelong experiences. This difference in gender roles is problematic when a woman finds herself living alone and discovers that she does not have all the skills that she

requires to maintain her independence in all activities; this is referred to as a 'secondary loss' (Stone 2001).

The restricted occupational choices that were available over the life course to the cohort of women in this study are likely to have implications for their experience of living alone in later life. The occupational choices that women are able to make throughout their life course are restricted by societal expectations that relate to their gender. These gender related expectations are likely to be cohort specific and will reflect the dominant beliefs of the time. When discussing occupational choice, occupational therapists refer to women having the opportunity to engage in the occupations that they choose to fulfil.

2.2.3 Women and Occupational Injustice

Occupational therapists believe that all people should have the right to engage in the occupations that they need and want to engage in, this is known as 'occupational justice' (Townsend and Wilcock 2004). Conflict can exist between the roles and occupations that women are expected to fulfil and what they actually want to do. This discrepancy between social expectations and personal choice creates 'occupational tensions' (Wicks and Whiteford 2005) which can challenge the ability of women to fulfil their potential as occupational beings. When issues external to a person arise, that limit or prevent their engagement in occupations, they experience 'occupational injustice'. There are different types of occupational injustice; they include occupational apartheid, occupational deprivation, occupational marginalisation, occupational alienation, and occupational imbalance (Durocher et al 2014). Women and indeed older women are most likely to experience occupational injustice in the form of 'occupational marginalisation'.

Occupational marginalisation is a form of occupational injustice that occurs due to unseen norms and expectations existing in society (Townsend and Polatajko 2013). These are concerned with the, "... how, when, and where people 'should' participate" (Townsend and Wilcock 2004:81) and are based on the identity that people are ascribed by society. For the women in this study the norms and expectations that would have influenced their experiences are likely to have resulted from a wide range of social factors. These include war, politics, socio-economic circumstances, geography, culture as well as social norms and expectations of gender and age. All of these factors are important, as argued by intersectional feminists (e.g. Scholtz 2010). These factors contribute to the way in which women are perceived by society and consequently how they are expected to behave.

The experiences of women across their life course and in later life as a form and consequence of occupational injustice has not previously received attention within occupational therapy literature. Indeed any exploration of occupational injustice and the roles and responsibilities that an occupational therapist has in enabling occupational justice for all has also attracted little attention. In this study, my focus on occupational injustice as a lifelong experience for women constitutes a unique contribution to the field of occupational therapy.

2.2.4 Older Women as Occupational Beings

Social perceptions of older women include perceptions of how they occupy their time. One prominent view, called disengagement theory, states that all older people go through a process of withdrawal from society in preparation for their inevitable death (Cumming and Henry 1961). It is suggested that older people will willingly go through this process (Phillips et al 2010) and society will act as a facilitator by reducing the number of roles the person is expected to fulfil (Victor 1994). In previous times in the United Kingdom this could be observed through the implementation of a statutory retirement age which marked the end of engagement in paid employment for an individual (Phillips et al 2010). Disengagement is a means of transferring power to the young and decreasing the social pressure on older people allowing them to focus on themselves (Victor 1994).

Disengagement theory has been heavily criticised for failing to acknowledge the potential that people have for adaptation and compensation, for disregarding the wealth of knowledge and skills held by older people (Victor 1994) and for portraying ageing as being problematic for the older person and those surrounding them (Phillips et al 2010). Drawing upon secondary data gained from 195 participants, McKenna et al (2007) concluded that engagement in roles and associated occupations did not decline with age. Chilvers et al (2010) obtained findings that supported this conclusion by employing time use diaries over a period of 24 hours with 90 older people aged between 60 and 85 years. They discovered that the older people within their study were living full and active lives, as well as engaging in a diverse range of dynamic and positive activities spanning leisure, productivity and self-care. Lemish and Muhlbauer (2012) acknowledge that when older women find themselves with an “empty nest” they are in a good position to focus on their own development, careers and interests.

There appears to be an absence in the literature regarding the details of the activities that older women engage in, and the meaning that they ascribe to them. Published literature focusing on women as occupational beings comprises engagement in activities following a decline in health (e.g. Borley and Hardy 2016), or focuses on engagement in a single activity

such as cooking (e.g. Shordike and Pierce 2005). Studies that have attempted to identify the activities in which older women engage, tend to focus on how time is used and the roles fulfilled rather than the specific activities and the meaning given to them by older women. Chilvers et al (2010) attempted to address this limitation; however, they asked the women to use three pre-coded words to indicate the meaning they gave to their activities, therefore limiting the descriptions that they could provide. This study will use qualitative methods to enable older women to identify the activities that they engage in and define the meaning of these activities to them in their own words; this reflects a feminist approach to methodology.

2.2.5 Occupation as past, present and future

The past, present and future will all influence how an older woman experiences and defines an occupation. Occupation and meaning are inseparable with meaning established by various means across the life course (Hasselkus 2002). Wright-StClair (2012) explored what older women valued about their occupations in later life by using individual interviews and photographs of the hands of the person engaged in an occupation, or 'doing'. She found that the meaning that the participants associated with engagement in an occupation was influenced by their experience of the occupation in the past and present, and how this may continue or change in the future.

Continuity theory presents ageing as a process of preserving the preferences of the way in which life is lived (Victor 1994). This can be observed in the habits and lifestyle choices which prevail across a life course (Philips et al 2010). The activities, roles and relationships that surround the individual inform this sense of continuity (Laliberte-Rudman 2002). Experiences are seen to enable future development through the gathering of resources and the development of skills (Hugman 1999), although it is also noted that there are some life events for which there appears to be no preparatory experience, for example retirement (Victor 1994). Continuity with the past and engaging in the familiar are considered to be key influences in the achievement of successful ageing (Carlson et al 1998; McIntyre and Howie 2002). For example, a 65-year-old woman cited in a case study presented by McIntyre and Howie (2002) cites her continued engagement in meaningful occupations from the past as being highly influential when adapting to the death of her spouse.

Engagement in meaningful activities seems to be a means by which a person can feel connected to their past, present and future. Rudman et al (1997) drew on observations of the older people in their study to define this sense of connection. The connection with the past was seen to be facilitated by drawing on previous experiences that acted to stimulate

memories, as well as using skills and particular ways of doing things as passed on by previous generations. Activities focused on keeping up to date with current affairs were described as a means of feeling connected to the present and not being left behind on modern issues. Goal orientated activity with a prolonged deadline and passing on activities to subsequent generations helped the older people in the study to feel connected to the future. This study aims to explore the past, present and future in respect of the activities pursued by the older women in order to understand fully the meaning they hold.

2.2.6 Concluding Remarks: Older women as occupational beings

To date the opportunities for older women to share their narratives and have them captured appears to have been limited. Consequently, there is little information available about the occupations in which older women engage and the meaning they ascribe to these activities, particularly in later life. Within this study, I will provide the opportunity for a small number of women to define their own lives as occupational beings, taking into consideration the occupational choices that they have been able to make and the factors that have influenced them. I will also contemplate how my understanding of older women as occupational beings can be enhanced further through the concepts of occupational justice and injustice.

Therefore one of my research objectives is;

To understand women as occupational beings

2.3 Women and the environment of home

2.3.1 Occupational therapy and the environment

Occupational therapists recognise that people do not exist in a vacuum and that factors external to an individual influence their experiences as occupational beings. Grouped together these external factors form the environment. Occupational therapists do not view the environment as a single entity but as consisting of a number of distinct components, although there is a lack of consensus on the specific nature of these components. For the purpose of this study, I will adopt the definitions proposed by Polatajko et al (2007). They consider the environment to be consisting of two overarching parts; these are the physical and social. The physical environment comprises the naturally occurring and built surroundings as well as the items that they contain. The social environment acknowledges that people exist in social groups where there is an ongoing interaction between individuals and wider society. Polatajko et al (2007) identify two specific elements of the social environment; these are the cultural and institutional. The cultural environment captures the expectations that a society places upon people to behave and perform in a particular way whereas the institutional environment focuses on the way that organisations govern the shape and function of society in the form of rules, laws and policies; these can be formal and informal in nature. The external factors that form the environment in which a person exists require extensive consideration in order to understand fully the individual as an occupational being.

Occupational therapists assert that the environment has a key role to play in enabling a person to achieve a personally fulfilling level of occupational performance. It is widely accepted that there is a reciprocal relationship between the person and their environment (e.g. Law et al 1998; Kielhofner 2006); this means that a person can have an impact upon the environment and the environment can have an impact on the person. For occupational therapists, this reciprocal relationship occurs through the process of occupational engagement. The physical environment has received much attention in the literature (e.g. Petersson et al 2008; Marshall et al 2017) and has observable significance to the ability of an individual to engage in occupations (e.g. Fänge and Iwarsson 2005). The social environment is equally as important in enabling an individual to engage in occupations; however, when considering the potential influence of the social environment upon occupational performance the emphasis is upon understanding the parameters in which people exist as occupational beings. If occupational therapists want to enable people to achieve their full occupational potential, we need to enhance our understanding of all components of the environment. This will enable us to tackle the barriers that society, culture, and institutions present to engagement in occupations

rather than accepting them as parameters in which people need to fit. It is important that occupational therapists attribute the physical and social environment equal value and realise their potential to challenge the factors that act as barriers to occupational choice and participation.

2.3.2 The environment of home

This study will focus on the environment of the home. According to Steward (2000) we appear to have a shared yet unspoken understanding of what we mean by home that promotes a particular appearance, ambiance and purpose in our minds. Popular culture reinforces this socially constructed meaning of home and informs what we expect a home to be (Blunt and Dowling 2006) which subsequently fuels our aspirations for the ideal home. However, the unique nature of each person's home suggests that the interpretation and application of this unspoken understanding is unique for each individual. Providing a concise definition of what a home is appears to be more problematic than everyday conversation would lead us to believe.

Whilst beginning to unpick what constitutes a home I found myself reflecting on what I consider to be a home. This reflexive approach is encouraged when using feminist methodology because it enables a researcher to consider the baggage with which they approach their work (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). During my life to date, I have lived as an only child with my mother in a council house, part of a reconstituted family with my mother, stepfather and three half-sisters in a privately owned house until I was 18 years of age, and in three different shared living environments whilst I was attending university in London. Returning from London I spent a very brief period back with my family before moving first to a privately rented flat where I lived alone for several years followed by a house share for several years with my best friend. I have lived in my current home for 10 years, it is a privately owned bungalow that my husband had already purchased and renovated prior to us meeting. I am now aware that I value my own space and time to be able to do what I want to do. I need to feel as though I can organise my immediate environment in a way that enables me to feel calm and in control, somewhere that is clean and safe, and that I need to live with people with whom I feel completely at ease. I value the opportunity to own my own home, however the size of a property and 'keeping up with the Jones's' is not a concern of mine. I am aware that my experiences from the past and my aspirations for the future greatly influence what I consider to constitute a home at this point in my life; a relationship previously discussed in work by Rubinstein (1989) and, Blunt and Dowling (2006). My personality is also significant in the preferences that I have. Considering what home means to me leads me to appreciate

that a home will mean different things for different people because we all have different experiences in life.

In an attempt to offer clarity to what constitutes a home, academics suggest that we would benefit from considering its component parts. These component parts include the physical structures, social relations occurring within the physical structures, and the emotional responses that are elicited within (Rapoport 1995; Dupuis and Thorns 1998; Blunt and Dowling 2006). These components help to make a distinction between a house and a home, with the emotional responses associated with a physical structure being essential in the creation of a home from a house (Gillsjö and Schwartz-Barcott 2010). However, how these components of home are experienced will vary from person to person. The physical structure that provides the shell of a home can take various forms, and many of us will prefer a particular style of structure, indeed Blunt and Dowling (2006) suggest that people can find a home in the least likely of dwellings. Saunders (1989) explains that our experience of social relations as part of our home will emerge from who we live with (if anyone), and the nature of these relationships. Combined with the physical structure, the social relations that exist in the home will contribute to the emotional response that we will have to where we live. These component parts of home encourage us to view the meaning of home as arising from a combination of factors; however, I believe that they fail to capture the true complexity that surrounds the personal definition and experience of home.

Some of the factors that define the meaning of home link explicitly to the components of physical structures, social relations, and emotional responses. Rapoport (1995), Dupuis and Thorns (1998), and Blunt and Dowling (2006) suggest that these include; the type of property the person lives in and the material items that it contains (physical structure), what it means to not have others in the home (home as a place for social relations), and the sense of control, security and attachment that people experience (emotional responses to a dwelling). Other factors beyond these silos that I believe might contribute to the definition and experience of home might include the age of the person, the cohort that they are part of, and their gender; but these appear to have been under explored.

The most tangible aspect of a home is arguably the physical structure that we can see and touch. However, there are many different types of physical structure that may be considered a home (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Even if we all lived in the same style of structure there are many ways that we can personalise the space that we occupy from changing layouts, creating spaces to fulfil a particular purpose, or decorating it to meet our personal tastes. There will

also be vast variations in the objects that we keep within the structure and the way that we choose to display them. The way that we choose to personalise the physical environment of our home reflects who we are (Molony 2010). People may face restrictions in the extent to which they can personalise the physical structure of their home such as their financial situation, whether they own or rent their property, and live in some form of institution. However, Dahlin-Ivanhoff et al (2007) found that older people place a high value on the opportunity to leave a personal mark with Peace et al (2006) suggesting that they achieve this through their selection and organisation of decoration or objects. Steward (2000) proposes that being able to personalise the home, to any degree, enables a person to demonstrate that they have control of their immediate environment; this will have positive consequences for the health and wellbeing of an individual.

Like any built structure, the home requires regular maintenance. Home maintenance includes everyday tasks concerned with ensuring cleanliness and appearances through to more challenging do it yourself (DIY) projects. Sixsmith (1990) and Steward (2000) suggest that older people particularly value their ongoing ability to maintain their home environment as it allows them to demonstrate that they are still able to look after themselves. Coleman et al (2016) appear to present further evidence to support this claim in their study that explores the experience of home maintenance in later life. They found that three quarters of their participants claimed that they did not have any concerns about their ability to maintain their home, even though their homes were in an obvious state of disrepair. Coleman et al (2016) attributed this reluctance for older people to accept the need for support with home maintenance activities, to the fear that they would be removed from their home and placed into institutional care. The World Health Organisation (2014) explains that living in a poorly maintained home environment could have consequences for the health and wellbeing of an individual. Consideration needs to be given to how seeking support with home maintenance activities in later life can be promoted as a positive action that benefits their ongoing health and wellbeing.

At a time of life when changes in physical and mental abilities are more probable, a home can facilitate ongoing engagement in occupations in a familiar environment. Oswald and Wahl (2005) and Peace et al (2006) explain that the home can help to compensate for a decline in health or functional abilities however; they also suggest that this is dependent upon the level of control that the person is able to exercise to make the changes required. Lawson (1990) describes the process of spatial disengagement that can occur in the home as people age. He

explains that older people tend to create 'control centres' where items that they use frequently are within easy reach of a central point, such as a frequently occupied armchair. This ability to organise their home environment to support occupational performance is beneficial in assisting to maintain their level of independence.

The process of spatial disengagement is not limited to the internal home environment. Throughout our life course home is a place from which we are able to travel from and return to and this is no different in later life (Peace et al 2006). However, Sixsmith (1990) suggests that as we age the distance that we stray from our homes reduces. He explains that this process starts when a person begins to reduce the space that they access in their social life. He suggests that spatial disengagement arises due to increased frailty, a lack of personal finance, fewer places accommodating the interests or needs of older people, and the decline in the number of social roles expected of them. All of the reasons cited for spatial disengagement indicate that it occurs because of environmental barriers, suggesting that older people are not necessarily choosing to spend more time either closer to or in their home. This fails to acknowledge that some people (regardless of age) will value spending time closer to or in their home. Therefore, a distinction needs to be made between whether older women are experiencing home as a prison or as a refuge (Annison 2000; Molony 2010). Only the women themselves are able to define the meaning of their experiences. It is important to establish whether the decline in accessing physical space in later life occurs because of personal choice or not as this will have implications for the support, they may or may not require.

Humans are social beings and therefore it is inevitable that the home environment will have a social component. Saunders (1989) refers to home as being the core of society where relationships form and are subsequently duplicated out in the wider world. Molony (2010) and Schenk et al (2004) explain that the nature of the relationships that exist within the home inform the meaning attributed to home by an individual and enhances the degree of attachment that they experience to this environment. However, it is important to remember that not all relationships within the home are positive, for example as highlighted by Blunt and Dowling (2006), when the home becomes a place of abuse perpetrated by those closest to the individual there are likely to be negative implications for the meaning that they attribute to their home. Social relationships are also not restricted to those with family members or even the people who reside there. Other people may come and go, fulfilling a range of different purposes from friendships through to service provision. However, Dupuis and Thorns (1998), Mallett (2004), and Malony (2010) suggest that the home also needs to fulfil the function of

somewhere that an individual can seek refuge from the demands of society. In order to achieve this function, Young (1997) explains that it is important for an individual to feel that they have control over who enters the home. Dahlin-Ivanhoff et al (2007) acknowledge that this can be challenging when there is a need for an individual to receive care in their home. The social component of home has an important part to play in the personal meaning that an older woman will attribute to her home; this issue requires further exploration to ascertain their unique lived experience of home in later life.

2.3.3 Living alone at home

When considering the social component of the home environment the focus is often upon the presence of others, however it also includes the absence of others. In everyday language, 'absence' is associated with a lack, a deficiency, or a failure (to attend) (English Oxford Living Dictionaries 2017). These negative connotations are evident in discussions about the absence of other people in the home environment, with links commonly made to loneliness and isolation. This is complicated further by the interchangeable use made of the concepts of living alone, solitude, isolation, and loneliness (Forbes 1996; Victor et al 2000; Cattan et al 2003; Savikko et al 2005).

It is increasingly common for people in the United Kingdom to be living alone. In 2016, 28% of households in the United Kingdom contained one person (Office for National Statistics 2016). Between 1973 and 2011, the number of people living alone almost doubled from 9% to 16%, with the majority of the increase occurring by 1998 and predominantly within those under the age of 44 years (Office for National Statistics 2013). In the past 5 years, there has been an increase of 12% in the number of people living alone; this can be explained in part by the growth in population that has occurred (Office for National Statistics 2016). In 2016 of the people aged over 16 years who were living alone, 3639 thousand were aged 65 years or over, this is representative of 36% of individuals within this age group (Office for National Statistics 2013). Of the 3639 thousand, 72% were women (Office for National Statistics 2016), reflecting a similar pattern across the lifespan where more women live alone than men (Victor et al 2000).

This study is particularly concerned with the experience of living alone for older women. Numerous authors have sought to explore this topic; however, they have tended to focus on older women who are living alone with a medical condition (e.g. De Witt et al 2010) or adapting to life as a widow (e.g. Van Den Hoonaard (2009). All of these studies define the experience of living alone for older women as being complex, featuring both opportunities and

challenges. In this study I am aiming to capture the experience of living alone for older women who are not defined by the conditions that they may have or by the recent loss of a loved one.

A positive aspect of living alone may be the level of autonomy that an individual can exercise. Porter (1994) and Dahlin – Ivanhoff et al (2007) completed studies that explored the experience of living alone in later life and found that having autonomy enables people to do what they want to do, alter routines to suit their desired lifestyle, come and go as they please, and to engage with a social network when they choose to do so. Mason (1989) explains that older women are most likely to experience an increase in their level of autonomy because of the change in the membership of their household, where the needs of their husband and children are no longer their primary concern. Peace et al (2006) found that older people took pleasure from the opportunity to exercise their newly found autonomy.

Living alone lends itself to experiencing periods of solitude. Drawing on the plethora of definitions of solitude that exist, Senechal (2011) concludes that solitude is time spent alone that affords a person the opportunity to be within their mind, to make sense of their thoughts, and to develop ideas. She suggests that this is easier to achieve by seeking physical isolation. However, from their analysis of existing literature, Long and Averill (2003) determined that it is important to acknowledge that solitude is achievable in the presence of others. They explain that solitude can be achieved anywhere as long as the person is able to detach their mind from the environment, an environment that may include other people. Long and Averill (2003) suggest that solitude is advantageous because it enhances the opportunity to experience freedom, creativity, intimacy, and spirituality. However, views and experiences of solitude are not always so positive. A person who has committed a criminal offence or been taken captive may be placed in solitary confinement as a means of punishment. Maitland (2014) suggested that those who actively seek solitude are viewed with trepidation. She describes how she actively sought a life of solitude in Scotland, a life that she has embraced for over 20 years, however she reports that her preference for such an existence commonly encourages others to view her as being 'sad, mad or bad' (Maitland 2014: 15). How people view and experience solitude can vary. Long and Averill (2003) suggest that this variation is dependent upon the degree of choice that a person feels that they had in being in solitude. They suggest that people who choose to be in solitude are more likely to define their experiences positively. The only way to understand the lived experience of solitude for older women living alone is to ask the women themselves.

Whilst solitude is seen to have many positive attributes, isolation is considered more problematic. Townsend (1973), Victor et al (2009), Cattani et al (2003) explain that isolation is an objective and quantifiable measurement of the number of people that someone actively engages with on a frequent basis. However, as emphasised by Age UK (2012), solitude does not recognise the quality of the relationships that older people may have with those they meet. In a jointly produced document, Campaign to End Loneliness and Age UK (2015) state that isolation can have a negative impact upon the health and wellbeing of an individual, this may contribute further to their isolation.

More than one million people in the United Kingdom over the age of 65 years report experiencing chronic loneliness (Campaign to End Loneliness 2014). Holt-Lunstad (2010), amongst others, warns that loneliness has consequences for the mortality of an individual that are akin to those associated with smoking or obesity because they are more likely to develop ill health. Attempting to quantify loneliness assumes that there is a shared definition and experience. However, the exact nature of loneliness continues to be subject to debate, due in part to the complex nature of what constitutes loneliness and why it affects some more than others (Victor et al 2005). Therefore, it is not possible to be sure, that two people who report feeling lonely are referring to the same phenomenon. Much of the literature exploring loneliness suggests that a defining feature is the absence of others; however, it is possible to feel lonely in a room full of people due to the lack of connection that may be felt by an individual (Townsend 1973; Victor et al 2002). This issue warrants further exploration.

Theories have emerged in an attempt to clarify the complex nature of loneliness; the most commonly cited theories are cognitive (de Gierveld 1987) and interactionist (Weiss 1973). The cognitive theory suggests that loneliness occurs when a person does not have the social network that they desire, where their desire is informed by personal and societal expectations (de Gierveld 1998). The interactionist theory makes a distinction between social and emotional loneliness where social loneliness arises from an absence of a social network and emotional loneliness from the lack of a significant attachment figure (Weiss 1973). Both of these theories promote the notion that loneliness is a personal experience and as such is difficult to quantify objectively.

The Campaign to End Loneliness (2017) explains that those in later life are more likely to experience loneliness because of an increase in contributory personal and societal factors. These include a decline in health, mobility, bereavement, a low income, barriers in the physical community environment, an absence of public transport, and technological changes.

However, The Mental Health Foundation (2010), caution that loneliness should not be seen as an inevitable part of later life.

2.3.4 Home as a gendered experience

Gurney (1997) and Blunt and Dowling (2006) consider the complexity of the relationship between the gender of an individual and their home as being highly influential in the expectations, perceptions and lived experiences within this most intimate of environments. For women the home is likely to have unique associations that will contribute to the meaning given to and the experiences that occur within this environment. Men have traditionally held the power within this environment (Oakley 1985). Young (1997) suggests that this power infiltrated all aspects of home life, from the initial design and construction of a property by male dominated professions and trades, through to the day-to-day life that occurs within. Young (1997) refers to the approaches taken to running a home as beneficial to men (and children) and as negatively affecting the experiences of women and their relationship with their home. Atkinson and Johns (2001) suggest that the power that men held over the family and home was a consequence of their provision of the family wage. For women the home was, and continues to be, a workplace, with the responsibilities and expectations placed upon them by their family and wider society, restricting their potential to achieve success beyond it (Mallett 2004). The concept of home for women appears to have changed with the growth in women engaging in paid employment (Dupuis and Thorns 1996). However, there has also been an increase in the demands put upon women to fulfil roles, both within and beyond the home, which will have consequences for their lived experience (Slaughter 2012). Women will have a unique experience of home due to their gender; the cohort that they are part of will influence the exact nature of this experience.

2.3.5 Home as a cohort specific experience

The meaning and significance that a woman will attribute to her home will change over time (Dupuis and Thorns 1998; Blunt and Dowling 2006); these changes are attributable to what is expected and acceptable in society at a particular time (Massey 1994; Dupuis and Thorns 1996; Moore 2000). For example in the past century there have been considerable changes in the accepted formation of the family (Dupuis and Thorns 1996) with a move from the nuclear, two point four children family, to a plethora of variations including single parent and reconstituted families (Giddens 2006). The older women within this study will have experienced considerable societal and historical change throughout their lifetime, including the transitions surrounding times of war (Crow 1989). It is therefore essential to treat home as a dynamic and context bound entity informed by the prevalent cultural norms of the time (Marcus 1995; Leith

2006; Rapport and Dawson 1998; Gillsjö and Schwartz-Barcott 2010). My study explores the changes in society that have occurred in the life time of the women as these are likely to contribute to the meaning that they attribute to their home.

There is little research and literature that captures and explores the experience of home for either women or older women. Gurney first made this observation in 1997; however, a cursory search of current literature confirms that this gap continues to exist. Feminists would suggest that this is because of the everyday oppression that women face in a society dominated by patriarchy. Within a patriarchal society, the voices of women hold little value and the absence of their experiences in literature contributes to the invisibility that women experience in everyday life. My study aims to capture the unique experiences of older women within the environment of home, an environment that contributes to the invisibility of women, using methods that enable them to guide the research.

2.3.6 Concluding remarks: Women and the environment

For women the home is a central environment that informs their experiences as occupational beings. Within this study, I am interested in understanding how older women who are living alone define their experience of home through the meaningful activities (occupations) in which they engage within this environment.

Therefore one of my research aims objectives is:

To explore home as a place for occupational engagement

2.4 Capturing the complexity of occupational engagement

In order to understand an older woman as an occupational being it is necessary to consider who she is as a person, what activities she engages in and the environments that she inhabits. These three components, and the interaction that occurs between them, are a core concern of occupational therapists and inform all stages of the occupational therapy process. Law et al (1996) refers to these three components as having a transactional relationship where each influences the other. They state that when the transactional relationship is working effectively the outcome is the achievement of successful occupational engagement. Each of these components are characterised by their own complexity and finding ways to capture this fully is essential to achieving a successful outcome in occupational therapy practice.

2.4.1 Methods of assessment used in occupational therapy practice

Occupational therapists use ongoing assessment throughout the occupational therapy process to collect information about the person, their occupations, their environment, and level of occupational performance. Creek (2010) suggests that occupational therapists take three key approaches when conducting assessment; these are observation, testing and measurement. Hocking (2010) also includes conversation and self-rating. A common feature of all of these methods of assessment is that the occupational therapist holds the power within the therapeutic relationship. I consider this problematic in a profession that prides itself with being person centred in its approach to practice (Boniface and Seymour 2012; College of Occupational Therapists 2017). Whilst an occupational therapist will have specialist theoretical knowledge and practice skills, the individuals with whom they work are the experts in their own lives. It is important that the assessment methods used in occupational therapy practice embrace the knowledge and skills of both the professional and the individual; using them effectively to achieve optimal occupational performance.

In current health and care services, I believe that the power of the professional has developed to a point that challenges the person centred nature of occupational therapy practice. This is in part due to the increasing pressure placed on services that limits the time available for, and the scope of, occupational therapy provision (Durocher et al 2015). This has led to services that are prescriptive in the approach that they take with a limited ability to tailor input to the individual. The person centred nature of occupational therapy practice experiences further restrictions due to the risk adverse culture that informs current health and social care service provision (Atwal et al 2011). We all take risks in life, often in the most mundane of activities such as leaving the house, however the acceptability of these risks becomes an issue of scrutiny when a person has need to engage with health and social care services. Risk adversity

is particularly apparent when people are seen to be vulnerable, such as those in later life. I believe that we need to find new and innovative ways that will enable occupational therapists to work in collaboration with the people who require their input to help them to achieve optimal levels of occupational performance.

2.4.2 The potential of photo-elicitation as a method to capture occupational engagement

I propose that photo-elicitation could be an innovative means of gathering information to understand the complexity of occupational engagement. Photo-elicitation is a type of unstructured interview that uses photographs to inform the discussions that occur between those sharing, and those gathering the information (Collier 1957). The photographs that are used in photo-elicitation may be taken from archives (personal or professional), taken by the researcher (guided by them or the interviewee), or taken by the interviewee themselves (Tinkler 2013). In this study, I am concerned with capturing the experiences of living alone for older women in their own words and therefore the women will be asked to take their own photographs. This will facilitate a reciprocal research relationship that is key to person centred practice and a feminist approach to methodology (Hammersley 1992; Creswell 2013). The method of photo-elicitation will be discussed further in chapter 3.

2.4.3 Concluding remarks: Capturing the complexity of occupational engagement

The use of the research method of photo-elicitation in this study performs two functions. The first is to enable the women who are taking part in the study to gather and discuss information about their experience of living alone. Taking such an approach will help to facilitate a reciprocal research relationship which is essential when adopting a feminist approach to methodology (Hammersley 1992; Creswell 2013). The second function is to consider the potential for using photo- elicitation in occupational therapy practice as a means of gathering information about occupational engagement. Evaluating photo-elicitation within this study will help to develop the theoretical understanding and practical application of this research method.

Therefore one of my objectives is;

To consider the potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement

2.5 Concluding Observations: Rationale for studying older women who live alone at home

This chapter has presented an exploration of older women (person) and what older women do (occupation) within their homes (environment). Within developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, women are experiencing greater longevity and it is important to ensure that their additional years are positive and fulfilling. Older women have been shown to continue their engagement in meaningful occupation in the latter years of their lives with Occupational Therapists considering this engagement to be fundamental to the maintenance of an older woman's health and wellbeing. As a woman ages she is likely to spend increasing amounts of time within her home environment therefore it is important to understand how older women define and experience their home.

A consistent theme that has emerged from the literature pertinent to this study is the need for individuals to define their own experiences of ageing, engagement in meaningful activities and home. However it is this individual definition that is consistently absent from the literature and reinforces the importance of this study as a means of enabling some older women to express their experiences in their own voices. Within the literature explored there is a limited amount of attention given to the lived experience of ageing, engaging in activities and home, however, there is no literature which combines these three key areas of interest and the related experiences of older women living alone.

2.5.1 Research aim and objectives

Completing the 'introduction' and 'rationale for studying older women who live alone at home' elements of this study has enabled me to establish a clear research aim and four research objectives.

This study will address the following aim;

To explore the experience of living alone for 11 women aged 70 – 80 years

This will be achieved by addressing these objectives;

1. **To understand how the participants define their own experience of being an older woman**
2. **To understand women as occupational beings**
3. **To explore home as a place for occupational engagement**
4. **To consider the potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement**

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the research methods used in this study. This will include identification of the theoretical perspective, research methodology, research design and methods used. I will also give attention to the specific procedures that I followed which will include information about the recruitment of participants and the ethical considerations that I made throughout the study. The research methods in this study were designed to enable me to address the following research aim;

To explore the experience of living alone for 11 women aged 70 – 80 years

The four objectives that I identified to address the research aim were;

- 1. To understand how participants define their own experience of being an older woman**
- 2. To understand women as occupational beings**
- 3. To explore home as a place for occupational engagement.**
- 4. To consider the potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement**

3.1 Philosophical approach to the study

3.1.1 Interpretive Phenomenology

This study is influenced by phenomenological philosophical principles. When planning and implementing this study it was important for me to use an approach that would attribute value to the voices and experiences of the people that chose to engage with me. It was therefore essential for me to select philosophical principles which put the lived experience at the forefront of research. Phenomenology is concerned with the exploration of a lived experience of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of the person experiencing it (Dowling 2007; Starks and Trinidad 2007; Balls 2009; Creswell 2013; Tuohy et al 2013). In this study the phenomenon of interest was that of 'living alone' and the people experiencing it, 11 women aged 70 – 80 years. I find the philosophical principles of phenomenology particularly inspiring because it strives to encourage people to take a fresh look at experiences that are often taken for granted (Balls 2009) by challenging existing assumptions about a particular phenomenon (Starks and Trinidad 2007).

The two main schools of phenomenology are purported to be descriptive phenomenology and interpretive phenomenology (Balls 2009; Tuohy et al 2013). These two schools of thought vary in the degree to which they believe that the context in which a person exists can be detached from their experience of a phenomenon. Descriptive phenomenology is seen as being directly linked to the work of Husserl and strives to maintain a scientific edge by removing the prior experiences of the researcher from the research process as a means of achieving objectivity; this is referred to as bracketing (Balls 2009). Bracketing, also known as “reduction” or “epoche” is used to enable the essence of the phenomenon being explored to emerge without being tainted by previously attributed assumptions, established attitudes or any other influencing factors (Finlay 2012; Tuohy et al 2013). I decided that descriptive phenomenology was not appropriate for use in this study because it is my experiences as a granddaughter, occupational therapist, and woman that are inherent to whom I am and drive the focus of this study.

Heidegger further developed the ideas originally proposed by Husserl to integrate the influence of the context in which a person lives into the research process; this is referred to as interpretive phenomenology (Creswell 2013). I do not believe that it is possible or helpful to consider human experience as occurring in a vacuum. The experiences that we have and the understanding that we develop of a particular phenomenon are influenced by the context that we live in (Flood 2010); Tuohy et al (2013:18) refer to this as ‘being in the world’ or ‘dasein’. They also recognise that experiences of the past, present and future will influence the lived experience of any given phenomenon. This study is focused on the phenomenon of living alone in the context of the home with consideration given to the past, present and future experiences of the women.

Heidegger’s acknowledgement of the influence of the context upon the experiences of people reflects a fundamental aspect of occupational therapy theory. This is particularly captured by Law et al (1996) who defines the transactional relationship which Occupational Therapists see as existing between the person, environment and occupation. They state that it is impossible to remove one element from the transaction because underrepresentation of any of the three components will have negative implications for the ability of a person to complete the occupations desired by, or expected of them. The shared fundamental beliefs held by interpretive phenomenology and occupational therapy made the selection and use of interpretive phenomenological philosophical principles inevitable.

3.1.2 Feminist Philosophy

This study is also influenced by feminist philosophical principles; this is because of the interest that I have in better understanding the experiences of women; particularly in later life.

Feminism is a movement which is concerned with understanding and reducing the inequalities which exist between the sexes, particularly those that are detrimental to the lives of women (Walby 2011; Hooks 2015). Usher (1996) explains that feminism is informed by the fundamental belief that all core values in the world are gendered, where women are seen as inferior to men with regards to their ideas, values and strengths. She asserts that the inferiority of women will continue all the time that we exist in a world where truth is defined by the abilities of men against which women are unfairly measured. The inequality existing between genders can particularly be observed with the greater degree of value that is attributed to the work that men pursue and the attributes that they display (Scholz 2010). Rose (1989) supports this by stating that any job which is pursued by women is automatically perceived as being inferior and attracting lower levels of pay; particularly those jobs which require skills that have been developed in the home. Within this study I wanted to acknowledge the value of the experiences of older women; experiences which have been accrued throughout the life course and those concerned with their current experiences of living alone.

The progression of feminism in the last century provides an interesting dimension to this study. There are purported to be two key 'waves' of feminism which have occurred; the first wave spanned from 1830-1920 with the second wave emerging in the 1960's (Vincent 2010). Weiner (2006) explained that the 'first wave' strived to obtain access to education, welfare and achieve the right to vote for women. The 'second wave' saw an emphasis placed upon issues which were specific to the experiences of women, for example sexuality and reproduction. The women in this study were all born between 1936 and 1946 and would therefore have lived through the 'second wave' of feminism; this would have influenced the context in which they lived, the roles that they performed and the expectations which were placed upon them. This study strives to capture, present and explore the past and current experiences of 11 older women; experiences which are anticipated to be unique to both the individuals and the cohort to which they belong. I assume that for the women in this study, their gender will have contributed considerably to their experiences of living alone due in part to the growing impact of feminism during their life course.

Feminism purports that women and the places that they occupy are attributed little value which contributes to their invisibility in everyday life. The predominantly private environment

of the home has long been viewed as the workplace of a woman. Prior to the industrial revolution women played an extensive and valued role in the workplace, which at the time was situated in the home. The industrial revolution led to an increase in the use of automated production units which existed centrally outside of the home and required large organised workforces to operate. Women were excluded from this new way of work as it was considered inappropriate for them to leave the home for the means of employment; they were instead expected to remain at home to fulfil the newly created role of the 'housewife' (Oakley 1985). This led to women becoming 'invisible', being attributed a lower status than men, and more likely to experience social isolation (Oakley 1985). I believe that the invisibility of women is reinforced through the absence of literature exploring their experiences, particularly for those in the latter years of their lives. The experiences of older women are often presented as negative and voiced by people who may not be women or older, if they are presented at all. This study strives to make visible and value the experiences of older women living alone in the traditional workplace of a woman, the home; this reflects the inherent interests of feminist philosophical principles.

Feminist philosophical principles are primarily concerned with promoting equality for women; however it is essential that we do not view all women as a homogenous group. Feminist philosophers stress that differences exist between individuals and therefore caution needs to be taken so as not to attempt to speak on behalf of all women (Garry and Pearsall 1996). The emergence of intersectional feminism emphasises the importance of recognising that women will not only experience inequalities due to their gender, but that there are other contributory factors such as their race, age, class and ethnicity (Scholz 2010). However, the scope of this study does not allow for comprehensive consideration of all factors that will influence the experiences of the women. For the purpose of this study I have focused specifically on the influence of gender and age on the experience of living alone for older women.

3.2 Research Methodology

This study is influenced by qualitative and feminist principles of research methodology. Qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of people and results in findings which are rich in detail (Grix 2010; Holloway and Wheeler 2010). It is therefore well placed to address the requirements of a study influenced by principles of phenomenology which is concerned with the lived experience of a phenomenon from the perspective of the person who is experiencing it (Dowling 2007; Starks and Trinidad 2007; Balls 2009; Creswell 2013; Tuohy et al 2013). Feminist researchers may use either quantitative or qualitative methods, although qualitative methods tend to be preferred as they are seen as

better at enabling personal experiences to be captured (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002); this is a defining feature of feminist methodology. By combining qualitative and feminist methodological principles, I believe that I will be able to effectively capture the experiences of living alone for older women in a way that values their unique and individual voices.

The key features of qualitative research revolve around the relationship between the researcher and the participant, the potential it offers to explore complex issues, and how the environment influences the collection of information. Each of these elements will now be explored in detail to capture the value of adopting a qualitative research design in this study. Consideration will also be given to how these elements relate to feminist principles of methodology.

Qualitative studies are often critiqued for their small number of participants. This is because it is said that generalisations cannot be made from the information that is obtained from such studies (Grix 2010). However the emphasis in qualitative studies is placed upon gathering deep and detailed information rather than being able to generalise from the findings (Flick 2009). Within qualitative studies the participants are given the opportunity to voice their own story (Creswell 2013). Qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of their experiences in the world in which they live (Holloway and Wheeler 2010) and therefore they value highly the knowledge, perceptions and practices of the people being studied (Flick 2009). This challenges the traditional research relationship between researcher and participants (Creswell 2013) which may feature the researcher posing a series of pre-defined questions (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). Within qualitative research the meaning of the issue being studied is defined by the participants themselves rather than by the researcher (Creswell 2013), this enables people to move the discussions in ways that have meaning to them. After all, only those who have the lived experience of a phenomenon are able to truly define their experiences. This emphasis on enabling people to share their own personal experiences also reflects the person centred nature of occupational therapy and the women centred philosophy of feminism.

The nature of the research relationship is a key component of feminist research, particularly in terms of the power which exists within the research process. Within traditional research studies there is often an imbalance of power between the researcher and the researched with the researcher holding a higher position in the power hierarchy. Feminist research strives to explore and challenge this imbalance of power (Kumar 2011; Hussain and Asad 2012). The power differences that may exist could be based on sex, sexuality, race or class however within

feminist research the concern is particularly upon the way in which subordination of women may influence their representation through and in research (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). Feminist research focuses on establishing research relationships which are based on collaboration, non-exploitation and reciprocity (Hammersley 1992; Creswell 2013). In order to achieve this, women taking part in research studies are actively encouraged to have an influence on all aspects of the research process (Hammersley 1992).

The role of the researcher is of course not completely obsolete in qualitative research and it is important to understand how the researcher influences all aspects of the research process (Primeau 2003). It is argued that it is within qualitative research that the voice of the researcher is most evident (Hasselkus 2003) with the values of the researcher shaping all stages of the research process; therefore there is a need for these values to be explicitly identified (Hollway and Wheeler 2010). I am an occupational therapist, a woman but not older; this provides me with a unique perspective of the different aspects being explored in this study. Within qualitative research value is attributed to the thoughts, feelings, communication, and reflections of the researcher; these are often recorded in a research diary created by the researcher and used to inform the analysis of the findings (Flick 2009). This facilitates reflexivity which requires the researcher to explicitly position themselves (their background) in terms of the study being completed (Creswell 2013).

Reflexivity of the researcher throughout the research process is also a key element of a research study that is influenced by feminist methodological principles (Naples 2007). Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) talk of how a researcher will carry baggage with them; this baggage may be emotional, intellectual or political. They state that a decision needs to be made with regards to what gets taken along for the journey and what gets left behind. I believe that who I am is inherent in my motivation to complete this study and the approach that I have taken throughout the research process. From the outset I was very aware that I was undertaking this study to make a point; that later life for older women living alone was not inevitably a negative experience. Through reflexivity I was able to consider the impact that my 'baggage' may have on all stages of the research process. I have captured my ponderings in a research diary and throughout this thesis. Whilst reflexivity of the researcher is clearly an essential means of ensuring the quality of a feminist study, I need to ensure that I do not overstate my position and allow the voices of the women to remain at the forefront (Hollway and Wheeler 2010).

The relationship which is established between the participant and researcher is essential for the success of the research process within qualitative research (Hammell 2002). To this end it is essential for me to build an effective rapport with the participants of my study, a rapport that is characterised by trust, negotiation and honesty (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). Qualitative researchers emphasise equality in the relationship between participant and researcher based on the notion that both are human beings (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). This 'down to earth' approach which does not exploit the potential power of the researcher reflects my own everyday values. By taking such an approach I hope that the women in my study will feel confident to discuss issues pertinent to my research. The quality and quantity of the information gained through qualitative research, and ultimately the overall success of my study, is significantly dependent upon the interaction which occurs between the participants and the researcher (Hammell 2002).

Within this study a number of steps have been taken in an attempt to ensure that the research relationship is owned by the women in the study as far as is possible. The first step was to ensure that effective rapport was established between the researcher and the women from the outset, this included, where possible, having a telephone conversation with them prior to the first face to face meeting. I tried to avoid merely conversing through email before we met as I was aware that there was a potential for misinterpretation and I felt it lacked the personal element. When engaging in conversations throughout the research process I shared what I deemed to be an appropriate amount of personal information; an approach that Bryman (2012) identifies as being important when establishing relationships in research informed by feminist methodological principles. Where possible the women were encouraged to guide the research process. At the end of the period of information collection each of the women were asked to reflect on their engagement in the study, including the research methods; this information was captured to both ascertain how they perceived their input and to address one of my research aims. Taking these steps helped to create a reciprocal relationship which characterises a feminist piece of research.

This study is influenced by qualitative and feminist methodological principles. This will help to facilitate the women in the study to express their experiences in their own words, provide them with the opportunity to have their unique individual voice captured, and to actively influence the research process throughout. The complementary nature of taking a qualitative and feminist approach to methodology reflects my own values as an occupational therapist, woman and feminist.

3.3 Research Design

This study comprised four phases which were completed over a period of 11 months. **Phase 1** (March - June 2015) included an introductory interview (interview 1) that was planned to last approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. Following the interview the women were given a camera and/ or memory card to borrow and asked to take approximately 25 photographs of activities that they do when they are at home alone; the photographs needed to be taken before the next scheduled meeting. The camera and/ memory card were collected at an agreed time defined by each woman with a date and time being set for a subsequent meeting to discuss the photographs. **Phase 2** (March - June 2015) comprised an interview (interview 2) about the photographs which was planned to last for 2 hours. Phases 1 and 2 were completed over a period of 4 months.

Phase 3 (December 2015- January 2016) commenced when the camera and/ or memory card were again provided to the women. As in phase 1, the women were asked to take approximately 25 photographs of their activities when they are at home alone; the photographs needed to be taken before our next scheduled meeting. The camera and/ or memory card were collected at an agreed time with a date and time being set by each woman for a subsequent meeting to discuss the photographs. The interview (interview 3) about the photographs was planned to last for 2 hours.

Phase 4 (February 2016) consisted of an unstructured interview (interview 4). This final interview aimed to discuss the use of photographs as a means of exploring the activities that the women completed when they are alone in their home. This interview was planned to last approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

3.4 Methods

This study used two different qualitative research methods to obtain the information required to address the stated research aim and objectives. The two methods were unstructured interviews and photo-interviewing. Prior to these methods being selected I considered and discounted alternative methods; they were time use diaries and non-participant observation.

3.4.1 Discounted Research Methods

Time use diaries are a means of capturing detailed information about how a person spends their time (Crosbie 2006; Bryman 2012); they are particularly concerned with the amount of time spent doing each activity and the order in which they occur (Farnworth 2003). Time use diaries are of particular interest to an occupational therapist as they facilitate a focus on a person's engagement in activities; a central concern of occupational therapy (Farnworth 2003).

Crosbie (2006) identifies two different ways in which a time use diary may be implemented, these are researcher administered or self-administered. With researcher administered diaries the researcher either observes a person and records the details of the activities in which the person engages or completes an interview from which an activity diary is completed. For a self-administered diary the person completes the diary themselves during a given time frame by documenting the information required when they are engaging in the actual activities. The preferred option within this study would have been self-administered time use diaries as they would have allowed the lived experience to have been captured in a timely manner (Crosbie 2006; Chilvers et al 2010) and reflect the personal experience of those capturing it, uninfluenced by the presence of a researcher. Additionally self-administered time use diaries have the potential to address any challenges which may arise through recalling events at a later date (Crosbie 2006). A self-administered time use diary would have suited the feminist methodological approach informing this study because of the control that the women would have had over what information was captured, and to a lesser extent, how it was captured.

There are a number of drawbacks to using self-administered time use diaries. Firstly they are criticised for the limited amount of qualitative information that they are able to capture; where additional information is obtained it tends to be restricted to where the activity was completed, who was present and who the activity was completed for (Farnworth 2003). It is also necessary to rely upon the commitment of the respondent to complete the diary which could have implications for the level of accuracy and detail that it contains (Crosbie 2006; Chilvers et al 2010). Finally there is a limited amount of evidence available to support the use of time use diaries within occupational therapy research (Farnworth 2003). Therefore time use diaries were rejected as a suitable method for use in this study.

The second research method which was considered for use in this study was observation. Occupational therapists are trained to use skilled observation in all aspects of their practice, particularly when exploring the nature of occupational engagement (Christensen and Baum 2004; Josephsson and Alsaker 2015). It could therefore be suggested that based on the professional skills I have, observation would be an ideal research method to use. In order to decide whether observation would be an appropriate method consideration needed to be given to understanding what observation looks like as a research method, as well as the benefits and challenges associated with it.

It is commonly accepted that there are two main types of observation which are referred to as 'participant' and 'non-participant' (Grix 2010). Participant observation sees the researcher

fully immersing themselves into the situation that they are seeking to observe, whereas in non-participant observation the researcher completes their observation from a distance (Grix 2010). If observation had been chosen as a method to be employed in this study the type used would have been non-participant observation.

The use of non-participant observation is associated with a number of benefits. Being present within the environment allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied within the natural environment in which it occurs (Bowling 2009). This is particularly valuable when trying to make sense of complex situations as it is possible to see the different contextual factors which are at play at any one time (Booth 2015). Using non-participant observation also affords the researcher the opportunity to record the events which are occurring at the time of the actual observation (Carr et al 2012). This means that they do not have to rely on their ability to recall information following the observation. The benefits associated with using non-participant observation suggest that there could have been value in using this method in this study.

As with any research method, there are also a number of challenges which are associated with using non-participant observation. Firstly the behaviour of those being observed may change due to the presence of the researcher; this is known as the Hawthorne effect (Kuman 2011). Additionally the focus of this study was upon the activities that women complete when they are alone at home, therefore my presence when completing my observations would have changed the very nature of the phenomenon of interest. Non-participant observation can also be very time consuming to complete (Blaxter et al 2010) as well as being restricted to particular times which would be problematic in gaining an extensive understanding of the activities that the women engaged in at home. These challenges in the use of non-participant observation as a research method led to the method being rejected for use in this study.

3.4.2 Selected Research Methods

Having considered and discounted using time use diaries and non-participant observation in this study, our attention now turns to the research methods which were deemed appropriate; that of interviews and photo-elicitation.

3.4.2.1 Interviews

Interviews were used as a research method throughout this study. Interviews were deemed an appropriate research method due to their ability to access the meanings and perceptions held by the women in this study of the phenomenon of interest (Punch 2005); that of living alone. Interviews are traditionally structured by the researcher asking questions to which

people are invited to respond (Punch 2005). This method contrasts with the other methods which were considered and rejected; that of time use diaries and observation where interaction with participants is limited to non-verbal methods. Using interviews to gain and explore the perceptions of the women in this study facilitated the fulfilment of the feminist and phenomenological approach informing this study.

Individual interviews were chosen as opposed to group interviews due to the personal nature of the experiences being explored within this study. Group interviews or focus groups would have emphasised the group interaction which would have occurred and the information which was subsequently elicited with the researcher acting in the role of a facilitator or moderator (Punch 2005). Had a group approach to interviewing been taken it was likely that it would have acted to stifle the information that the women in the study were willing to share (Bowling 2009), as many of their experiences were likely to be personal and unique to them. It was also considered that the individual personalities within the group could have further reduced the engagement of some women in the interviews (Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson 2013). Individual interviews were expected to enable the researcher to develop more effective rapport with the women and for their individual opinions, experiences and stories to be captured and valued (Ellis 2010).

This study used a particular style of interview referred to as 'unstructured'. There are a number of different styles of interview, each varying in the degree to which the researcher directs the conversation (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). In unstructured interviews the researcher poses an opening question to stimulate discussion with the progression of the interview being predominantly guided by the participant which allows them to express their personal perspective using their words (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). This was relevant for a study that is focused on experience as defined by those who are living it. There are two other types of interviews used in research which are structured and semi-structured (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). In structured interviews the researcher poses a number of pre written questions in a specific order (Grix 2010). Holloway and Wheeler (2010) argue that structured interviews are rarely used in qualitative studies as they limit the responses achievable which is contradictory to the exploratory nature of qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews employ a less directive style with the researcher using an interview guide which includes a number of open questions to stimulate discussion and provide focus for the topics to be explored, however this is not used in a prescriptive manner (Flick 2009). This study was

concerned with enabling the women to express their experiences in their own voice and to this end an unstructured style of interviewing was used.

3.4.2.2 Unstructured Interviews

Within this study I approached each interview with an idea of the kind of concepts that we could discuss and some loose questions that I may have used should the conversation have waned. Miller and Crabtree (1999:19) capture the essence of unstructured interviews by defining them as being a “guided everyday conversation” and this was the feeling I wanted to create with the women in my study. Unstructured interviews typically start with a broad opening question with any subsequent questions emerging spontaneously during the interview (Balls 2009; Grix 2010). All of the questions that I used were open and non-directive to enable the thoughts and interests of the women to guide the interview (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). The participant led nature of unstructured interviews is effective in a study such as this which is influenced by phenomenological theoretical principles and a feminist approach to methodology.

Unstructured interviews were selected for use in this study because of the quantity and quality of information it is possible to obtain. The information generated through an unstructured interview is full of depth and detail (Holloway and Wheeler 2010) because the conversation becomes an exploratory process guided by the participant. The evolving nature of an unstructured interview allows complex issues to be explored (Bowling 2009) and conversations to be taken to places not previously considered by the researcher (Grix 2010). This was particularly important in this study as I am not an older woman and have not had experience of living alone in later life; therefore I was unable to anticipate the full scope of our conversations in advance. Within phenomenological research unstructured interviews are seen as the gold standard of research methods due to the opportunity for participants to control the discussions that occur (Balls 2009).

The depth and detail of the information obtained from unstructured interviews can raise a number of challenges for the researcher (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). The quantity of information obtained can make data collection and analysis a very time consuming process (Bowling 2009) and there is no guarantee that all of the information gathered will be relevant to the research study (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). In this study it was accepted that the interview would stray from the focus of the study, however this was seen to be advantageous in developing rapport with the women which enabled more detailed information to be obtained. The wealth of information elicited within this study was captured through audio

recording and I also kept a diary in which I captured any immediate observations that I had following interviews. Prior to completing the interviews the maximum suggested expectation of the length of the interviews was discussed with the women and used to inform the length of the appointment arranged; this acted to contain the length of the interviews. The potential complexity of the information obtained means that the numbers of participants in studies of this nature tend to be smaller (Bowling 2009) and the potential to make comparisons across participants can prove challenging (Grix 2010). However the purpose of this study was not to generalise from the results (Bowling 2009) but to present the personal lived experience (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). The potential challenges which may arise from using unstructured interviews were used to inform decisions made during the planning stages of this study in order to minimise their influence.

3.4.2.3 Photo-Elicitation

Two out of the four unstructured interviews used visual stimuli in the form of photographs. This approach is captured under the umbrella of visual research methods. Visual research methods draw on a range of materials which may include photographs, video, film and drawings (Flick 2009; Asaba et al 2015) although the most commonly used visual stimuli is that of photographs (Rose 2014). In this study the women were asked to take photographs because the feminist nature of this study warranted an approach which provided the women with choice and power. The method of asking participants to take photographs as part of the interview process is a particular style of interviewing called 'photo-elicitation' (Collier 1957). It was borne from anthropologists using photographs to illustrate their work (Collier 1957; Ketelle 2010). The term 'photo-elicitation' was first used by Collier in 1957 as a result of an experiment that he completed which compared using photographs in interviews to traditional interviews which only drew upon verbal stimuli to generate discussion. He concluded that the interviews which used photographs to stimulate the discussions were more fruitful than those adopting the more traditional approach. Using photographs has been found to enhance focus during the interview and produce information which is rich, detailed and full of emotion (Collier 1957; Tinkler 2013). This was also found to be the case by Shaw (2013) who completed a study that examined the use of photo-elicitation with international students as a means of overcoming the language barrier. It is suggested that using photographs as a stimulus requires a different part of the brain to engage in the process which generates the production of a different type of information (Collier 1957; Van Nes et al 2012). It was therefore anticipated that using photographs as stimuli in this study would enhance the depth and detail of

information obtained from the women when they were exploring their experiences of living alone.

Photo-elicitation provides the opportunity to explore concepts which are difficult to observe (Harper 2002). The researcher is able to gain an insight into situations, contexts and perceptions without being present at the time or in the same place as the participant when they are taking the photographs (Collier 1957; Clark-Ibáñez 2004; Noland 2006; Pink 2013; Tinkler 2013). This is important in a study which focuses on the experience of living alone and the activities completed when the women are alone at home. Photographs have also been applauded for providing the opportunity to explore the unobservable. A study completed by Clark-Ibáñez (2004) that explored the experiences of Spanish speaking children in Los Angeles led to the observation that photo-elicitation is more than what is physically captured within the photographs. Similarly Collier (1957) found that photo-elicitation enabled the participants in his study to articulate complex ideas, situations and processes. Indeed Harper (2002) purports that photo-elicitation can capture the seemingly impossible, such as absence. A study by Hodgetts et al (2006) explored experiences of homelessness through photo-elicitation. It provided the basis for a subsequent discussion in an article by Hodgetts et al (2007) which explores the meaning of images which are not taken by the participants. They suggest that images not captured are as important as those which are and failing to discuss absent images will result in missing important issues which may relate to abstract ideas, situations and relationships. In this study it was therefore important to consider the images which were presented and discussed as well as those which were not captured.

Interviews which use photographs to stimulate discussion have a tendency to last longer than those adopting a more traditional style (Collier 1957; Hurworth 2003; Shaw 2013); this has implications for the quantity of information obtained. Photographs are seen to enthuse participants (Tinkler 2013) particularly if they are taken by the participants themselves, resulting in freer sharing of information in the subsequent discussions (Shaw 2013). This could be as a result of participants having time prior to the interview to reflect on what they want, and do not want, to present to the researcher (Shaw 2013; Tinkler 2013). Collier (1957) found that not only did the interview last longer when using photographs as a stimulus but that participants were less likely to experience fatigue during the interview process. It was expected that this would be advantageous in obtaining rich, deep and detailed information about personal and unique experiences.

Photo-elicitation provides the opportunity for an enhanced level of collaboration between the participant and the researcher (Harper 2002; Hurworth 2003). The power within the research process is at least in part given over to the participant (Tinkler 2013) with the participant taking on the role of teacher (Harper 2002; Clark-Ibáñez 2004). The themes of the research are actively engaged with by the participants through their decisions about which images to capture or select for discussion (Hodgetts et al 2007). Enhanced collaboration in the research process is akin to the ethos of phenomenology (Balls 2009), feminist methodology (Hammersley 1992; Creswell 2013) and a qualitative approach to research design (Creswell 2013) which informs this study.

As with all research methods there are a number of challenges which need to be considered and addressed to ensure the optimal use of photo-elicitation in the research process. It has been highlighted that photographs are highly constructed, both technically and socially (Ketelle 2010), by those who have taken them (Alexander 2008). This is important as the original framing of an image will influence what is seen by others (Alexander 2008; Flick 2009). It is also worth noting that the same image may be perceived by different people in many different ways (Clark-Ibáñez 2004; Van Nes et al 2012). Tinkler (2013) states that to address this issue it is integral that the participant who captured the image is provided with the opportunity to explore what it means to them. Within this study the women were the sole interpreters of the photographs that they had taken although I would often ask them about parts of the image because I was interested in what they had captured. Within this study I was keen for the women to control the conversation as is desirable in phenomenology, feminist methodology and qualitative research design. However, Tinkler (2013) suggests that this approach may prove problematic if the participant has their own agenda that fails to answer the aim and objectives posed by the study. This challenge may be addressed in part by considering the amount of guidance provided by the researcher about the images to be taken. Tinkler (2013) identifies four approaches; the brief may be left entirely open for interpretation by the participant, a contained focus may be provided, or the whole process may be scripted by either the researcher or the participant. This study provided the women with a contained focus upon the activities that they completed when they were at home alone, which gave them control over the images that they collected whilst the objectives of the study were kept in mind. The focus was reinforced in the information sheet that was provided to all participants (see appendix 1).

When initiating the interview element of the photo-elicitation process control is handed over to the participant. I choose not to view the photographs taken by the women prior to the interview to reinforce the shared power in the research relationship. When the photographs are given to the women they get to choose which they talk about, the order in which they want to talk about them, and what they want to say (e.g Wall-Bassett 2014). Tinkler (2013) recommends that before conducting the photo-elicitation interview, the researcher should consider ways in which discussions can be initiated. However she does not offer any practical suggestions for approaches that could be taken; this is a common omission in literature exploring photo-elicitation. In this study I asked the women to either choose their favourite photograph or to work through the photographs in an order that made sense to them.

3.4.2.4 The Dictaphone

All of the interviews that I conducted in my study were recorded onto a Dictaphone. I decided to capture the information in this way so that I could fully engage with the women throughout the unstructured interviews. The recorder that I used was very small and unobtrusive, indeed several of the women commented that they had forgotten it was there. The Dictaphone enabled me to capture not only our conversations, but also expressions of emotions, and any additional noises in the environment. Whilst recording the interviews provided me with a verbatim record of the issues we had discussed, it did not capture the non-verbal communication of the women, or the photographs that we were discussing during interviews 2 and 3. I did not take written notes during the interviews, therefore relying on my memory to recall these elements after the event. Recording the interviews onto a Dictaphone enabled me to capture a vast amount of information; this will be drawn upon in the findings and discussions presented in chapters 4 and 5.

3.4.2.5 Researcher Diary

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis I maintained a research diary. This approach was taken to enable me to capture information about the context surrounding the visit with the women, any comments which were made and not captured on the Dictaphone such as those made in general conversation, and any event which happened during the interviews which could not be recorded by the Dictaphone. I also used my diary to capture any decisions that I made throughout the research process. The information documented has facilitated reflexivity throughout the research process and is cited, at least in part, within this thesis. I believe that my experiences and thoughts, as a woman and occupational therapist add a significant dimension to this study and therefore they are acknowledged within my thesis. The women who engaged in my study were not aware of my research diary or the

information that I recorded in it. Excerpts from my research diary will be used to inform the findings and discussions presented in chapters 4 and 5.

3.4.3 The Interviews

3.4.3.1 Phase 1: Interview 1

Interview 1 focused upon the three objectives of the study;

1. To understand how the participants define their own experience of being an older woman
2. To understand women as occupational beings
3. To explore how home influences and is influenced by the activities that women engage in when they are at home alone

I used the same opening question to start the unstructured interview with each of the women; the question was, "Please can you tell me about the places that you have lived throughout your life?" This question aimed to open up discussion and enable rapport to be established between the researcher and the women. The kinds of questions which arose to varying degrees throughout these first interviews included but were not limited to*;

- How long did you live there for? (3)
- Who did you live with at the time? (3)
- What were your most important roles at that time? (1, 2, 3)
- What activities do you recall completing within your home at that time? (1, 2, 3)
- What would a typical day have looked like for you? (1, 2, 3)
- Have you ever lived anywhere that you would not have called a home? (2, 3)
- Out of all of the places that you have lived, which was the most important to you? (1, 2, 3)

*the numbers indicate the objectives to which the questions relate.

At the end of interview I provided the women with a camera and memory card, or a memory card to use in their own camera. This marked the start of the photo-elicitation process.

It was anticipated that the first unstructured interview would last between 1 and 2 hours with each woman.

3.4.3.2 Phase 2: Interview 2

During this stage of the photo-elicitation process an unstructured interview (interview 2) was completed with the photographs used as stimuli for the conversations. In order to start the unstructured interview the women were asked to either, “Choose your favourite photograph and tell me why you have chosen that particular photograph?” or asked to work their way through their photographs in any way that felt comfortable.

It was made clear that the women did not have to discuss all of the photographs. The amount of time spent discussing each photograph was influenced by what the women wanted to say and how the conversations subsequently developed.

Some of the follow-on questions included but were not limited to*;

- What does the photograph show? (1, 2, 3)
- Why did you choose to take this photograph? (1, 2, 3)
- How often do you complete this activity? (1, 2)
- What motivates you to complete this activity? (1, 2, 3)
- How does this activity make you feel? (1, 2, 3)
- How long have you completed this activity for? (1, 2)
- Are there any times when this activity has not been part of your life? (1, 2)
- Where within your home do you complete this activity? (1, 2, 3)
- How does the environment influence your completion of this activity? (1, 2, 3)
- How does this activity influence how you feel about your home? (2, 3)

*the numbers indicate the objectives to which the questions relate.

This part of the photo-elicitation process was planned to last 1 hour 30 minutes – 2 hours.

At the end of interview the women kept their own printed photographs; I kept electronic copies of photographs to use in my thesis, presentations, and publications.

3.4.3.3 Phase 3: Interview 3

Prior to conducting interview 3 I provided the women with a camera and memory card, or a memory card to use in their own camera. This marked the start of the second round of the photo-elicitation process.

At the start of interview 3 women were asked to either, “Choose your favourite photograph and tell me why you have chosen that particular photograph?” or asked to work their way through their photographs in any way that felt comfortable.

It was made clear that the women did not have to discuss all of the photographs. The amount of time spent discussing each photograph was influenced by what the women wanted to say and how the conversations subsequently developed.

Some of the follow on questions included but were not limited to*;

- What does the photograph show? (1, 2, 3)
- Why did you choose to take this photograph? (1, 2, 3)
- How often do you complete this activity? (1, 2)
- What motivates you to complete this activity? (1, 2, 3)
- How does this activity make you feel? (1, 2, 3)
- How long have you completed this activity for? (1, 2)
- Are there any times when this activity has not been part of your life? (1, 2)
- Where within your home do you complete this activity? (1, 2, 3)
- How does the environment influence your completion of this activity? (2, 3)
- How does this activity influence how you feel about your home? (2, 3)

*the numbers indicate the objectives to which the questions relate.

At the end of interview the women kept their own printed photographs; I kept electronic copies of photographs to use in my thesis, presentations, and publications.

3.4.3.4 Phase 4: Interview 4

Prior to interview 4 I sent each of the women a printed copy of the original transcripts for interviews 1, 2, and 3. I also sent them each a copy of an organised transcript that I had created from their individual original transcripts for interviews 2 and 3.

This unstructured interview particularly focused on the fourth objective of this study which was;

4. To consider the potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement

In order to start interview 4 an opening question something along the lines of, “How did you feel about taking photographs of the activities that you complete when you are at home alone?” was used to start the conversation.

Some of the follow-on questions included but were not limited to*;

- Are there any activities that you decided not to photograph? (2)
- Were you concerned about what I might think about the photographs that you had taken? (4)
- How did any concerns influence your photographs? (4)
- Did you find it useful to have a photograph to focus on during the interviews? (4)
- Since the interviews discussing the activities that you had photographed, have you noticed any changes in the activities that you complete or how you complete them? (1, 2, 4)
- Do you think that photographing the activities had an influence on your wellbeing at the time or since the study was completed? (1, 2, 4)
- Has involvement in this study influenced the meaning that you give to your home in any way? (3, 4)

*the numbers indicate the objectives to which they relate.

These questions were aimed at exploring the potential use of photography as a means of capturing occupational engagement for assessment, intervention or as a research method for use by occupational therapists. This unstructured interview was also used as an opportunity for the women to provide points of evaluation of the study as a whole, their engagement in the study and my performance within the process of gathering information.

3.5 Ensuring Quality

Research studies have previously had their merits judged by using the concepts of validity, reliability and generalisability, regardless of their methodological orientation. However qualitative researchers have long argued that these criteria are reflective of a quantitative, positivist approach to research and do not reflect the specific ideals that inform qualitative research studies (Finlay 2006). These ideals value the unique, context specific experience of people taking part in research; they consider that there is not just one single reality and that the rich, detailed information generated by a single person has value (Finlay 2006). In order to ensure the quality of my research, when designing the methods, I used the four components of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The credibility of qualitative research is concerned with ensuring that the views and perceptions held by the participants are represented truthfully in the findings of a study (Moules and Goodman 2014). Credibility is therefore directly related to the methods that are used throughout the research process (Lincoln and Guba 1985). To facilitate the achievement of credibility in this study I drew on skills and knowledge that I had gained within my previous practice as an Occupational Therapist which enabled me to feel confident within the home as the context for the study and facilitated development of rapport between myself and the women. It is suggested that building effective rapport with study participants helps to develop trust and ultimately leads to improved honesty and depth to the information that they share (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In order to further influence the credibility of the study the women were provided with organised transcripts of interviews 2 and 3 prior to the 4th interview. This provided the women with the opportunity to ensure that they were in agreement with what had been captured and how. The 4th interview also aimed to provide the opportunity for the women to ensure that they were being represented in a way which they saw as being appropriate and true. Striving to achieve credibility through the involvement of the women

throughout the research process is reflective of the feminist approach to methodology that informs this study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define transferability of qualitative research as the ability to apply the findings gained from a study in one context to another context. They add that in order to achieve this, the researcher needs to ensure that they provide a rich and detailed description of each part of the research process. This enables the reader to make a judgement about the appropriateness of applying the findings to their own situation (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Transferability in this study will be achieved by providing a complete and extensive description of the entire research process within this thesis.

The third component identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is that of dependability which is seen to be essential if credibility is to be achieved. Dependability is concerned with the ability to repeat a study with a similar set of people and within a similar context and to subsequently achieve the same outcomes (Polit and Beck 2014). This is challenging as the often fluid nature of qualitative methods and the dependency upon the skills of the researcher may very well result in the research being pursued in different directions (Lincoln and Guba 1985). It is suggested that dependability can be assured by engaging in an audit process where another person reviews the processes followed and conclusions drawn. Within this study dependability will be achieved by seeking feedback from my supervisory panel and at conferences where I will be presenting my work.

Confirmability is the final component defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and is concerned with the researcher providing a clear presentation of all decisions made throughout the research process. To support this I maintained a reflective diary throughout; which captured my thoughts and musings which have occurred throughout as well as justifications for all decisions that I made. The contents of this diary will be used to inform this thesis, particularly when presenting the method, information gained from the women and the subsequent analysis of this information.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

It is suggested by Grix (2010) that direct engagement with people which is a characteristic of qualitative research leads to a greater number of ethical considerations that require attention, when compared with quantitative research. These ethical considerations are not restricted to the process of data collection but exist throughout the research process as a whole (Creswell 2013). In order to ensure appropriate attention was given to the ethical issues relevant to this

study the principles of respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence and justice (Beauchamp and Childress 2013), were applied.

3.6.1 Respect for Autonomy

The ethical principle of respect for autonomy is concerned with the belief that people have the right to make decisions and that they should do so having been fully informed and not under the influence of others (Beauchamp and Childress 2013).

When conducting qualitative research the process of gaining consent is said to be ongoing throughout the study (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). The participants in a study have the autonomy to decide whether they wish to participate or not and this decision should be based on full information being provided by the researcher; this is known as informed consent (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). In this study verbal consent was gained during the first meeting with the participant for the first unstructured interview and as an initial indication of their willingness to participate in the study. At this stage all participants were provided with a participant information sheet (see appendix 1) which explained the details of the study and included contact details for the researcher. Informed written consent (see appendix 2) was obtained during the second meeting with the participant to allow them time to consider the information provided during the first meeting and for them to have the opportunity to ask any additional questions that may have arisen; this is integral to the process of gaining informed consent (Jacobsen 2012). Consent was reconfirmed verbally at the beginning of each subsequent meeting to address the requirement of gaining ongoing consent in qualitative studies. The consent obtained from participants needed to cover participation in the study and use of the photographs generated to support the thesis, publications and conference presentations as advised by the British Sociological Association (2006). This is because the copyright of the photographs is owned by the person who takes them (Alexander 2008). Throughout my study I aimed to ensure that the processes I was following were transparent to the women taking part and that they felt able to question these at any point.

To enable participants with poor literacy skills to provide their informed consent for participation in my study, I had planned to spend additional time, with those who required it, in the first two sessions working through the information on the 'participant information sheet' and the 'consent form'. Copies of these documents would have been left with the women and I would have encouraged them to discuss the information further with a trusted friend or relative. If the women had been unable to sign the consent form due to poor literacy, I would have recorded confirmation of informed verbal consent on a Dictaphone at

the beginning of the second meeting. This verbal consent would have needed to include the woman confirming their name, their agreement to each of the statements on the consent form and the date on which their consent was being provided. Taking these steps would have enabled those with a range of educational backgrounds to participate in my study.

For all of the women, their understanding of the participant information sheet was ascertained through discussion about what they saw the expectations of their involvement in the study to include. These discussions occurred at each phase of the research process as preparation for their involvement in the next phase. It was expected that understanding (or otherwise) of the participant information sheet would have been evident as the research process progressed and by the photographs that the women had taken.

To enable the women to make an informed decision about their choice to take part in the study, it was important to ensure that they were aware that the information obtained would be treated in a confidential manner at all times. Confidentiality is concerned with how the researcher acts to protect any information provided to them by the participant (Jacobsen 2012). The women were advised that their information would be shared with my supervisor in its raw and analysed state during the production of the thesis. The findings would also be shared with the examiners and with a wider audience through publication and presentation at conferences in a condensed format; and no information would be included which would allow the women to be identified.

The right to respect the women's autonomy was further instilled by providing the women with the choice of what they photographed and which information they chose to share during the interviews. This may have included the women capturing images that did not fully meet the brief provided, or not taking a photograph that I would have deemed relevant to the study because they did not see it as valuable or did not want to discuss the issues it captured. As a researcher it was important that I respected the choices made by the women and held their right to not share information ahead of the desire to fulfil the needs of my study.

3.6.2 Nonmaleficence

Nonmaleficence refers to the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that they do not cause harm to the people participating in a research study (Beauchamp and Childress 2013); this includes the participants and the researcher. I aimed to do no harm by the way in which I engaged with the women, the maintenance of the anonymity of the women and the maintenance of confidentiality throughout the study.

This study did not set out to discuss sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting issues, I anticipated that the discussions which arose from unstructured interviews and the process of photo-elicitation could raise such issues. The nature of the research methods being used meant that I would be obtaining an intimate insight of who these women were and what they did, a feature of photo-elicitation identified by Clark-Ibáñez (2004). The issues which were anticipated to arise to varying degrees included: loss of loved ones, changes in life circumstances, changes in health situation, decline in functional abilities, loneliness, isolation and relationship issues. I planned to draw upon my experience as an occupational therapist from practice and teaching in higher education, where I have had the opportunity to develop and utilise appropriate therapeutic communication skills to deal effectively with these issues in a sensitive and supportive manner.

My 7 years' experience as an occupational therapist was within an acute physical NHS Trust where my role focused upon facilitating the safe transition of patients between hospital and home. Whilst I worked with all people over the age of 18 years, the majority of my caseload was over 65 years of age. I have experience of working with complex and challenging situations which have demanded effective communication skills to deescalate situations and confront difficult discussions such as a decline in functional abilities indicating a need for individuals to move into residential care. My 6 and a half years teaching in higher education afforded me the opportunity to further consolidate my communication skills both in the delivery of teaching and in the personal tutor support provided to undergraduate students. It was these skills that I expected to be able to draw upon to effectively engage in difficult conversations.

I needed to be fully aware of the limitations of my boundaries as a researcher rather than practitioner and would have referred onto other agencies if the need for alternative or longer term support had been indicated. If any of the women had become distressed at any point during the data collection process their wellbeing would have been treated with the utmost importance. Discussions would have been drawn to a close and comfort offered. I would have offered to contact a friend or family member and referred onto other agencies if indicated. I would not have left any of the women in a state of distress without organizing appropriate support. Contact details of local organisations who offer a range of support and advice were provided to all of the women at the outset of the study enabling them to self-refer at any point (appendix 3).

It was important to consider and maintain appropriate boundaries between myself and the women participating in the study, however it was also important for empathy to be exercised as a means of maintaining rapport in the relationship (Alderson 2013). Rapport was an essential foundation for this research study to ensure that the women felt comfortable to share personal experiences (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). It has been suggested that rapport is facilitated through a degree of the researcher drawing on and discussing their own personal experiences in relationship to the research being undertaken (Nelms 2015). However, I needed to be careful not to reveal personal details, such as addresses or the names of other people in my life or to present myself as vulnerable in order to protect myself. In establishing rapport with the women in the study I needed to exercise caution about how the relationship progressed, avoiding moving from a researcher- participant relationship onto friendship.

It was essential that the anonymity of the women would be protected throughout the study (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). Pseudonyms are commonly used as a means of maintaining anonymity and the researcher and participant are the only people who should know which pseudonym refers to which participant (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). During the first meeting (interview 1) the women were ascribed a pseudonym which was kept separate from the research information, as suggested by Holloway and Wheeler (2010), electronically in the form of a password protected pen drive.

Using the research method of photo-elicitation required some very specific considerations surrounding the confidentiality of the photographs. The women were being asked to take photographs focusing on the activity that they were completing when alone at home and to this end should not include images of other people. It is important to heed the advice of Alexander (2008) who explained that photographs that obviously belong to an individual should be discussed but not presented in a thesis, presentation, or publication. Photographs that may prove problematic include a photograph of a photograph, very personal items, or of other people. All photographs were to be associated with the pseudonym given to the woman who took them throughout the research process.

3.6.3 Beneficence

Beneficence is concerned with the researcher bringing about something good from their research (Kerckhoff and Hanson 2013). Within this study beneficence aimed to be achieved by placing an emphasis upon enhancing the visibility and representation of the women in the study. This was facilitated by using phenomenological and feminist philosophical principles to inform the methods used. This led to the women actively engaging in the research process

and presenting their experiences in their own words and attributing value to issues that were important to them.

3.6.4 Justice

Justice is concerned with enabling equality (Beauchamp and Childress 2013). In this study justice was challenged due to my approach to sampling which meant that participation was not open to all older women. Factors that restricted their participation included their age, marital status, and geographical location. However, within the sample of women who engaged in my study, justice was considered in terms of their fair and equal participation in the study. It was anticipated that there would be differences in the contribution made by the women in the number of photographs that were taken, the length of time spent discussing the issues pertinent to the study or the depth of information that they were willing to share with me. Regardless of the variations in the contribution made to my study by each of the women, equal value was attributed to all of their contributions.

It was also necessary to consider how it would be possible to facilitate the engagement of the women in the study should they have had poor literacy skills, sensory impairment which did not exclude them from the study, or changes in circumstances which again did not exclude them from the study. It was anticipated that these issues could be addressed by providing additional time during the various phases of the research process, enabling them to gain additional support from the researcher or others, and the option to renegotiate any timeframes or meetings within the study to which they were anchored. This would have reinforced the value attributed to the contribution that each of the women was able to make.

3.6.5 Gaining Ethical Approval

In order to meet the ethical principles, this research study was presented to the Faculty of Health and Social Care Research Ethics Committee at Canterbury Christ Church University which subsequently granted ethical approval (see appendix 3).

3.7 Participants

This study aimed to recruit women aged 70-80 years who lived alone; this is a purposive sample. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to recruit participants who have the attributes that allows them to address the aims of the research (Bryman 2012). In recruiting women to take part in this study, women with a range of experience of living alone were sought. This included those who had lived alone for more than half of their lives, widows, women who were divorced and those who had moved to their current home in the past 5 years. It was anticipated that recruiting women with a range of experiences of living alone

would enable an interesting spectrum of information to be obtained and captured.

Comparison of experiences across the group of women was not an initial concern of this study (Wright- St Clair 2015) as the desire to present unique lived experiences was a driving force.

Before starting to recruit women explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria needed to be established. In order to be considered for inclusion in this study, potential participants needed to first be female and aged between 70 and 80 years. This age range was selected because the National Service Framework for Older Persons (DH 2001), identified this age as a time of transition from an active life to becoming increasingly frail. At this age it is common for women to have retired from paid employment and therefore have increased opportunity to spend time within their home environment. My final inclusion criterion was that the women had to have lived on their own for two years or more; this was to allow time after bereavement or relationship break down. I considered that this time period allowed time for the women to get used to living alone, including establishing their own routines and engaging in activities which may have not occurred before they lived on their own.

The exclusion criteria focused on the abilities of the women in relation to the research methods which were to be used. It was not possible to include women who had a visual impairment as photo-elicitation required them to take and discuss photographs. Whilst they could have been assisted by another person to capture their images, this would have meant that they were not capturing activities that they completed when they were at home alone. The second exclusion criterion concerned the cognitive abilities of the women. They were required to understand the requirements of the study in order to provide their informed consent and to be able to adequately process, retain and act upon complex instructions concerning the research process. Women were also excluded if they did not have the physical abilities to engage in the photo-elicitation process, which involved the use of a digital camera.

The actual number of participants required for qualitative studies cannot be specifically calculated (Steward 2006). Holloway and Wheeler (2010) suggest that using larger sample sizes in qualitative studies can result in information being obtained which lacks the depth, detail and personal meaning. They suggest that qualitative studies commonly involve between 4 and 40 participants. This study aimed to recruit 11 women who would each be interviewed on four separate occasions. I anticipated that my methods would generate vast amounts of information, and therefore 11 participants seemed to be an appropriate number to enable me to do justice to their experiences.

3.8 Pilot

A pilot study was carried out with one of my friends to trial the use of the photo-elicitation method to establish whether it would generate the information being sought for the study. My friend was asked to take up to 25 photographs of activities that she completed at home over a period of 3 days when alone. She was given the same instructions that were drafted for the women in my study (appendix 1).

My friend produced 21 photographs. I printed the photographs in colour and took them to her home to complete the photo-elicitation process. Verbal consent was gained to record the discussion of the photographs on a Dictaphone. I initiated the discussion by posing the open question, "Please can you choose your favourite photograph and tell me why you have chosen that particular photograph?". I took my friend through some of the open questions I was considering using in interviews 2 and 3. The interview lasted 40 minutes. By this point it was evident that the research method elicited the information required for the study. The duration of this particular interview was felt to be shorter than anticipated due to the close participant- researcher relationship and my friend being only 35 years of age which provided less points of discussion due to her limited life experience. It was anticipated that the length of the interviews with the women within this study were likely to be longer in duration.

3.9 Procedures

This study consisted of four phases of data collection extending over a period of 11 months to enable potential seasonal differences to be captured and to allow time for the women to reflect on their involvement in the study. All four phases were completed in the homes of the women with the exact place within the home being chosen by the women themselves.

In order to recruit participants for this study I distributed information about the study through family, friends and community groups using email (see appendix 6), posters (see appendix 7), flyers (see appendix 7) and word of mouth. All methods of distribution were dependent on another person (not the researcher) passing on written information and therefore it needed to contain all of the pertinent details to enable women to make their decision. Women who were interested in taking part in the study were asked to either contact me via email or telephone, or to pass their contact details through the person that had given them the information.

The details of each of the four phases are as follows;

Prior to the phase 1 I contacted the women either by telephone or email to introduce myself and the study as well as to set up the first meeting.

3.9.1 Phase 1 (March – June 2015)

Phase 1 was the first face to face meeting between the researcher and each woman in her home. The aim was to fully introduce the study, including the methods to be used, to answer any questions that they may have had about the study, and to provide an information pack. The information pack included;

- Information about the study and my contact details (see appendix 1)
- A copy of the consent form (see appendix 2)
- Instructions on how to use the digital camera (if borrowing a camera and memory card from the researcher) (see appendix 8)
- A couple of fliers advertising the study in case they knew of anyone else who may be interested in taking part (see appendix 7)

Once all of the information about the study had been discussed and the women were happy to take part in the study, verbal consent was obtained to commence their active participation. During this initial meeting the first unstructured interview (interview 1) was completed and recorded on a Dictaphone.

Once interview 1 was completed the method of photo-elicitation and how it was to be used in this study was explained again with a particular emphasis placed upon how it was to be used within this study. The women were given the choice of either borrowing a camera and a memory card from me or to use their own camera with a borrowed memory card. If the women choose to borrow a camera I demonstrated how to use the digital camera with this verbal information supported by an information sheet that they could keep (see appendix 1). If they chose to use their own camera I provided a memory card that they inserted into their camera whilst I was present to ensure it was compatible.

All of the women were asked to take up to 25 photographs of activities that they completed when they were alone within their home environment. It was made clear that there was not a right or wrong photograph or a particular way to take them; this acted to reinforce the control which the women had over the process.

At the end of this first meeting, the women set a time and date for me to return and collect the camera and/ or memory card and a date and time for me to return to interview them about their photographs.

3.9.2 Phase 2 (March – June 2015)

Phase 2 commenced when I collected the camera or memory card from the women at the prearranged time; this was a very brief visit. I arranged for all of the women's photographs to be printed but did not view the photographs myself before they were returned to the women. At the time agreed informed written consent was obtained, a copy of which I retained, and photo-elicitation (interview 2) was completed. This part of the photo-elicitation process was planned to last 1 hour 30 minutes – 2 hours. After interview 2 the women kept their own printed photographs.

3.9.3 Phase 3 (December 2015 - January 2016)

Phase 3 was initiated when I contacted each of the women, either by telephone or email. I checked with each of the women whether they were happy to continue to take part in the study and if they were, arranged a time and date to visit them in order to provide the camera and/or memory card for a second round of photo-elicitation.

As in phase 1, the women were asked to take 25 photographs of activities that they completed when they are alone within their home environment over a negotiated period of time. The women set a time and date for me to return and collect the camera and/ or memory card and a date and time for me to return to interview the women about their photographs.

On collecting the camera and/ or memory card I arranged for all of the women's photographs to be printed, but I did not view the photographs. Interview 3 was completed at the time and date agreed with the photographs used as a stimuli for the conversations. This part of the photo-elicitation process was planned to last between 1 hour 30 minutes and 2 hours. After interview 3 the women kept their own printed photographs.

3.9.4 Phase 4 (February and March 2016)

Phase 4 commenced when I contacted the women either by telephone or email to arrange the final unstructured interview (interview 4). The interview was completed at a time and date that suited the women. This unstructured interview was planned to last for about 1 hour.

3.10 Capturing the Interviews

All interviews were recorded on a small Dictaphone as this was felt to be minimally intrusive within the environment, yet captured the full extent of the conversations which were had

during the interviews. It was important to ensure that I was familiar with the recording device prior to the interviews in order to minimise the attention and potential apprehension drawn to the Dictaphone. All interviews were transcribed by an external agency. The recording of interviews enabled me to focus upon the women throughout the exchange and allowed for the information to be analysed in detail at a later time (Bowling 2009). It is suggested that the researcher within phenomenological studies should not delegate transcription of interviews to others as this removes the opportunity for the researcher to become immersed in the information obtained (Balls 2009), however this became necessary due to my limited transcription skills coupled with limited time. All interviews were fully transcribed to facilitate the achievement of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study, thus assisting to ensure the quality of the research (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

3.11 Analysis of findings

I initially found the wealth of information that I had gathered from the 11 women during the four phases of my study overwhelming. I was aware of the responsibility I held to ensure that the women in my study were represented appropriately through the images and words that they had provided and that my analysis of the findings needed to be systematic, transparent and fair. This was necessary in order to meet the four components of ensuring the quality of a research study as identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985); credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In order to understand how I should approach the analysis of my findings I explored numerous texts (e.g. Smith et al 2009; Silverman 2011; Bazeley 2013). These texts recommended a range of approaches that could be used to analyse my findings, such as interpretive phenomenological analysis (e.g. Smith et al 2009) and using computer software such as NVIVO (eg. Bazely and Jackson 2013). I trialled both of these approaches (amongst others) but found that they merely added to the complexity of dealing with such a vast amount of information.

At this point I made the decision to put the books to one side and engage with my findings in any way that felt natural and right to me. I started the analysis process by reading the transcripts from interviews 2 and 3, informed by photo-elicitation. I decided that this was the best place to start the analysis because understanding the activities that the women engaged in would help me to make sense of the contextual information gained during interview 1 and the varied discussions captured in interview 4. The transcripts from interviews 2 and 3 were read through numerous times before any action was taken; for an excerpt from an original transcript see appendix 9. In order to focus on the meaning of what is said rather than an analysis of the conversation, Smith et al (2009) suggests that it is acceptable to 'organise' the

transcripts. To organise the transcripts I removed any repetition in conversations and filler words such as 'ums and ahs'; for an excerpt from an organised transcript see appendix 10. The activities the women had discussed became headings in the organised transcripts with excerpts of the interviews pertinent to each of the activities presented beneath these headings.

Each of the organised transcripts was re-read and units of meaning were identified and recorded alongside the text. I repeated this process to ensure all units of meaning were captured. I created a table containing a list of the units of meaning. Next to each one, I noted the names of the women who had spoken about this issue and the page number from the organised transcript (see appendix 8). This enabled me to identify which units of meanings were common to more than one woman.

Next, the original transcripts from interviews 1 and 4 were read and re-read. The units of meaning were identified. The process was repeated to ensure that all units of meaning had emerged. Some of the units of meaning were unique to interviews 1 and 4, others had also been identified in interviews 2 and 3. The table was augmented with the additional units of meaning, along with the women who had spoken about the issue and the page number from the organised transcript.

The next steps that I took enabled me to physically engage with the units of meaning. This was achieved by cutting up a list of all of the units of meaning so that they could easily be moved around, grouped and regrouped. Using a temporary adhesive I secured each of the units of meaning onto wall charts, gradually placing together those which appeared to be referring to similar issues. At times I found it challenging to recall the context in which the women had discussed issues and so I returned to the original transcripts to ascertain that I had allocated them to the correct groups. This process of grouping and regrouping occurred over a period of approximately 4 weeks.

The grouped units of meaning were attributed a theme name by the researcher (see appendix 13). When defining the themes it was necessary to return to the original transcripts on several occasions to ensure that the theme was truly representing the original discussions that had occurred. Due to my personal and professional motivation to complete this study I needed to be mindful of the pre-understandings that I brought to the analysis of my findings. I worked hard to be as objective as possible and open to capturing the findings that were unexpected or which challenged my pre-understandings.

The photographs taken by the women were not analysed by the researcher.

The women who engaged in my study did not have the opportunity to contribute to the analysis of the findings, including the approval of the process followed or of the conclusions drawn. This challenges the feminist approach to methodology that influences this study, where the suggestion is that women should be engaged in all stages of the research process (e.g. Hammersley 1993). Restrictions imposed by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee prevented the involvement of the women in the analysis of the findings due in part to concerns about the ability to maintain the confidentiality of the women.

3.12 Concluding remarks: methods

In this chapter I have identified the philosophical and methodological approaches that have informed this study. I have explored research methods that were discounted and those that were used. I have described the processes that I intended to follow and the process of implementation which occurred. Finally I have defined the process that I followed to analyse the findings gathered.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the research. It will summarise how the research process happened, present the final sample of 11 women, and present the key themes that emerged from the findings. In order to remain true to the feminist approach to methodology the voices and photographs taken by the women, will be central to the findings presented.

4.1 The Research Process

Once the women were recruited to the study, I negotiated a date and time (see appendix 14) to visit each of the women in their own home; this environment was chosen because it was the context with which the study was concerned. The exact places within the home were selected by the women themselves and included the kitchen table, the dining table, the lounge area and the conservatory. Interview 1 was completed during this first visit. This interview lasted between 33 and 77 minutes (See appendix 15). To inform the photo-elicitation process (phase 2 and 3), all of the women were asked to take up to 25 photographs of the activities that they completed when they were at home alone. They were asked to complete this process twice – prior to interview 2 and prior to interview 3. At the end of interview 1 a time and date were set for the researcher to return in order to collect the camera and/ or memory card; this was set by the women themselves (see appendix 14). The time taken to take photographs ranged from 7 to 14 days (see appendix 14). The number of photographs taken to inform phase 2 ranged from 14 to 32 (see appendix 16). The number of photographs taken to inform phase 3 ranged from 7 to 22 (see appendix 16). Interview 2 was completed in March – June 2015 and lasted between 29 and 82 minutes (see appendix 15). Interview 3 was completed in December – January 2016 and lasted between 16 and 66 minutes (see appendix 15). Interview 4 was completed in February – March 2016 (see appendix 15) and lasted between 32 and 84 minutes (see appendix 15).

Eleven Women

The final sample comprised eleven women aged 70-80 years who were living alone in the South East of England. They varied in the reasons which had led them to living alone and the length of time for which they had done so. All of the women were white and British. Three of the women were recruited through my ex-colleagues, two were recruited through the local Brownies, four through the Girlguiding Trefoil Guild, one from a community café, and one through a flyer which had been passed to her by others.

Each of the eleven women will now be introduced in turn. The information presented here is drawn from all four of the interviews that were completed with each of the women. I invited the women to contribute to the construction of their pen pictures however this opportunity was not taken up by any of the women. Interview 1 focused on the past and present context and experiences of the women and proved to offer the most information.

4.1.1 Natalie

Natalie is 70 years old. She was born in Buckinghamshire where she lived with her brother, mum and dad. Although Natalie cannot recall much about her own childhood, she spoke of how she had attended numerous different schools because her family moved around a lot. Natalie left school at 15 and took a job working with children. Natalie studied for and achieved her National Nursery Nurses Qualification in London before spending a year working in America at the age of 20. Natalie met and married her husband when she was in her 20s with whom she had her son and a daughter. Natalie was keen for her children to experience the stability when they were growing up that she had not and so the family only moved once, to the south east of England. Following their move south, Natalie and her husband became foster parents with one of the girls that they fostered now considered a daughter and part of the family. Natalie returned to full time employment when she was 40. Natalie's husband retired at the age of 52 years due to poor health; he was diagnosed with vascular dementia. Natalie cared for her husband for 5 years at home and commented that she had put her life on hold, this included retiring at 62 so she could dedicate her time to caring for her husband. Natalie and her husband lived together for 46 years prior to his death in 2012 at the age of 70 years; Natalie has lived on her own in their privately owned bungalow since his death. Natalie's daughters live locally however her son works away for long periods.

4.1.2 Alison

Alison is 78 years old and lives alone in a privately owned bungalow with her 2-year-old dog. Alison chooses not to speak extensively about her upbringing because it was a challenging time. She explained that she was raised in London with her nine siblings. For seven years during and after the war the family were living apart with Alison being evacuated to the Midlands; a time that Alison refers to as being 'horrible'. Alison feels that her upbringing has resulted in her being 'a very strong woman'. Following her time as an evacuee, Alison returned to the family home, moving to the south east of England when, aged 33, she married her husband. Alison did not have any children saying "...that wasn't choice, that was just one of those things". Alison had spent her working life in the clothing trade, mainly working in factories. She retired twice, first at the age of 60 but found it boring so found employment in

an alterations business. Alison finally retired at 67 because she moved out of the area. Alison has lived in her current property for 11 years; she was drawn to the area because her sister lives locally. Alison's husband had dementia, which progressed rapidly leading to his death 3 years ago; they had been married for 42 years. Since the death of her husband Alison has lived on her own.

4.1.3 Anne

Anne is 78 years old and has lived on her own for 8 years. Anne left her childhood home at 18 to start training as a nurse; she married her first husband during this time and was subsequently required to withdraw from her training because at the time married nursing students were not accepted. Anne's first husband was in the Navy, she originally moved to be near his base but when he went away for 18 months loneliness led her to returning to the area in which she was raised. Anne returned to her nurse training once she had had her first three children. Anne divorced her first husband when she was 36 years old; at the time, she had four boys. Anne remarried and had a girl. Anne's second husband retired early from the fire brigade due to injury and passed away from an unknown cause 8 years ago. Anne has lived in her current property for 50 years. Anne has children and grandchildren living locally.

4.1.4 Roberta

Roberta is 78 years old; she was born and raised in south east England. During the war, when Roberta was six or seven her father was fighting in the war, which meant that the family moved around the country for three years staying as house guests. Roberta speaks positively of her later childhood years. She went to a grammar school and lived in a large house with big gardens surrounded by a park and woodland. Roberta commented that she had been given much freedom at this time and said she had a 'lovely childhood'. On leaving school, Roberta had wanted to be a doctor or a pharmacist but she trained for six years to become a chartered accountant as instructed by her father. Roberta married at 24 and gave up office-based work opting to work at home instead. Roberta had her first child when she was 25 years old, followed by her second 18 months later; a boy and then a girl. At this point Roberta moved to the area in which she lives now. A third child, another boy, arrived seven years later. Roberta divorced her first husband and married her second husband through an entirely amicable series of events. At one point, Roberta's second husband commuted weekly to work in Germany. He passed away aged 60 years; 18 years ago. Following the death of her husband Roberta retired aged 59 years. Roberta met a new man who she moved to live with in the Midlands; he passed away 5 years ago at which point Roberta moved back to this area. Roberta has now lived on her own in her property for 5 years. Roberta has family living locally.

4.1.5 Yvonne

Yvonne is 70 years old and has lived alone for 7 years since her husband passed away from motor neurone disease. When Yvonne was growing up, she moved from Scotland to England and then spent several years in North Africa because her stepfather was in the army. When the family returned to the UK, they moved to the area where she has now lived for the past 55 years. Yvonne had a brother and a sister, a stepsister and a stepbrother. Yvonne described her childhood as having been 'fantastic'. Yvonne got married when she was 18 years old and bought her first house with her husband in 1963. Yvonne's husband was in the Merchant Navy for 28 years and therefore spent long periods at sea away from the family; these lasted from six weeks to five and a half months. Yvonne has either worked or volunteered for most of her adult life, feeling as though she has equally divided her time between career, children and home. Her current house is the second property that she bought with her husband; Yvonne has lived here for 35 years. Yvonne has two daughters who live locally.

4.1.6 Taylor

Taylor is 73 years old and has lived in the same area all of her life, including during the war years. Taylor had worked for just four years in her lifetime, as her husband had wanted her to stay at home once they were married; this was not what Taylor had wanted to do. She and her husband had a son and daughter. Taylor developed a hearing impairment later in life and wears implants to provide her with some hearing, although she also depends on lip reading to communicate with others. Taylor lives in a privately owned house where she had lived for 46 years. Taylor and her husband were married for 37 years before he passed away 15 years ago. Taylor is now living on her own for the first time in her life. Taylor has two younger brothers who have also lived locally all of their life. Her daughter lives nearby with her son a little further afield.

4.1.7 Lottie

Lottie is 80 years old. She was born and raised in London during the war years, living in rented rooms with her parents. Lottie married in 1959 when she was 24 years old; she and her husband stayed in London for 3 years after they got married before moving to south east England. They had two children, and whilst they were small, she worked in a supermarket though only for a very small number of hours. Lottie returned to work part time once both children were at school (aged 7 and 11). Lottie has lived in her current property for 40 years. She has lived on her own for 9 years since her husband passed away; this is the first time that Lottie had lived on her own. Lottie's son lives locally and her daughter approximately 2 hours away.

4.1.8 Hope

Hope is 79 years old. Hope grew up in London and Surrey. She married at the age of 21 and moved to south east England because of her husband's work; a move that she regrets. They had three children, the first of which she had when she was 22 years of age; at this point Hope gave up work for a period of 15 years. In 1973 Hope divorced her husband, having been on her own with the children since 1971. Once the children were all at school, Hope took a job at a local college where she did office work until she opted to retire at 70 years of age. Hope has lived in the same property for 32 years and has lived on her own for 35 years. Now grown up, two of her children live relatively nearby and one lives a long distance from Hope.

4.1.9 Ordelia

Ordelia is 72 years old. She was born and raised on the south coast, moving to London to train to become a physiotherapist. Ordelia says that when she was younger she felt like an outsider both in her family and with her peers. Whilst in London Ordelia lived in numerous properties, all of which were in poor condition. Ordelia married at the age of 25 years, although her husband spent much of his time working at sea which resulted in him being away from home for long periods. They had two sons, their first when she was 27 and the second when she was 31. Once their children were older Ordelia pursued a career change into education, from which she retired at the age of 56 years. Ordelia stated that she had moved around a lot in her life but has lived alone in her current property for 16 years, since her husband had passed away. Ordelia said that she is currently experiencing the best time of her life in terms of her overall wellbeing. One of her sons lives relatively locally with his own family and the other in the north of England.

4.1.10 Olive

Olive is 74 years old. Olive got married when she was 21 years old and had two children. She had first trained as a nurse and then changed career to become a teacher. On completion of her teacher training, aged 34, Olive became divorced from her husband. She moved from the Midlands to the south east of England with her young children. Olive spent 8 years at home with her children. Olive has lived in her current property, which is a privately rented ground floor flat for 5 years. Olive explained that she has moved between properties frequently during her life. Both of Olive's children and their families live locally to her.

4.1.11 Rebecca

Rebecca is 77 years old. As a child, Rebecca moved around the UK frequently because her father was in the RAF, although they settled in the south east whilst Rebecca was at primary school. Rebecca left school at 16; she would have liked to have trained to become a teacher or

nurse but the family could not afford for her to do this. Rebecca married just before she turned 21 and subsequently left work to have her two daughters who were born in the 1960's. She returned to work when her youngest was old enough to attend nursery. Rebecca and her own family made several further moves around the country before settling back in the south east of England. Rebecca worked until she was 71 years old although had reduced her hours to two full days a week. Rebecca has lived in her property for 31 years having previously shared it with her husband and one of their daughters. She has lived on her own for almost 10 years since her husband passed away.

The Themes

The units of meaning identified in the transcripts of the interviews were grouped into sub themes; these sub themes were subsequently grouped and allocated a theme. Seven themes were identified;

1. Ageing as a lived experience for older women
2. The loss of a loved one
3. The desire to challenge the misconceptions about them as older women
4. Unique experiences of women in this generation
5. Later life as a time of self-growth
6. The environment of home and living alone
7. Using photo-elicitation from the perspective of the women

Each will now be presented and illustrated by the voices of the women and the photographs that they took.

4.2 Ageing as a lived experience for older women

4.2.1 Personal experience of the ageing process

Seven of the eleven women in this study described their personal experience of the ageing process. Lottie was the only woman that commented on the physical changes that she could see in herself as she had aged. She reflected on how she had looked when she was younger, “... a nice fat face, a nice fat body which I wish I'd got now instead of all this bony skinny, I hate being bony skinny, hate it, hate it, hate it. No boobs (laughs) I had boobs in those days (laughs) ...” (Lottie Interview 1).



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Hope, Rebecca and Natalie acknowledged that their energy levels had declined as they had grown older. Hope commented, “I’m trying to pace myself now because I can’t do what I used to do” (Hope Interview 2). She took a photograph of gardening (figure 2) and commented that she found it quite tiring. Rebecca took a photograph of her slow cooker (figure 3) and explained that she would use this when she knew she would return home tired. When she had been out all day she was usually ready, “ ... for a bit of a sit down and rest for the evening. And it’s nice to know that I haven’t got to do a lot of food preparation ... ” (Rebecca Interview 2). Natalie explained, “ ... as you get older you haven't got the energy [pause] to do things ... ” (Natalie Interview 4) which meant that you ended up just sitting down. This tendency to spend more time seated was also referred to by Roberta who reported that she did, “ ... tend to sit and watch telly in the afternoon, which I never used to do” (Roberta Interview 2); this

activity was captured in her photograph of watching sport on the television (figure 4). Roberta reflected on how perhaps three or four years ago she had a rule that she would not turn the television on until the 6 o'clock news was on but now, "I tend to sit down in the afternoon ... " (Roberta Interview 2). Roberta referred to being " ... conscious that I'm getting on. My reflexes aren't as good; my eyesight isn't as good ... " (Roberta Interview 3).

Ordelia spoke specifically of how her personal experience of the ageing process had consequences for her cognitive processes. Ordelia observed that her memory had declined over the last 10 years.

4.2.2 Ageing and engagement in activities

Hope, Taylor and Roberta described their experience of age related changes by explaining how they affected their engagement in specific activities. Hope spoke of how she had her twin granddaughters visit her at home once a week. Whilst she enjoyed having them around, she said that they were exhausting! Hope explained that she looked after them at times although, " ... I don't like them to be here too long just me on my own. Not at, not at my age mind you. Anything could happen" (Hope Interview 2).

At the time of interview 2, Taylor was looking after her daughter's dog. She commented, " ... I keep thinking I'll have a dog for company and get me walking but I don't know. My ankles are already playing up and it's only two days" (Taylor Interview 2).

Roberta explained that she was now reluctant to travel because, "I'm not desperately mobile anymore. It's counting in luggage and sorting it all out. I don't have the self-confidence I used to have" (Roberta Interview 1). Roberta explained that this decline in self-confidence also meant that she would not drive to places she had not been to before. Roberta had decided it was, " ... time to slow down a bit" (Roberta Interview 3).



Figure 5

Roberta took a photograph of mowing the grass (Figure 5) and explained that in the past she would not have thought twice about doing some gardening but earlier that week she reflected that she had done a bit more than she should have done, “ ... and for three days I could not move” (Roberta Interview 2). By the time of interview 3 Roberta had employed a gardener because, “Getting down on the knees, and it’s the back and I really, really can’t do it” (Roberta Interview 3).



Figure 6

Roberta took a photograph that captured the activity of having a shower (figure 6) and explained that she had a shower because, “ ... I can no longer manage to get out of the bath very well” (Roberta Interview 2).



Figure 7

Roberta took a photograph whilst she was getting dressed (fig) and explained that the, “ ... biggest difficulty is getting my socks on” (Roberta Interview 2).

When discussing experiencing the effects of natural ageing Roberta explained, “ ... you have to realise you can't get up and change the light bulb (laughs)” (Roberta Interview 4). When I picked up the camera before Interview 2, I was asked to help Roberta turn her mattress.

Roberta was keen to make a distinction between ageing and (poor) health. She explained, “I don't have any problems now, apart from the fact that my legs don't work very well, odd aches and pains, but other than that, I'm hale and hearty” (Roberta Interview 1). Roberta made a distinction between her physical and mental abilities, “ ... physical limitations (laughs). Mentally, it's there, but physically...” (Roberta Interview 4). Although Roberta explained that she liked to watch University Challenge on the television and took pride in the fact that she could answer about a third of the questions but was aware that she was unable to match their ‘speed of recall’. Hope mirrored this experience; she said that she enjoyed quiz shows and knew the answer but could not get it to her tongue.

4.2.3 Personal health

Anne, Hope, Taylor and Roberta spoke positively of their current level of personal health. For example, Roberta saw herself as being, “ ... blessed with extremely good health” (Roberta Interview 1).

Hope, Lottie and Olive all referred to feeling lucky when it came to their personal health, even though they all had medical conditions. Hope commented, “ ... I've been very lucky health-wise ... ” (Hope Interview 1). She added, “ ... if you're not healthy, there's a lot of things you can't, can't do” (Hope Interview 1). “When I think of people 10 years younger than me on sticks and frames, I think myself really lucky” (Hope Interview 1). Lottie felt that she was, “Very lucky. Because I’m not physically disabled in any way. Very lucky about that” (Lottie Interview 3). Olive was annoyed with herself because the health conditions that she had resulted from her smoking. Although she added that she was, “ ... thankful for the things I haven't had” (Olive Interview 1), citing arthritis as an example.

Hope explained, “ ... the big thing is how healthy you are ... in old age. That's the key” (Hope Interview 4). Thoughts that were echoed by Roberta who added, “You know, if you are a person that has had a lot of problems, or you've got a chronic ailment of some kind, it must colour your whole existence [pause] through pain, or if you are incapacitated” (Roberta Interview 1).

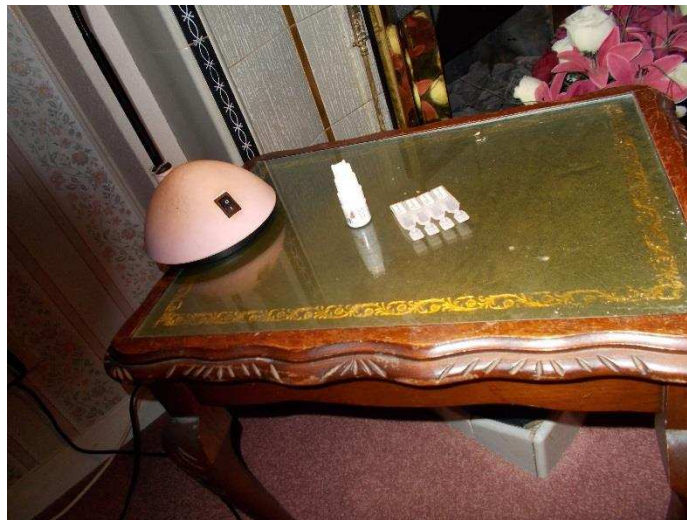


Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

For the duration of this study, Lottie and Taylor were both experiencing personal health issues with their eyes. Lottie took a photograph of her eye drops (Figure 8) and explained that she had glaucoma and had to use eye drops which she described as the, “ ... bane of my life morning, noon and night” (Lottie Interview 2). Lottie also took two photographs of her morning vitamins that she took daily (Figure 9 and Figure 10) although commented, “I don’t know why I take them ... ” (Lottie Interview 3). Taylor spoke of having developed cataract in both eyes in recent years.

High blood pressure was another condition that affected several of the women in this study. Rebecca took a photograph of using the computer (not shown here to protect anonymity) and explained that she was e-mailing her GP with her blood pressure readings to facilitate her medication management. High blood pressure was the only health issue that Rebecca had.



Figure 11

Natalie took a photograph of the medication that she had to take to ensure her personal health (Figure 11) and commented that she had had enough of tablets, but was also aware of the consequences of not taking her medication. Olive explained that her medication regime influences how her morning progresses and the reason she gives for watching the television in the morning.

There were other health conditions that some of the women referred to which were not common across the group. Taylor had experienced hearing loss about 20 years previously and consequently wore implants. Following the death of her husband, Ordalia sought help for depression, which, on reflection, she believed she had experienced for much of her adult life. Ordalia had been taking antidepressants ever since. Ordalia had also had a trans ischaemic attack and a myocardial infarct in the past.

4.2.4 Making changes for their health

It was apparent from the photographs and discussions that the maintenance of the women's personal health was not just addressed through medical management but through other changes they made. The changes emerged because of a health warning, in response to a diagnosis, or because they were considered a means of prevention.



Figure 12

Alison, Yvonne, and Olive explained how they had made changes to their diets. For Alison and Yvonne (Figure 12) this was achieved by joining Weight Watchers. Alison had emphysema and found that losing weight had helped her breathing. Yvonne had been a member of the organisation for many years. Olive had changed her diet for the good of her health and explained that she had been following a, “ ... new diet that I've been doing, um, to get my blood pressure down” (Olive Interview 4). She added, “I've been quite good” (Olive Interview 4).

4.2.5 Relaxation to support health and wellbeing



Figure 13



Figure 14

Ten of the women in the study referred to relaxation. Whilst they did not explicitly cite relaxation as informing their health and wellbeing, the frequency at which it was mentioned and the way in which they spoke about it suggested this was the case. The women engaged in a range of activities to promote relaxation. For Alison relaxation came in the form of reading the newspaper on a Saturday morning. Hope (Figure 13) and Yvonne (Figure 14) both spoke of watching television to relax.

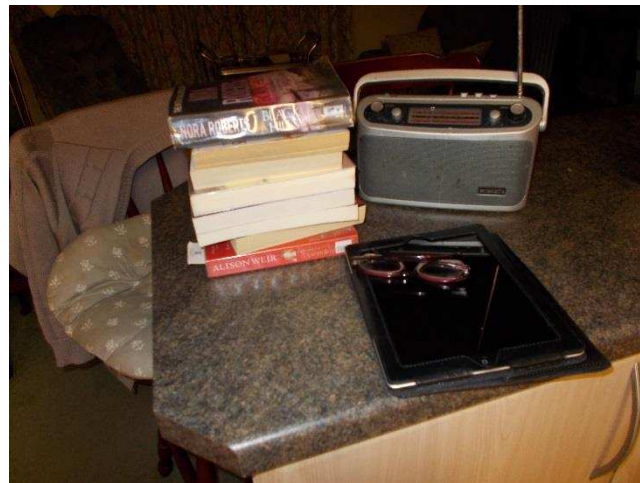


Figure 15

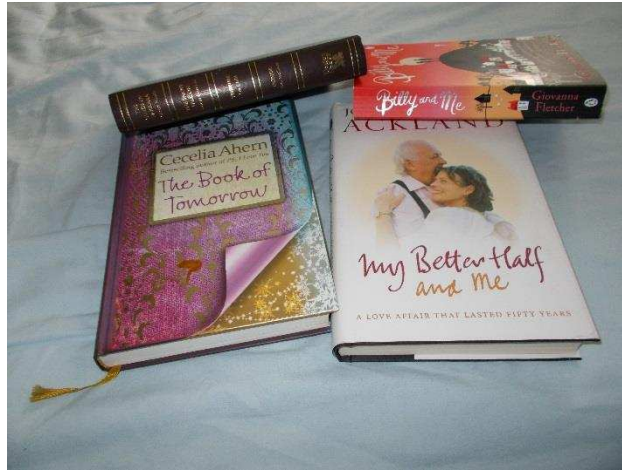


Figure 16

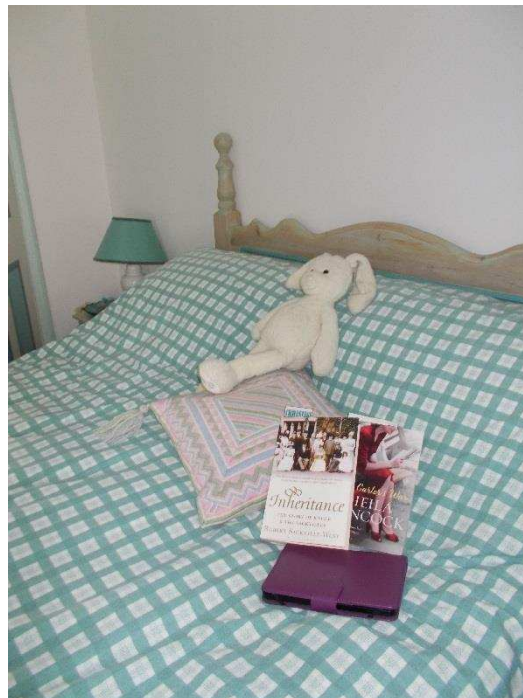


Figure 17

Lottie, Yvonne and Rebecca referred to reading as being an activity that they engaged in to relax. Lottie took a photograph of a pile of books (Figure 15) that she had gathered to read over the Christmas period and commented, “ ... the majority of them were um easy read. I thought, “I don’t want anything too stimulating” (Lottie Interview 3). For Yvonne (Figure 16) and Rebecca (Figure 17) reading helped them to relax, ‘unwind’ and get to sleep.



Figure 18



Figure 19

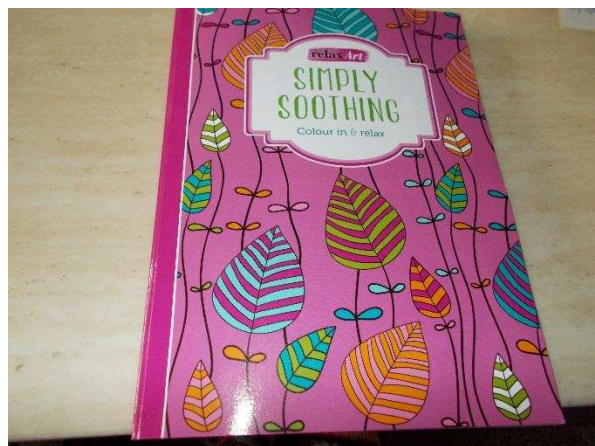


Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

Relaxation was not just about preparing the mind and body for sleep, as indicated by Natalie, Olive and Ordella. Natalie took three photographs of her 'artwork' (Figure 18, Figure 19, and Figure 20) and explained, " ... I've always liked colouring, but it's so, so relaxing ... " (Natalie Interview 3). In her photograph of the fridge (Figure 21) Olive also captured her ironing board; Olive said she found, " ... ironing quite relaxing" (Olive Interview 2). Ordella took a photograph of taking a bath (Figure 22) and explained that occasionally she would, " ... have a deeper bath and just lean back and relax [pause] so that's me relaxing" (Ordella Interview 2). Taylor took a photograph that captured doing jigsaw puzzles (Figure 23) which she described as being relaxing.

For Hope and Ordella relaxation was more than just engaging in particular activities. Hope explained, "I like having a day at home" (Hope Interview 4) because it means, " ... your brain is more relaxed ... " (Hope Interview 4). For Ordella, having a day at home was more likely to occur in the winter. During these days she said that she might have a lie down for an hour in the afternoon and that she did, " ... often just chill out" (Ordella Interview 3) which she agreed was just as valuable as doing.

4.2.6 Poor personal health and engagement in activities

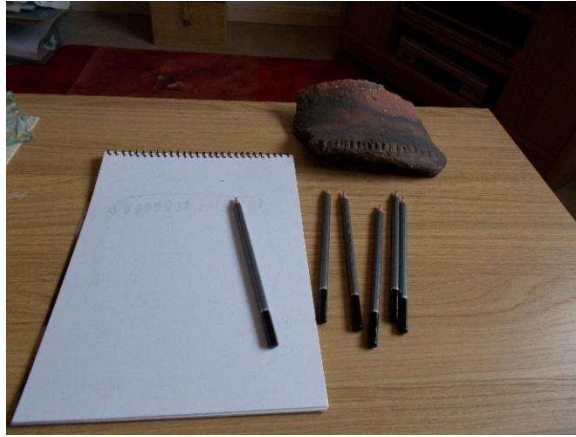


Figure 24

Ten of the women in this study referred to the way in which their personal health had influenced their engagement in activities. When Olive spoke about her photograph that captured drawing (Figure 24) she commented that she felt her ability had declined since she had her stroke.



Figure 25

Alison took a photograph of cutting the grass (Figure 25) and explained that she loved gardening but that her, “ ... breathing stops me from doing a lot” (Alison Interview 2). By the time of Interview 4, Alison had developed several other health issues which meant that she was taking medication and explained , “ ... I'm taking these pills, I'm always so tired” (Alison Interview 4). Alison spoke of her frustration at not being able to maintain her garden and said, “I look at the garden, and think I should do something, but I just can't do it at the moment” (Alison Interview 4).



Figure 26



Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29

Hope, Lottie, and Taylor all referred to how the personal health issues affecting their eyes influenced their engagement in activities. Hope took a photograph of her glasses (Figure 26), Hope did not feel that her sight was having an impact on her engagement in activities although did comment, “I did uh see an optician about my um night driving [pause] and she said I was just about legal for that” (Hope Interview 3). Lottie also spoke of the issues that she had with her eye health when she took a photograph which captured reading (Figure 27). Lottie read a lot and explained, “ ... at one time I was feeling I wouldn’t be able to read ... that would have been horrible” (Lottie Interview 2). When talking about making Christmas cards (Figure 28),

Taylor explained that a recent cataract operation and the wait for her second one to be done was affecting her ability to complete this activity.

Taylor's eyesight was also a point of discussion when exploring her photograph of present wrapping (Figure 29) as she was debating whether she could drive to her son's for Christmas. At the time of Interview 4 Taylor was still waiting for her second cataract operation and she explained, "The card making, at the moment you see I'm limited, still haven't had the appointment for the other eye so close work is a bit limiting. Even jigsaw puzzles and even the computer. I've got to have the computer at the right angle and the glasses at the right angle, so I'm a bit limited" (Taylor Interview 4).



Figure 30



Figure 31

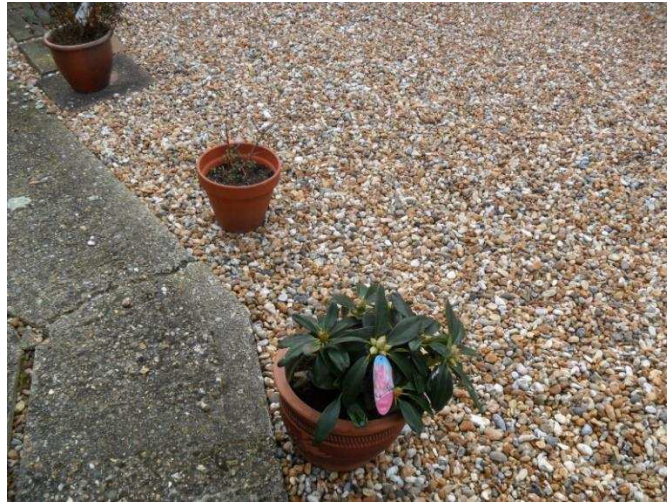


Figure 32

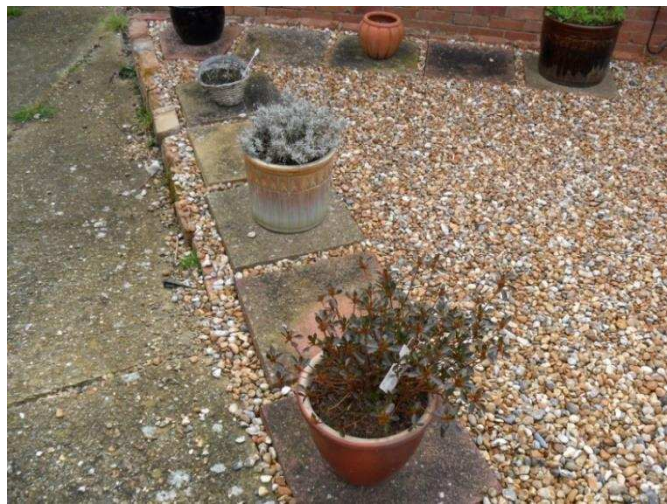


Figure 33



Figure 34

When Natalie discussed her photograph of knitting (Figure 30), she commented that her, “ ... arthritis is playing up” (Natalie Interview 2) which was affecting her ability to knit. Natalie explained, “ ... my joints are really playing up now” Natalie Interview 1). Natalie took 4 photographs of gardening (Figure 31, Figure 32, Figure 33, and Figure 34) and explained that she did not, “ ... do an awful lot in the garden at the moment” (Natalie Interview 2) due to her ongoing personal health issues.

For Ordelia a mild heart attack meant that her, “ ... son and daughter in law just decided not to expect me to do regular, you know, child care” (Ordelia Interview 1).



Figure 35



Figure 36

Taylor had a hearing impairment that affected her engagement in activities. Taylor was hearing impaired prior to her husband dying but explained that her hearing had declined further and commented, “ ... that cut me off ... ” (Taylor Interview 4). Taylor stated that the issues with her hearing, “ ... restricts what you can do” (Taylor Interview 3). She particularly spoke of activities that she struggled to engage in outside of the home, such as Church, Girlguiding, and group exercise classes.

Taylor took a photograph which captured the activity of reading the newspaper (Figure 35). She explained that she liked to read the newspaper because her poor hearing meant that she gets, “ ... much more from the newspaper” (Taylor Interview 2) as opposed to watching the television.

Taylor took a photograph which captured listening to music (Figure 36). Regardless of her hearing impairment Taylor explained, “If it’s popular music, like Christmas music, I can hear it, and I can understand it [pause] yeah but other times I can’t tell what’s being played or not [pause]it’s just music” (Taylor Interview 3). Taylor said that she did not listen to the radio because she could not hear what they were saying, she added, “I would like to listen to the Radio (local), because you get quite a bit of news on there [pause] but I can’t understand it” (Taylor Interview 3).



Figure 37

The majority of the personal health issues that affected the women’s engagement in activities were physical in nature. However, Yvonne referred to the influence of mental health issues. Yvonne took two photographs (which were exactly the same image) of chopping down a plant

or tree (Figure 37). She explained that she had a gardener to do the lawns for her, an arrangement that started when her husband was in the hospice but had continued because if Yvonne was, “ ... having an off time, then the garden’s always tidy” (Yvonne Interview 2).

4.2.7 Less likely to take risks

The personal health challenges and age related changes resulted in the women being less likely to take risks to complete activities. Anne, Ordelia, Natalie, Rebecca, Roberta and Hope all referred to being aware of a decline in their abilities as they had grown older with this translating into them being less likely to take risks. Anne and Ordelia both referred to it being silly to take undue risks, particularly in relation to DIY tasks that needed doing in the home. As stated by Anne, “ ... I could but I don't think I'd better” (Anne Interview 1).



Figure 38

Roberta took a photograph that captured the activity of hoovering (Figure 38) and explained that her hoover was heavy which proved difficult in moving it between the floors in her home. She reflected on how this activity had changed, “ ... once upon a time you wouldn’t think twice about it [pause] but now I’m very wary coming up and down the stairs with it” (Roberta Interview 2).

Natalie spoke animatedly about the consequences of taking risks in later life. Natalie referred to the need to be ‘extra careful’ and stated that she thought many other women thought the same, “ ... cause they’re frightened of of an accident and who’s gonna come get them?” (Natalie Interview 2). A sentiment echoed by Rebecca who stated that, “ ... you’ve got to look after yourself” (Rebecca Interview 3). Hope thought that one had to use common sense although described times, such as climbing a ladder, when she would take risks,

4.3 Addressing the barriers to engagement in activities

Whether the barriers to their participation in activities was as a result of the natural ageing process or personal health issues, the women all spoke of how they had addressed the barriers that they had faced. This was often in a positive way or with a degree of acceptance that that was the way things were for them now.

4.3.1 Adapting activities

All 11 women described ways in which they had adapted their activities to ensure they could continue to do them. When faced with challenges the women needed to problem solve in order to identify the most appropriate solution. For Roberta having to problem solve was considered to be, “ ... part of the fun” (Roberta Interview 4). She cited the example of no longer being able to drive long distances, “ ... so I'll get on a coach and go see my son” (Roberta Interview 4).



Figure 39

For Alison and Anne, the tools that they now used enabled them to continue their engagement in specific activities. Alison cleaned the inside of her windows when she was fit to do so, using a gadget that she had bought to make it easier for her to do. Anne took a photograph that captured cutting the grass (Figure 39) and explained that she had recently bought a new lawn mower which had a battery. Prior to this, she had a petrol lawnmower but found that she was not tough enough to pull the ‘thing’ (starter cord).



Figure 40

For Hope changing the technique used to complete certain activities was the solution. Hope took a photograph of homemade marmalade (Figure 40), she commented, “ ... don’t be too impressed because I make it um from um the tin you know [pause] the prepared oranges” (Hope Interview 2). Hope explained that she used these oranges as she had a weak thumb that made it difficult to do all the cutting.



Figure 41



Figure 42



Figure 43



Figure 44



Figure 45



Figure 46

For Hope and Natalie the key to adapting activities was to pace themselves. Hope explained, “Well, what I do now, I think well, I’ll do certain things like, I wouldn’t, well perhaps I might do, clean downstairs and upstairs on one day, but I wouldn’t do the garden as well” (Hope Interview 4). When discussing her four photographs of gardening (Figure 41, Figure 42, Figure 43, and Figure 44) and two photographs of cleaning (Figure 45 and Figure 46), Natalie explained that she would take the time she needed to ensure she did not suffer as a result.



Figure 47

Ordelia described how she used physical prompts to address the decline she had observed in her memory. Ordelia took a photograph of the outside of her fridge (Figure 47) which was where she kept her calendar and displayed items which reminded her of events to come. Of her calendar, Ordelia said, “ ... I wouldn’t be without it” (Ordelia Interview 2). Ordelia felt that the calendar was more important now because she did not work; she explained that work would have previously provided structure to her day and helped her to remember where she needed to be.



Figure 48

Taylor took a photograph of her television (Figure 48) and explained, “It’s on subtitles the whole time”, (Taylor Interview 3) due to her hearing impairment. Taylor also adapted the

environment to allow her to continue to engage in the activity of sewn cards to address the ongoing issues she had with her eyes and sight. She explained, “ ... I find I have to do it when the lights on [pause] it’s like reading the paper this morning. I don’t pull the curtains, I put the light on (laugh) because I can’t, I can’t see with [pause] the lights not strong enough” (Taylor Interview 3).

4.3.2 Support from others

Nine of the women in this study referred to having received or requiring support from others to complete activities in their home. Alison invited the researcher to, “Come and have a look at my kitchen” (Alison Interview 1) as her friend’s husband had recently renewed it. Alison reflected on how she could no longer do her decorating and explained, “ ... so the fella who done my kitchen, I said, ‘ ... when I go away, will you do my living room up?’ ... ” (Alison Interview 1). The decorating also proved challenging for Rebecca who spoke of her plans to redecorate the lounge, although she would be paying someone to come and do this for her. Rebecca explained, “ ... of course, with [husband] being a painter and decorator, I never had to do it, you see” (Rebecca Interview 1). Later in the study, Rebecca explained that whilst preparing for the decorating to commence, “ ... I’ve had to ask for help. One or two people to help me get rid of stuff” (Rebecca Interview 4). Rebecca commented; “ ... if you're not well, people are very caring and everything” (Rebecca Interview 4).



Figure 49



Figure 50

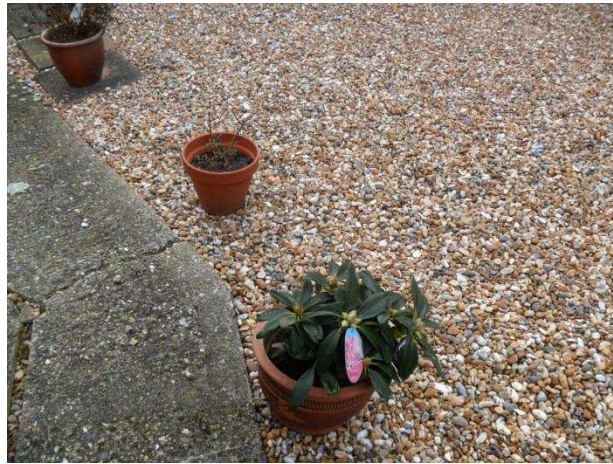


Figure 51

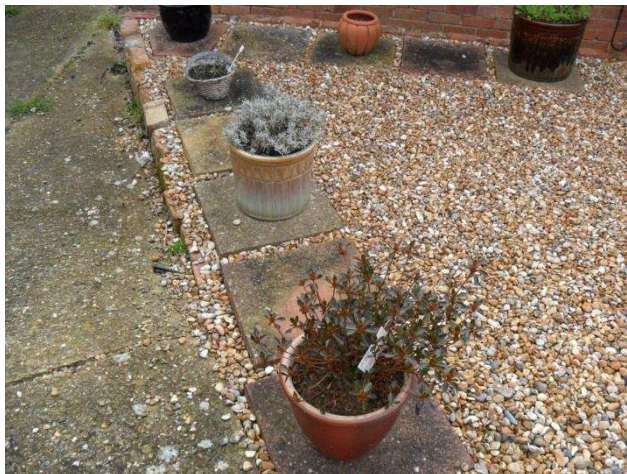


Figure 52



Figure 53



Figure 54



Figure 55



Figure 56

The women commonly cited gardening as an activity with which they had sought support for from others. Alison took a photograph of cutting the grass (Figure 49) and explained that she would usually do all of her gardening, however, at the time of interview 4, Alison was experiencing some health issues that were affecting her ability to complete all of the activities that she would normally do. She explained, “My niece's husband said he'd come around and cut the grass for me, because it gets so long and it's so hard ... ” (Alison Interview 4). Natalie explained that her neighbour, “ ... mows me lawn [pause] 'cause I cannot do it, I've got uh, my joints are really playing up now ... ” (Natalie Interview 1). This influenced her ability to maintain her garden (Figure 50, Figure 51, Figure52, and Figure 53). This situation frustrated

her but she counted herself lucky because she had help from a friend of her daughter and they did the garden together.

Rebecca took a photograph of gardening tools (Figure 54) and explained, “The only thing I don’t do is I can’t cut the beech hedge [pause] it’s far too [pause] it’s quite erm a woody one and you need a strong one of these ... ” (Rebecca Interview 2) so she employed someone to do this for her. Hope cited a similar problem when she discussed her photograph of some parsley (Figure 55); Hope had a large hedge at the end of her back garden and paid someone to cut this for her. Yvonne took a photograph of chopping down a plant/ tree (Figure 56) and explained that when her hubby went into the hospice they had a man to cut the lawns and now Yvonne has a woman to do it for her.



Figure 57



Figure 58

The support received from others did not only centre on them completing the activity for the women. Alison and Olive spoke of how the support they received from others was to enable them to learn a new skill. They made particular reference to having support from others to use technology. During the study Alison bought herself a tablet which she photographed (Figure 57). Alison did not know how to use it before she bought it and sought help from

friends and myself. Olive took a photograph that captured using the computer (Figure 58). Olive explained that she used her computer for games, banking, emails and ordering prescriptions although she did not completely agree when I suggested that she was very computer literate and pointed out that she had the ongoing support of a 'computer buddy'.



Figure 59



Figure 60

Natalie, Taylor, Olive, Hope, and Anne cited maintaining the home environment as an area with which they sought support from others. Natalie explained, " ... there's little jobs that I need do. Although I must admit I have got a neighbour two doors down, a young couple, he comes in and they'll put like a toilet seat, a new toilet seat on, and he'll do things" (Natalie Interview 1). Natalie took two photographs that captured dismantling a chair that was to be replaced with a new table and set of chairs (Figure 59 and Figure 60). Whilst she was comfortable with dismantling the old furniture she did not feel the same way about building the new items due to there being too many bits and pieces; she referred to it as a 'man's job'.

Natalie referred to several friends that she approached for help as she needed and explained, "I go to them people because they know what they're doing" (Natalie Interview 4). Natalie spoke of calling on a male friend from church when her lights stopped working. She thought it was the fuse but did not feel able to fix it herself. Her friend was more than happy to help. Natalie explained that different people have different skills and knowledge. For Taylor the skills and knowledge that a person had were seen to link to their gender. Taylor spoke of her desire to, "... have a man around to do small jobs" (Taylor Interview 4). She cited the following example, "... it's like my taps need resetting, I've got to go find a plumber, I've never had to find tradesmen because [husband] did most of it and I'm not very good at talking to people like that because I don't understand what they're doing, this is what I find difficult" (Taylor Interview 4). Taylor added, "... I don't have the skills to do those, most things I can do but I don't have the skills to do that" (Taylor Interview 4). Taylor referred to these being, "Things that are men jobs" (Taylor Interview 4).

Olive reflected on her decision to sell her previous property and rent her current property, she commented, "I think I, maybe I feel a bit, I feel a little bit more secure actually renting, because if anything goes wrong, I can phone the landlord" (Olive Interview 1).

Anne spoke of a problem she had been having with her boiler and how she had got a man in to sort it out for her; it turned out that she had not done something correctly. Anne explained how she had tried to resolve the issue herself, "I look in all the boiler books. I couldn't find out. There was no instructions [pause] There was no instructions even on the boiler" (Anne Interview 3). Anne asked that the man put a sticker on the boiler for future reference so she could solve the problem herself should it arise again. Anne agreed that she found having to get people in to help her frustrating. I commented, "I get the impression you're very independent, kind of get on with things" to which Anne responded, "Everybody says that. Yeah" (Anne Interview 3).



Figure 61

For Lottie having support from others to complete activities in the home was not because she could not do them herself but because she did not want to do them. She explained, “I mean, it's only recently I've had somebody, and as soon as I said to my son, ‘Oh, I've got a cleaner now’. ‘About time’” (Lottie Interview 4). Lottie took a photograph that captured cleaning (Figure 61) and explained that she had had a cleaner for about four or five months and that she also has a gardener. She said, “ ... it's simply nothing to do with ability, it's just that I hate going out there and doing it [pause] and the same with the cleaner really [pause] My Hoover [pause] packed up and uh I thought it was a good opportunity not to have to do it anymore ... ” (Lottie Interview 2).

For Natalie, the support that she received from others was beyond having help to complete activities. Natalie spoke about who listened to her when she needed to talk to someone, “My friend round the corner” (Natalie Interview 4). She added, “She is fantastic. I mean, we're there for one ... And she says to me, though, ‘we're there for one another ... ’” (Natalie Interview 4). Natalie cited an example of the support provided by her friend, “ ... as we went into church, she said, ‘Do you want to come in to pray?’ because we've got a little chapel, I said, ‘Yes please’. I said ‘I was going to go in on my own’ [pause] She said, ‘No, come on, we'll go in together’ [pause] and we both prayed, and, uh, she's always there for me” (Natalie Interview 4).

4.3.3 The best person to provide the support required

Anne, Hope, Lottie and Natalie spoke of their reluctance to ask their family to help with activities that they required support from others to complete. Anne explained that her children looked after the jobs that revolved around plumbing or the car as these reflected the work they did. However, there were some tasks that Anne did not ask her children to help

with and cited the following example, “But I would like somebody [pause] that side of my house needs painting on the outside, because it takes all of the weather. I won’t ask any of them I’ll get somebody in” (Anne Interview 2). Even though her children would come around if needed, Anne did not like to ask them to help her. Hope would not ask her son to help because he was busy with work and things. Lottie told of how she and her friend agreed that they, “Would rather pay somebody to come in and do it than ask either your son or daughter” (Lottie Interview 2). Natalie was keen to learn how to use a feature on her computer but commented that she would probably not ask her son to help because it took her a while to learn new skills and, “He gets really agitated with me” (Natalie Interview 4).

Finding the right person to support the women with activities in the home presented challenges, from concern about the cost, to ensuring the person employed had the right skills for the job. Anne was concerned by, “What they are going to charge” (Anne Interview 1), although she did not feel vulnerable to being overcharged. Hope spoke of how she tried to alleviate the concern about cost by using people that were recommended by others.



Figure 62

For Taylor and Roberta the challenge of finding the right person for the job related to making sure that the person employed had the correct skills. Taylor spoke specifically of wanting someone to help her with her family history; she explained, “ ... I really want to find someone who can help me write it up properly” (Taylor Interview 4). During this study, Roberta had started to employ a gardener, she explained, “Well, I’ve had odd people who’ve come in and done a bit of a clearance job [pause] every now and again. And, but it’s only been in the last few months [pause] I suppose that I’ve had someone come on a permanent basis” (Roberta

Interview 3). Whilst talking about her photograph of her garden in winter (Figure 62), Roberta added that her gardener, “ ... comes about once a month” (Roberta Interview 3) although Roberta cuts the grass herself. Roberta explained how it had been challenging to find the right person. She valued that her gardener knew what she was doing and aired her frustration at having to tell previous people the difference between a weed and a plant.

Natalie and Roberta had different views on asking for support from others to complete activities. Natalie was quite happy to ask for help and commented, “You've got to ask somebody”. She added, “I don't see the object of not going to somebody” (Natalie Interview 4). In contrast Roberta said, “ ... I actually don't like asking people for help” (Roberta Interview 4) although conceded, “ ... but you have to realize you can't get up and change the light bulb (laughs) (Roberta Interview 4).

4.3.4 Anticipation of the future

Anne said of her current level of health and wellbeing, “Uh, I'm quite well, yeah. I do have to take a blood pressure pill, but I'm not going to take it when I'm 80 [pause] I'm going to stop”. The researcher asked why she planned to do this to which Anne replied, “Well I don't want to get old and [pause] And you can't get out. Imagine not being able to go out. Imagine not being able to drive your car [pause] And you've got to sit in here all day, 'cause you can't get out, 'cause [pause] The pills have kept you alive so long. Nah (laugh)” (Anne Interview 3). Anne added, “It's no good being alive if you're not well, is it? [pause] It's really not, and I suppose working with old people um I thought oh dear, I don't want to end up like that” (Anne Interview 3).

Speaking generally of what her future may hold, Hope spoke of the possibility that she may become disabled and find it difficult to do things. She considered this as a time when people may very well become frustrated. Hope said she was already aware that her short-term memory was in decline and added, “At least I hope it doesn't get worse but if it does, what can you do? Nothing you can do about it is there? No good worrying about it until the time comes” (Hope Interview 2). Hope described herself as ‘a contented person’, she supported this by saying, “ ... I think some people I know, they're always looking for the next holiday, the next thing to do, the next [pause] well I can't see the point really I mean, otherwise you're never satisfied with anything are you?” (Hope Interview 2). In contrast, Rebecca said that holidays are, “ ... quite nice to look forward to ... ” (Rebecca Interview 2). At the time of interview 2 Rebecca already had three holidays planned for the year and was, “ ... planning on going to Australia to visit family. At the beginning, about February time” (Rebecca Interview

2). After she had completed this trip Rebecca commented, "I did want to go to Australia once more if I, you know, health permitting and everything" (Rebecca Interview 4).

Hope spoke of an online quiz that she had done which aimed to give an indication of when she would die, " ... I lost a bit of weight and it went up to 93 but you know, that doesn't stop you going under a bus does it?" (Hope Interview 2). Roberta also referred to not being able to anticipate the future, she stated, "You don't know what it's going to be like" (Roberta Interview 2) and later added "Well, you just have to wait and see, really, don't you?" (Roberta Interview 4). Roberta felt, " ... you can't alter it [pause] so why fret about it" (Roberta Interview 4). She added, "Now, I might have fretted about things in the past, but I suppose you learn a certain acceptance" (Roberta Interview 4). Roberta felt that this attitude probably developed when she was first on her own, "And the realization that right, my life is down to me now" (Roberta Interview 4).

Natalie had hopes of a positive future and commented, "I'm not a dodderly old lady yet, you know", (Natalie Interview 1) she added, "I might get to that stage but, God willing, I won't [pause] I will still keep my brain ... " (Natalie Interview 1). For Yvonne her future was overshadowed by an impending knee operation. I asked her how she thought she might deal with the need for extra support in the future to which she replied, "Um, I did pick up a leaflet from Age Concern the other day. Um, I really don't know. I do think about it. Um, depending on my knee, I'm sort of looking slightly in the future, a knee operation, I'll be back to square one and normal" (Yvonne Interview 4). Rebecca concluded that you cannot plan what will happen in the future, "You can only put certain things in place" (Rebecca Interview 4).

Roberta was keen not to be a burden on her family in the future. She explained, " ... I got my will in order, um, children all taken care of and that I've got, I'm so lucky, I have enough money to fund me through any kind of care [pause] that I might need and still have ... " (Roberta Interview 4). Roberta said, " ... I don't have to actually take care of the family anymore because they're all grown up and earning their own living. Um, so, yes, I think that was a time I think, 'Okay, what happens, happens'. We'll cope with it when it comes along" (Roberta Interview 4). The need to ensure funds were in place for the future, including care provision, was highlighted to Roberta when she was caring for her mother. For Roberta it was important to have financial resources, "So that I'm not going to be beholden to my children or a burden to them because that's what I don't want to happen [pause] I don't want any of them to feel they've got to look after me" (Roberta Interview 4). Roberta added, " ... I really don't want to

be a burden to any of them. They've got their lives; they've got their families" (Roberta Interview 4).

4.3.5 Considering death

When considering death, Lottie said, "I try not to think about that bit" (Lottie Interview 4) and later added, "I don't worry about dying. It will come when it comes is all I, I can say" (Lottie Interview 4). Natalie's husband died when he was 70 years of age and Natalie was approaching her 70th birthday at the time of the first interview during which she commented, "So you can see, I'm a bit concerned about making 70 (laughs)" (Natalie Interview 1).

At the time of interview 4 Natalie was experiencing some health concerns and spoke of how youngsters seemed to think, " ... that we can go on forever, but we don't. We all, we all, we all pass away. That's, that's nature" (Natalie Interview 4). Natalie added, "The circle of life, so you're born, you do everything you want to do, and then you die. And hopefully you've done whatever you want to do during your lifetime [pause] You know. If, if that's the way you, that you are. I mean, as I said, I've done quite a bit, and I've said to my friends, 'I ain't going yet. I've got too much else to do'" (Natalie Interview 4). Natalie concluded, "To be quite honest, you cannot live forever. I mean, I woul-, don't want to live forever ... " (Natalie Interview 4).

Ordelia said, " ... I don't particularly want a long(Laughs) [pause] A long exit" (Ordelia Interview 4). She added, "I say it now because I'm not in that situation, but I would consider taking my own life if I felt ... " (Ordelia Interview 4). Ordelia said, " ... there comes a time when enough is enough [pause] especially, you know, if you know that you're not going to get better" (Ordelia Interview 4). On the subject of having choice surrounding her death Ordelia said, "I'm hoping in the next few years that, um, it will become easier [pause] to be able to exit [pause] As you would a dog or an animal" (Ordelia Interview 4).

For Rebecca, Natalie and Roberta value was attributed to having things in order before their death and knowing what would happen to their children when they had gone. Rebecca spoke of how her husband had made his wishes known before his death, " ... it sounds macabre but he wanted, um, our ashes to be mixed together eventually" (Rebecca Interview 4). She explained that she had, "An idea of where I want them scattered, but if not they'll just do what they want with them, you know?" (Rebecca Interview 4). Rebecca added, " ... we had such lovely times up there" (Rebecca Interview 4). Rebecca reflected on the fact that she had not written this down and that she should. Rebecca also spoke of how, "The other thing too I was going to do. I was talking to a friend of mine over the road. We were going to, um, start to pay

into a, a funeral plan..." (Rebecca Interview 4). Roberta spoke of having everything in order " ... I got my will in order, um, children all taken care of ... " (Roberta Interview 4).

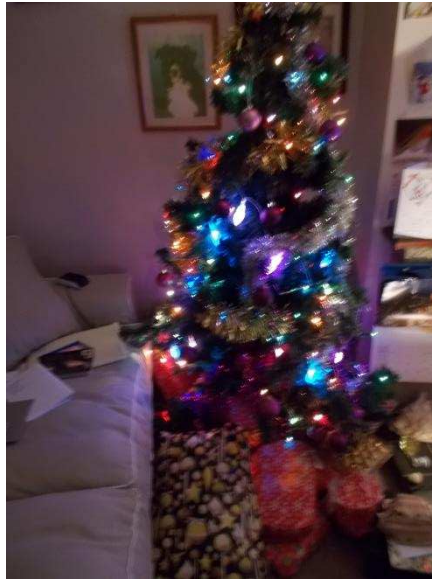


Figure 63

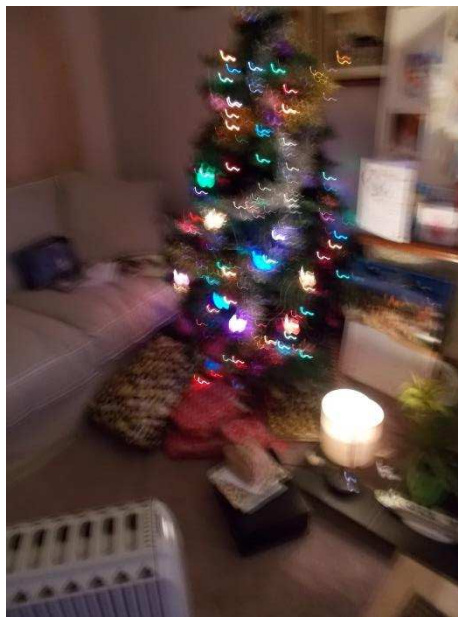


Figure 64

Natalie said, "I was talking to [daughter] about when I pass away what are we gonna, what's she gonna do, with the house, her and her brother. And it, it was really interesting, to find out what her, her views were [pause] and etcetera. Because we're all going to die so I, I just wanted to make sure that, she knew what I wanted [pause] and, and what, where was she going to go" (Natalie Interview 1). Whilst discussing her photographs of Christmas (Figure 63, Figure 64), Natalie referred to a conversation that she had recently had with her daughter.

Natalie had expressed her wishes for her own funeral to be a church service, to which her daughter responded, 'You won't be around to know'. Natalie's daughter did not want her mother to have a church service but for Natalie religion and her membership of the church was a key part of her life; the comment from her daughter had troubled her.

4.4 The Loss of a Loved One

A unique part of the experience of ageing for women is often the loss of their 'significant other'. Nine out of the eleven women involved in this study were widows, having lost their husband or partner. The amount of time since they had lost their husband or partner ranged from 3 to 17 years and commonly reflected the length of time that they had lived on their own.

4.4.1 Caring for their husband

Alison, Natalie, Rebecca and Yvonne all spoke of the caring role that they fulfilled in the time preceding the death of their husband. Alison cared for her husband who had dementia and spoke of how it limited what she was able to do, " ... because you never knew what he was going to get up to, because he used to creep out [pause] and, you know, he used to walk the streets" (Alison Interview 1). Alison agreed that the time when she was caring for her husband was stressful and commented that she had never sworn so much in her life. Alison referred to the nights being the most challenging time and, " ... the reason he went into care" (Alison Interview 1). Natalie looked after her husband, who also had dementia, for five years. Natalie said that it does, "Wear you down" (Natalie Interview 1) and that she found herself asking, " ... is it ever gonna get any better?" (Natalie Interview 1). Unlike Alison's husband, Natalie's husband did not wander; indeed one of the challenges faced by Natalie was convincing him to go out. Like Alison, Natalie found that caring for her husband impacted on what she could do and the opportunities that she had and explained, " ... I didn't do an awful lot, my life really stood still for five years" (Natalie Interview 1). Natalie recalled how after her husband had died she, "...turned round and said to myself, 'You've done enough of caring for ... it's your time'" (Natalie Interview 4).

Ordelia cared for her husband when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer; she was in her mid-fifties. Ordelia gave up work for the last three months of her husband's life to spend time with him in the cottage that they had rented on the coast, specifically for its significance to her husband's life spent at sea. Echoing the experience defined by Natalie, when Ordelia's husband had died she would often be asked what she planned to do now and she told of how she had made the decision that she was, " ... not going to be joining anything to do good or anything. This now is my time" (Ordelia Interview 1). Rebecca's husband was also diagnosed with cancer when she was 65 years old and whilst he fought it for three years and entered remission, " ... it came back and it was more aggressive, and, uh, and sadly he died in, uh, May 2006" (Rebecca Interview 1). During this time Rebecca referred to being, " ... very focused on him [pause] sort of thing, just to help him" (Rebecca Interview 1).

Yvonne's husband was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease and during interview 3; she spoke extensively about his illness. He received 24-hour care in their home and was supported by a nurse consultant, which was valued very highly. Yvonne told of numerous occasions where she had acted as an advocate for her husband but particularly emphasised what she had done to ensure he was able to return home.

Natalie, Alison and Yvonne all referred to the period between the moment of diagnosis and the death of their husband. Natalie cared for her husband who had dementia for 5 years. Natalie spoke of how her husband deteriorated rapidly in his final year. Alison saw this period of decline in her husband with dementia as serving a purpose saying that it was, " ... like that you're being prepared for when it does happen" (Alison Interview 4). For Yvonne the time from her husband's diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease through to his death was far shorter and she reflected, " ... you've got someone who was active, walked into [local hospital] and then within hours, um, was on the spiral down to [pause] uh, you know, to death really" (Yvonne Interview 4). Yvonne also spoke of her husband's desire to, " ... keep it as normal as possible" (Yvonne Interview 3). She added, " ... he was quite happy sitting there, um knowing that we were carrying on as best we could" (Yvonne Interview 3) and therefore she carried on working for as long as she could.

4.4.2 The day they lost their husband

Yvonne, Alison and Anne spoke of the day that their husband had died. Yvonne was able to recall in considerable detail the events that occurred on the day that her husband had died at home. Following his death Yvonne made an on the spot decision when speaking to the undertakers, to keep her husband at home until the next day; a decision which appeared to be a challenging idea for her family. Yvonne explained that she said to them, " ... I need to be here and we need our quiet time. Because since July or really for the whole year we've had people in and out of our lives" (Yvonne Interview 3).

Alison was not present when her husband died in his care home because she was unwell. Alison said, "I still feel guilty, you know. I didn't see him" (Alison Interview 1), she continued, "I saw him over a week later, when I had to identify the body, so you can imagine what it was like, can't you? [pause] and I had to get that picture out of my head" (Alison Interview 1).

Whilst both Yvonne and Alison had an awareness of the decline in health affecting their husband, Anne had a very different experience, as her husband was not known to be unwell. She explained, "They found him dead on the beach. No idea what happened to him" (Anne Interview 2).

4.4.3 Life after death

Roberta, Yvonne, Rebecca, Taylor, Alison and Natalie described the range of emotions and feelings that they had, and in some cases still did experience, because of losing their partner or husband. Alison had always wanted her husband to die before she did as she felt he would not have coped well on his own; she referred to having got her wish. Yvonne and her husband had not previously considered what would happen if one of them died as they had been going through life as a couple. Yvonne referred to the time following her husband's death as being, "... a hard road ..." (Yvonne Interview 3). At the time of the study Yvonne was still feeling, "... angry about it, he, the fact that he had it, you know?" (Yvonne Interview 4).

Natalie spoke of how she missed her husband and how living with someone for 46 years is going to have that effect. At the time of Interview 1, Natalie explained that she had recently had a 'bad week' as it would have been her husband's birthday.

Roberta, Rebecca, Taylor, Yvonne and Natalie all spoke of their losses as being very difficult but that they found a way to deal with it that enabled them to continue with their lives. Roberta said of losing her husband, "... I missed him dreadfully" (Roberta Interview 1). Roberta met another man after the death of her husband that she moved to live with but he had also died 5 years prior to when she took part in this study. Of losing both her husband and partner Roberta said, "They've gone, but I'm not regretting the fact, in a way, because there has been such good experiences" (Roberta Interview 1). Roberta added, "... you wish the person hadn't gone, you wish they were still here [pause] but they're not so, nothing you can do about it" (Roberta Interview 4). Roberta referred to a time when she had, "Kicked myself hard" (Roberta Interview 1), pushing herself to engage in more than the activities that she associated with being a widow, such as knitting. Roberta perceived this ability to push forward as related to her own 'inner resources' which she acknowledged not everyone had.

Rebecca stated, "... life is never the same again" (Rebecca Interview 4) but, "... it's something that you live with" (Rebecca Interview 4). Rebecca referred to the loss of her husband as being, "... something that is always sort of there" (Rebecca Interview 4), something that, "... lives beside you ..." (Rebecca Interview 4). Taylor echoed this need for a degree of acceptance; she explained that even though her husband had died 14 years previously it was still difficult and made reference to having to cope with the alternative being to 'give in'.

Yvonne spoke of her life not being, "... the life I planned" (Yvonne Interview 4) although commented, "... but I'm working through it" (Yvonne Interview 4). Yvonne referred to 'feeling low' at times and questioned, "... how low do you go? And how do you pull yourself back up?"

(Yvonne Interview 4). For Yvonne engaging in 'doing' was very much part of helping herself to deal with feeling low. Yvonne commented, " ... I don't think I've actually told anybody that I'm low. No, I think you just work it off, don't you and do, do something ... " (Yvonne Interview 4). This need to 'do' was also evident with Natalie who talked of the bad times coming and going with the need to follow a bad time with getting on with things.

The experience of missing their partner or husband was evident in all of the interviews with those who were widows, however specific reference was made to missing conversations and physical contact. Alison and Yvonne both referred to missing talking to their husbands. Alison spoke of occasionally thinking of things to tell her husband when he gets home but commented, " ... obviously you know he's not coming in. But it just goes through your brain at that time that he is coming in" (Alison 4). Yvonne explained that prior to her 'hubby' dying she would have said that they talked an average amount, however since he had gone she had realised that they actually talked a lot particularly about everyday things. Yvonne referred to not having, " ... anyone to moan at or bounce off" (Yvonne Interview 2). Her husband had had a different attitude to issues, which acted to calm her down.



Figure 65

Yvonne also referred to the absence of physical contact following the death of her husband, though had taken steps to help address this. Yvonne took a photograph which showed that she had been to have her 'feet done' (Figure 65). Yvonne commented, " ... I go for massages and things like that because I think it's important" (Yvonne Interview 3). Yvonne said that you do not experience physical contact when you are on your own and this was her way of addressing this.

Alison and Anne saw their previous experience of having their husbands working shifts or being away from home for periods as helping with their adjustment to living alone following their death. Alison explained that she was used to him not being there at night throughout his working life and that he had not long retired, “ ... I think this is what made it easier when he died” (Alison Interview 1). Similarly, Anne referred to having had a husband who was away at sea for work as making it a little easier when she found herself alone following her loss.

4.4.4 The ongoing presence of their husband

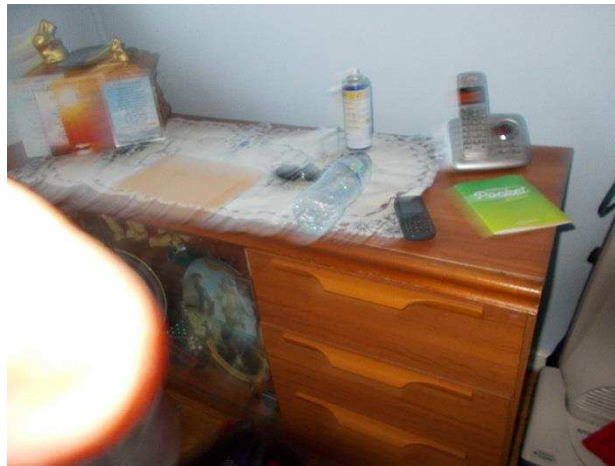


Figure 66

For Yvonne and Rebecca the ongoing presence of their husband remained physical as they both had their ashes in a casket at home. Rebecca took a photograph which was discussed during interview 2 (not shown here to protect anonymity), she referred to the photograph which was taken in her lounge as capturing, “ ... a shelf full of memories” (Rebecca Interview 2). Central to this photograph was a casket that contained her husband’s ashes with a photograph of him placed on top. Yvonne also captured the presence of her husband’s ashes in the home (fig Figure 66); however, this photograph was taken in error when she had been setting up another. Yvonne explained that these were her ‘hubby’s’ ashes. She added, “He didn’t want a grave because he didn’t want people to go and spend time there so the ashes were um in the box and um the agreement was he came to me Monday to Friday and my daughter, the youngest one, would take him as weekends [pause]. But she um happy to leave him here ... ” (Yvonne Interview 2). The Easter bunnies were indicative of the time of year and Yvonne spoke of how, “About every month he has something different on there” (Yvonne Interview 2).



Figure 67

A plant in the garden also captured the ongoing presence of Yvonne's husband. Yvonne took a photograph of some plants on her garden table (Figure 67). She explained how one of the plants in her garden had a name that included her husband's name and was valued for this link.

For Rebecca the influence of her husband was observable in her home environment because he had put, " ... an awful lot of work into it" (Rebecca Interview 1). During interview 4, Rebecca discussed her plans to redecorate her lounge. It was clear that Rebecca was considering her husband in the decisions that she was making; these included opting not to have the ceiling redecorated as her husband had stencilled a design onto it himself which she did not want to lose.

Rebecca, Anne and Alison reflected on how the ongoing presence of their husbands influenced their engagement in particular activities. For example, Rebecca explained that her husband informs her decision to eat her meals in front of the television because they used to sit opposite each other at the table. When I completed interview 2 with Rebecca, Rebecca suggested that we should sit at the table but she deliberately positioned herself in a different way to how she had sat with her husband.



Figure 68

For Anne and Alison the ongoing presence of their husband led to them completing particular activities. Anne took a photograph that captured feeding the birds (Figure 68) and explained that her husband had previously kept and raced pigeons, an activity which she says she had also loved. Alison showed the researcher the pond in her back garden and explained that it had initially been installed for her husband before he died but that she now maintained it.



Figure 69

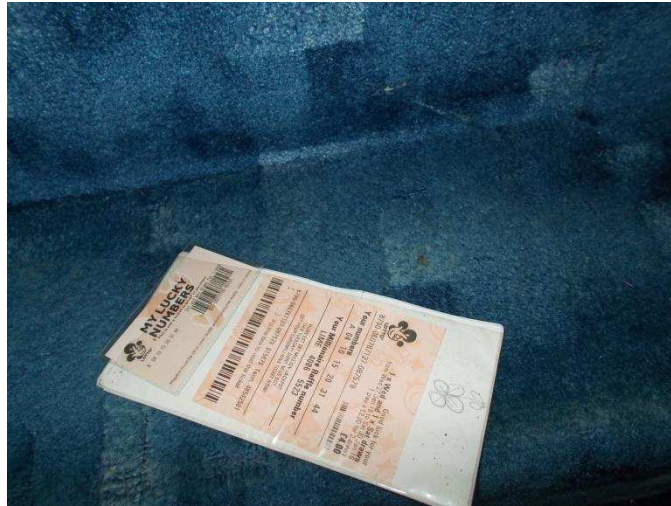


Figure 70

Yvonne became aware of the extent of her husband's influence when she realised that he had been her 'right hand man', whether he had been advising her in the garden or mending the car. Yvonne's husband had been responsible for the cooking at home and his influence over Yvonne's cooking at the time of the study was apparent in the conversation that evolved from the photograph that she had taken of chopping vegetables (Figure 69). Yvonne explained that she had, " ... promised hubby that I would a) look after myself, yeah I would eat properly ... " (Yvonne Interview 2). Yvonne also took a photograph of her lottery ticket (Figure 70) which she defined as a, " ... kind of connection with Hubby ... " (Yvonne Interview 3) because he always insisted they did it. Even when he was unwell in hospital, he made sure this happened so she had continued to do this following his death.

4.5 The desire to challenge the misconceptions about them as older women

Throughout this study, it was apparent that the women were aware of how wider society perceives them because they were older and women. However, they consistently expressed their desire to challenge what they saw as being misconceptions.

4.5.1 Frustrated with how they are perceived by others

A number of the women in this study spoke of their frustration concerning how others perceived them, and subsequently how they were expected to behave. These frustrating perceptions were seen to be held by their family, friends, and wider society.

Natalie was frustrated by how she was perceived by her daughter. She explained that her daughter thought that she should be doing everything for herself and therefore reacted negatively when she found out that she had sought help from others. Of this situation Natalie said, “ ... she doesn’t realise that you know as you get old you can’t do it” (Natalie Interview 3). In attempting to explain this situation, Natalie suggested that children do not consider their parents getting older and expect them always to be there.

Natalie, Roberta, Hope, and Ordelia expressed their frustration about how they are perceived by wider society. Natalie explained, “ ... what the government's saying about us that really gets me now [pause] I've still got a brain and I'm still young enough [pause] good enough” (Natalie Interview 1). Natalie referred to the Government seeing them ‘as a burden’ and stated that, “ ... it does annoy me that we're all [pause] well, the way we are treated, you know. But, um, we can still [pause] You're right, we can still give [pause] a lot. We've got the exp- [pause] we've got years of experience [pause] which they won't use” (Natalie Interview 4). Natalie aired her frustration, “That we aren't even being listened to. [pause] As an elderly, as they keep saying, an eld- [pause]. They, are, are, are they thinking that we're all doolally now?” (Natalie Interview 4).

Roberta spoke of the danger with making assumptions about people, citing a recent experience that she had had whilst volunteering as a befriender. She explained that the woman she visited had a ‘rich history’ but, “ ... she's just a little old lady sitting there knitting scarves ... ” (Roberta Interview 4). Roberta felt that this perception was fuelled in part by her dementia.

Natalie cited a recent experience that she had had in a supermarket car park where a man had tried to accuse her of driving into his car. Natalie felt that he singled her out because, “ ... I was on my own, I'm an old lady, look at [pause]. You know. I don't feel it, but that's how they look at me” (Natalie Interview 4). Natalie explained how she had reacted in this situation; “ ... I said to him, ‘Take as many pictures as you like, mate’ but I said, ‘You're not getting any of my details’ [pause] and I didn't give him anything” (Natalie Interview 4).

Hope commented, “ ... people have a funny idea about people. You know, we're all sitting knitting all day [pause]. Some people, you know, think you can't walk without a walking brain or [pause]. You know. That sort of thing [pause]. You, you do what you can at any age, don't you, so” (Hope Interview 4).

Ordelia spoke of how she did not like the word ‘elderly’ being used to define her age group, “I don't know what word you could use but I don't like the word elderly, because you could say I'm elderly. I'd probably go to geriatric ward but I'm not geriatric” (Ordelia Interview 4). The researcher spoke of how she was trying to find a term that did not segregate older people in a negative way to which Ordelia added, “ ... I don't want to be categorized. I want to be part of that life, that continual life” (Ordelia Interview 4).

4.5.2 How they see older women

The frustration the women felt about being perceived as older and therefore limited in their abilities did not always transfer into how they perceived their peers. Hope explained how she saw those she considered as being elderly, “ ... I always say about the people over there, oh, there's an elderly couple over there. Or they, at table tennis, I say, ‘Well, you know, they're all elderly’ but, you know, I felt like saying, ‘but that doesn't include me’” (Hope Interview 4).

4.5.3 Not feeling their age

Alison, Anne, Natalie, and Rebecca referred to not feeling elderly or their age. Alison commented, “I don't feel my age anyway” (Alison Interview 4). I asked how old Alison felt to which she replied, “At the moment, not as old as seventy-eight. Well, I don't feel seventy-eight, putting it that way, I'm just tired. So, um, you know, it's um felt right about around sixty” (Alison Interview 4). Anne said, “I don't feel any different from when I was young really” (Anne Interview 4). Rebecca was asked if she felt her age to which she replied, “I don't know how I should feel actually” (Rebecca Interview 4).

4.5.4 Being up to date with the way of the world



Figure 71

Five of the women in this study aired their opinions on current affairs. When Anne discussed her photograph of her Christmas Cards (Figure 71) she spoke about not liking the church and Christmas, referring to it all being ‘a load of rubbish’. She was particularly passionate about the way that the church treated women in a negative manner. Anne later made reference to the annoyance that men are held in high regard even though, “Everything starts female ... ” (Anne Interview 4). She added, “They think they're, they're [pause]. They think they're [pause] that's probably what's made me cross, because (laugh) like these Muslim men [pause] think women are [pause] Well. And yet, if it weren't for women, they wouldn't even be here, would they?” (Anne Interview 4).

Anne, Lottie, Natalie and Yvonne spoke specifically of the current state of politics in the United Kingdom and beyond. Of the Prime Minister at the time of interview 4, Anne commented, “ ... he hasn't got a clue, has he? Hasn't got a clue how ordinary people live” (Anne Interview 4). When discussing the potential outcome from this thesis Lottie commented, “It won't tell me how to vote in this referendum, though” (Lottie Interview 4). Lottie also referred to the presidential elections in the US and said, “I think the world will be very jittery [pause] if a certain person gets in [pause]. Very jittery (Lottie Interview 4). She added, “I don't like the politics now. Mainly, I really do believe none of them are being honest with us” (Lottie Interview 4). Lottie stated, “What goes on behind their closed doors we never get to hear” (Lottie Interview 4). Yvonne echoed this sentiment, “ ... they're, they're all up for their own” (Yvonne Interview 4). Natalie explained that she was anti-government at the time due to a number of reasons, including the way they had dealt with the flooding up North.

Natalie and Roberta spoke of very specific concerns that they had about wider society that related to current affairs. Prior to interview 3 Natalie had started to volunteer at a local centre

for refugees. She felt that they needed to know that someone loved them because their parents are not with them. Roberta said, “ ... one of the biggest needs that strikes me at the moment is mental health [pause]. We're just seeing it time and time again [pause]. People really need it, particularly weekends. I can't get help on my mental health team. Can't get help with [pause]. There's a long waiting list for counselling. You think [pause] it's a tragedy” (Roberta Interview 4). Roberta added, “And so many people with mental health issues are written off as unproductive [pause]. They're not give a chance [pause] to contribute [pause]. Whereas surely if they were given this chance, it would improve their mental health” (Roberta Interview 4).



Figure 72



Figure 73



Figure 74

Nine of the women in this study referred to keeping on top of current affairs. Alison (Figure 72), Yvonne (Figure 73), Anne, Taylor (Figure 74), and Roberta achieved this by reading a newspaper. Alison and Yvonne explained that they only bought the newspaper once a week, on a Saturday. Yvonne described how she would go out to buy her newspaper, “ ... come home and sit and read it and that’s my treat to me. Um and it does last me the whole week. Wouldn’t have it every day, there’s not a lot in there really. I want to watch the news and so on. So I love that (Yvonne Interview 3). Yvonne continued, “Yeah I read it and even my daughter, if, if they’re coming she’ll phone and say I’ve got your paper, so they know it’s kind of important” (Yvonne Interview 3). Yvonne explained, “Yeah hubby had one every day, I don’t see the need for every day, and I think if I had it every day I probably wouldn’t go to aqua just sit and read papers” (Yvonne Interview 3). Taylor had her newspaper delivered every day and reading the newspaper was one of the first things that she did in the mornings, taking about an hour to work her way through it. Taylor liked to read the newspaper because it was easier than watching the television due to her hearing impairment. Taylor commented, “ ... I get much more news from the newspaper” (Taylor Interview 2). Roberta explained how she enjoyed a cup of tea after breakfast with her newspaper that she had delivered, sitting in her comfortable armchair. Roberta stayed like this until about 10am.



Figure 75



Figure 76

Taylor, Rebecca, and Ordelia all referred to watching the news on the television. When Taylor watched television (Figure 75) she mainly watched news programmes, she would put the television on at 1pm for the 1 o' clock news and then again at about 4 or 5 o' clock. Ordelia explained that she took her photograph (Figure 76), " ... just to show that I actually do watch television and this is me watching the news" (Ordelia Interview 2). She said that sometimes she watched the 6 o' clock news and sometimes she did not.



Figure 77

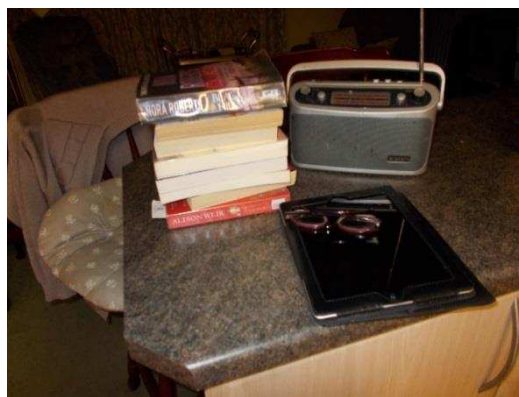


Figure 78

Anne, Hope and Lottie made particular reference to listening to the radio to keep up to date with current affairs. Anne commented that she did not listen to the radio all of the time, but listened to Radio 4 when she got up to find out what was going on. Hope took a photograph of having tea in the morning (Figure 77) and explained that she had her tea downstairs where she would listen to the radio. She was beginning to return to listening to Radio 4 in the mornings, as this was her favourite station. Lottie took a photograph that she referred to as preparing for Christmas (Figure 78). Whilst discussing this photograph Lottie explained that she does not like any particular programmes on the radio but that she listened to 'The Today Show' every day in the morning as a way to keep up to date with current affairs.

4.6 Unique experiences of women in this generation

The time at which the women in this study were born, developed and transitioned into adulthood resulted in experiences that were unique to this generation. The expectations that surrounded them were informed by the dominant belief of the time that women would prioritise family over career and that their place was within the home.

4.6.1 Career versus Family

During the 4 phases of this study, it became apparent that most of the women had experienced a tension between pursuing a career and fulfilling the expectations of having and caring for a family. Taylor was expected to give up work, even before she had children and explained, "I finished work about four, six months after I got married 'cause somebody didn't want me to work 'cause he wanted his dinner at 12:30" (Taylor Interview 1). Although Taylor gave up work it was not something she had wanted to do, she said, "I regret it ... " (Taylor Interview 1). Taylor explained that at this time, " ... the man provided ... " (Taylor Interview 1).

Whilst the expectation placed upon Anne and Olive was to give up work to raise their family, this was not an expectation that they were willing to fulfil. Anne said that the, " ... thing that annoys me is saying 'all women like to be at home' well they don't, do they? That's like saying all men want to be bus drivers isn't it? I didn't like being at home" (Anne Interview 2). Olive referred to her husband wanting her to stay at home with the children as this was what was expected of women at that time, a wish that she was not willing to meet, she commented, " ... there was no way I was going to stay at home" (Olive Interview 1).

In contrast to the views of Taylor, Anne and Olive; Ordelia, Hope and Natalie were happy to give up work when they had their children. Ordelia commented, " ... I wanted to be at home" (Ordelia Interview 1) though she did return to work, on a part time basis, when her first son was at nursery. She gave up work again when her second son was born. Hope also, " ... didn't think anything of ... " (Hope Interview 1) giving up work when she had her children and she saw it as important to be at home with them. Natalie, " ... enjoyed being at home" (Natalie Interview 1) to look after her children and felt strongly that she should always be at home when they returned from school, so only worked for a few hours a day when they were young. Natalie worked hard to provide her children with a good life and to maintain effective relationships with them due to the challenges that she had faced in her own childhood. Natalie returned to work later in her life, although this became an issue for her husband when he was unable to work due to poor health. She explained, " ... his idea, and he was old school, that that um, a man puts the bread and butter on the table, and he hated it that I was going out working" (Natalie Interview 1).

Neither Yvonne nor Lottie referred to their feelings about being at home with their children. Yvonne explained that her time had been evenly divided between being a wife, mother and worker. Lottie stayed at home to look after her children but did not pass comment as to how she felt about this.

4.6.2 Managing a career and family

Olive, Yvonne, Natalie, and Hope spoke of how they had gone about managing a career and a family. Olive had originally trained as a nurse. Once she had her children Olive found herself unable to return to this profession as it did not allow her to work flexible hours and so decided to retrain to be a teacher. For Olive it was important to have a career and not just a job. By the time Olive had qualified as a teacher her husband had left home and she, “ ... had to work, because we didn't have any, we didn't have any maintenance” (Olive Interview 1). Combining work and home life appeared to be valued by Olive who said it was, “Lovely being a mum. Yeah. I was, I was doing what I wanted to do” (Olive Interview 1). Yvonne also valued the opportunity to have a career and said that she had spent, “ ... a third of my life has been mar- on the marriage, a third has been on children, and a third has been on career” (Yvonne Interview 1). She also added that she enjoyed being a wife and a mother but if that had not happened she would have had a career and been, “ ... quite happy with it” (Yvonne Interview 1).

Hope made the observation that things are different for today's generation and wonders how, “ ... they fit it all in” (Hope Interview 1), she later commented, “Because I mean when you work and running a home, it's a lot, there's an awful lot to do ... ” (Hope Interview 4). Hope added that with regards to having children, “ ... they're not bringing them up because they're somewhere else” (Hope Interview 1), whereas she had been at home. Hope put this down to the generation of today wanting too much which leads to them working more and spending time away from their family and home. A point also highlighted by Natalie who referred to being part of a generation that would ‘make do and mend’ things rather than going out and replacing them. Natalie referred to experiencing what is now called ‘me time’ when she was raising her family but that it was different in that she would often be completing tasks such as ironing and knitting to meet the needs of her children. Hope acknowledged that the differences were not just between her and the current generations but that, “ ... it changes all the time ... ” (Hope Interview 4), citing how her mother also had a different experience.

Hope was a single parent for a large part of the time that she was raising her family, which presented its own challenges with managing her family and working. She explained that after 15 years at home raising her children she, “ ... had to start work” (Hope Interview 4) although she took employment that was part time and allowed her the school holidays off to spend with her children. Hope explained, “It meant, the money was poor, but we managed, you know. We had enough. The children didn't go hungry or anything like that” (Hope Interview 4). Hope recalled this time in her life as being, “ ... busy day, juggling children and then, of course, and

then they get sick [pause]. So that's another thing that stops you doing anything much, really”
(Hope Interview 1).

4.7 Later life as a time of self growth

4.7.1 Being busy



Figure 79

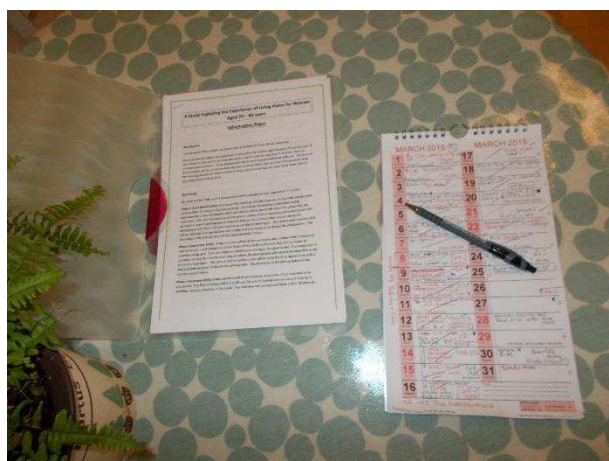


Figure 80

A number of the women in this study referred to being busy and/ or having a desire to be busy. Alison took a photograph of her 'kitchen and a bit of the window' (Figure 79) in the morning when it was still dark. Alison got up at 5am every day and said that she would have been making a cup of tea when she took this photograph. I asked if she took her tea back to bed to which she responded, "I haven't got time to go back to bed!" (Alison Interview 3). For Alison many of her activities took her away from her home, she commented, "It's not very often I get a day where I don't do nothing" (Alison Interview 1). Like Alison, Lottie stated that she was, "... not in much ..." (Lottie Interview 2). Ordelia took a photograph of her calendar and the information I had given her about this study (Figure 80) which led to a discussion about the fullness of her calendar.

Whilst Alison and Lottie spoke of being busy, defined as being out of the house, other women spoke of being busy when at home. Anne commented that she was 'always busy', always on her feet doing something when she was at home. Anne spoke of the importance of keeping your mind and body active, she commented, "If I'm not going somewhere, I have to go and do the garden, or something [pause] I can't sit around ... " (Anne Interview 3). A similar experience was defined by Rebecca who said that she was, " ... always doing something" (Rebecca Interview 2).

Anne, Natalie and Roberta spoke of how being busy had been a feature earlier in their lives. Natalie referred to having, " ... always been on the go ... " (Natalie Interview 1). Roberta spoke of how her life had been busy when she was younger, particularly when she was looking after her children, her mother and working full time, she commented, "You just get on with it, don't you?" (Roberta Interview 3). Roberta agreed that this was probably why she liked to be busy later in life, she added, "I think it's the nature as well [pause]. I quite enjoy being busy" (Roberta Interview 3). Ordellia described herself as, " ... very much a doing person" (Ordellia Interview 2), she explained that whilst she can sit, chat and relax she did not like to do this for too long. Ordellia referred to herself as being like a 'butterfly'.

Hope and Rebecca considered being busy as a consequence of living alone, because you had to do everything yourself. As Rebecca explained, " ... there's a lot I've got to do you see. I've got to keep the garden going and everything" (Rebecca Interview 4).



Figure 81

Olive referred to being too busy to engage in particular activities. Olive took a photograph of her knitting (Figure 81) and explained that she did not do it very often because she did not have, " ... as many hours in my day as I used to have" (Olive Interview 2). Olive put this down to it taking, " ... me a long time to get myself together in the morning" (Olive Interview 2), that

she usually had something to do in the day and then, “ ... 7 o’ clock is the end of the day [pause]. So it’s not a very long day” (Olive Interview 2).

Yvonne appeared to have variable feelings when it came to being busy. She commented, “ ... I think I probably do a bit more than I want to” (Yvonne Interview 4), although she then conceded that if she didn’t do as much she would, “ ... be very bored actually” (Yvonne Interview 4). Yvonne explained that she kept herself busy and made sure that she had something planned for each day. Yvonne explained, “I keep busy because I’m, I’ve found if I’ve got all day to do things [pause] I probably wouldn’t do them. Whereas if I’m going out, or you’re visiting, I would quickly tidy and so on [pause] And it gives you a purpose” (Yvonne Interview 1). Hope also highlighted the importance of having, “ ... to find a purpose ... ” (Hope Interview 4) particularly when she left work at 70 years of age because, “Otherwise you’re just waiting for death” (Hope Interview 4). She added, “...you’ve got to live; you’ve got to live a life. You can’t just sit here and wait for somebody just to come and take you out in a box, can you?” (Hope Interview 4).



Figure 82

Taylor spoke of the need for having a purpose when completing specific activities. She took a photograph of her knitting (Figure 82) and explained that she was knitting squares for a blanket before she moved onto knitting hats for Innocent bottles in aid of Age Concern. Taylor explained, “ ... I’ve got to have some purpose to do something” (Taylor Interview 2).

4.7.1.1 Opportunity to be yourself

Natalie referred to the time following the death of her husband as being ‘your time’. A sentiment echoed by Ordella who following the death of her husband decided, “...I’m not going to be joining anything to do good or anything. This now is my time” (Ordella Interview 1). She added, “I’ve gone to just sort of being in my later years” (Ordella Interview 4).

4.7.1.2 Making changes once living alone



Figure 83

Alison, Lottie, Taylor and Rebecca all referred to changes that they had made since they had been alone. Alison took a photograph of her dinner (Figure 83) that she had at lunchtime. She explained that in the past, when her husband was alive, they would have dinner in the evening because he would have been asleep all day as he worked at night. Alison changed her main meal time when she started to go to Weight Watchers because, “ ... I found it was easier to have at lunchtime so you use some of the energy up” (Alison Interview 2). Taylor also changed the time she had her main meal from lunchtime to the evening when her husband died because, “ ... everybody else eats in the evening” (Taylor Interview 1). She explained that her husband had always, “ ... wanted to come home at lunch time ... ” (Taylor Interview 1) to have his main meal of the day.



Figure 84

Lottie took a photograph that captured playing bridge (Figure 84) and explained that her husband had liked to play cards but was not interested in learning how to play bridge. She explained, “ ... as soon as he died, I know it sounds awful, next week [pause]. I’m going to

learn to play bridge now girls” (Lottie Interview 2). Bridge replaced outdoor bowls which she had engaged in for about 20 years prior to her husband’s death, she commented that bridge, “... is indoors, and I’m much happier indoors than outdoors” (Lottie Interview 2).



Figure 85

When Rebecca spoke about her photograph of her knitting (Figure 85) she explained that her knitting habits had changed since her husband had died because he had liked her to relax with him rather than knit. Therefore, she did not, “... do an awful lot of knitting when he was around...” (Rebecca Interview 2).

4.7.1.3 Doing what you want, when you want



Figure 86



Figure 87



Figure 88



Figure 89

Nine of the women in this study referred to the ability to do 'what you want, when you want' when you live on your own. Alison (Figure 86), Olive (Figure 87), Taylor (Figure 88) and Yvonne (Figure 89) all took photographs to capture the choice they had over when and what they ate or drank. Several of these women commented on the timing and nature of these activities as being when and what they fancied. Hope spoke of how she might come home from table tennis and shopping and decide to have her main meal because she is hungry, this might mean that she eats mid-afternoon but that she then does not have to have a meal later on.



Figure 90

Rebecca took a photograph of her breakfast of porridge (Figure 90) which led onto a discussion about where she ate her meals. Rebecca explained that she had her meals on her lap in front of the television and to those who did not approve she said, “ ... blow you, I’ll do what I like” (Rebecca Interview 2).

During interview 4 the researcher asked Alison if she had a key message that she would like to share about living alone to which she replied, “ ... the only thing I think of is if you're on your own, you please yourself what you're doing. You haven't got to answer to anybody. That would be my key message” (Alison Interview 4). Alison added that living on your own meant, “You can go to bed when you want to, watch what you want to, and eat when you want to” (Alison Interview 4). Alison’s comments were mirrored by Anne, Hope, Natalie, and Olive.



Figure 91



Figure 92

Hope took a photograph which captured gardening (Figure 91) an activity that she did not particularly enjoy and explained that she did a bit of it and then if she doesn't feel like going back out then she won't. Lottie also spoke of not enjoying cleaning or gardening when discussing the photograph that she took of her mop and bucket (Figure 92), however she had made the choice to have a cleaner and a gardener because she hated these activities.

The value of having choice was also evident when Hope spoke about having a 'free day' the day following interview 2. She commented, "I know I haven't got to do anything I don't want to" (Hope Interview 2). Hope said that she loved days like that as she would often potter doing jobs around the home and garden, "But I don't have to do it. You know" (Hope Interview 2), she added, " ... I can be lazy. I can have a day of not doing anything" (Hope Interview 2). The opportunity to decide what to do was also voiced by Natalie who said, "If I don't want to do it, I won't. I'll just [pause] if I don't want to do anything and just sit, I'll just sit" (Natalie Interview 2).



Figure 93

Ordelia gave an example of the value of being able to do ‘what you want, when you want’ when describing how her mornings usually developed. Ordelia reflected on the opportunity to choose when she got up. She explained that she was usually awake but did not like getting up and described having the choice of when to get up as a luxury. Roberta mirrored the experience described by Ordelia when she discussed her photograph of making tea (Figure 93). Roberta explained, “This is my first early morning task. I do like my first cup of tea in the morning. Downstairs, make a cup of tea (Roberta Interview 2). She continued, “Then it gets taken upstairs where I go back to bed. Cup of tea, good book and I stay there for as long as I want really” (Roberta Interview 2). Roberta spoke very positively about the opportunities that living alone afforded her, particularly in terms of autonomy. She explained, “ ... you can do what you want, there is nobody to be responsible to, or that you’re looking after. Or that wants to do something else” (Roberta Interview 2). Roberta referred to this as being ‘self-indulgent’, eating what she wants and knowing she can ‘slob out’ when she wants to. Taylor also valued the freedom that living alone gave her.

For Anne, Lottie and Ordelia living on their own enabled them to be spontaneous. Anne spoke of the opportunity to wake up and decide to do something; particularly with regards to going somewhere. This was also echoed by Lottie who cited the following example, “ ... like Saturday. What am I going to do today? Absolutely nothing to do. Right, can’t have that. Got meself on the 9:44 to St Pancras. First class lounge. Two cups of coffee and biscuits, free. Walked miles sort of along Regents canal and then came home” (Lottie Interview 2).



Figure 94

Ordelia took a photograph of her coat and walking boots (Figure 94) which led onto a conversation about how her travel plans would usually evolve. She explained that she had been to see friends in the United States recently; a trip which had not been planned very far in advance. Ordelia explained that there were numerous organisations that she could join but chose not to because she did not like, “ ... to be too tied down” (Ordelia Interview 3) with regular commitments.

4.7.1.4 Self - growth

Natalie described several situations within her life that had led to her self-growth. The first related to when she returned to work full time at about 50 years of age. She explained, “ ... it’s only when I went back to full time that I got my sort of confidence back [pause] I had very low self-esteem in myself and confidence” (Natalie Interview 3). In a later interview Natalie added, “So my confidence came back, and ever since then it, I’ve got better at it, and I will not let people walk over me” (Natalie Interview 4). Natalie commented, “ ... people say to me, ‘Oh you seem to have changed’ I said, ‘No. I’ve got older and I’ve got a little bit wiser’ [pause]. And I said, ‘I, my temperament has gone down’. And I don’t get phased out with anything now. If it’s meant to be, it’s meant to be, and if I continue as I am I’m happy” (Natalie Interview 3). Natalie added, “ ... over the years I have changed ... ” (Natalie Interview 4) which had led her to being more challenging if something was not right, such as a bill. Natalie spoke of how recent experiences of being scammed had also resulted in her changing and being more cautious, she commented that since that experience, “ ... nobody takes me now for a ride at all. It doesn't matter who they try to be, I will not ... ” (Natalie Interview 4).

4.7.1.5 Learning in later life

All of the women in this study spoke of issues that related to learning in later life. During this study, Alison bought herself an electronic tablet to take photographs. During interview 3 I asked Alison whether she had managed to take any photographs on it yet to which she replied, “No, the um, they’re not, I can’t work out why they’re not clear” (Alison Interview 3). Alison added, “At singing, there’s someone going to come in on the Friday to show us how to take photos on them so [pause] yeah, so I might learn something as well I think” (Alison Interview 3).



Figure 95

Alison also cited an example of how she had learned something recently that she had put into practice. She took a photograph of her dog eating (Figure 95). Alison said that sometimes he had the same meal as her but explained, “I’ve had a [pause] they done a, an article in um, in [pause] about feeding dogs and they reckon they’re better off uh, fr- you know fresh meat, without cooking it [pause] yeah raw meat [pause] yeah he loves it” (Alison Interview 3).

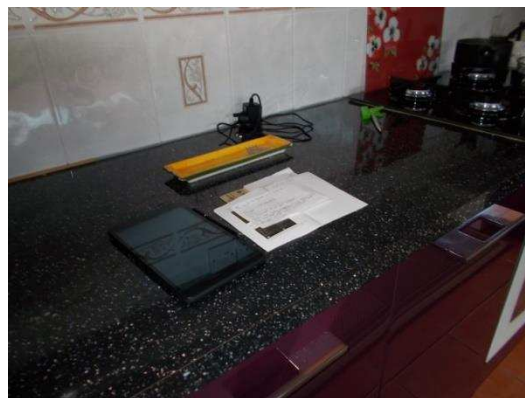


Figure 96

Alison, Ordalia and Yvonne spoke about how they had learned to use certain types of technology. Alison took a photograph of her tablet (Figure 96) and explained that when she bought it she sought help from friends who showed her how to use it. Ordalia referred to the learning that she had done to enable her to use her smart phone, “ ... I've mainly taught myself but I think things with apps I need to talk to somebody about that, so that's something I need to look at” (Ordalia Interview 4). Prior to Interview 4 Yvonne had been given her first digital camera as a birthday present from her girlfriends. She learned how to use it by, “ ... one of the husbands sat and talked me through it” (Yvonne Interview 4).



Figure 97



Figure 98



Figure 99

Anne, Roberta and Rebecca spoke of their learning relating to their gardens. Anne took a photograph that captured cutting the grass (Figure 97) and explained that she had learned what the plants were since she had taken on responsibility for the garden; an activity previously completed by her husband. Roberta took a photograph that captured feeding and watching the birds in the garden (Figure 98) and spoke of her pleasure in being able to identify the birds that visited, though used her book to check that she was correct. Rebecca took a photograph of the items that she kept beside her armchair (Figure 99); this included a gardening book which she often referred to.

4.7.1.6 Learning from books



Figure 100

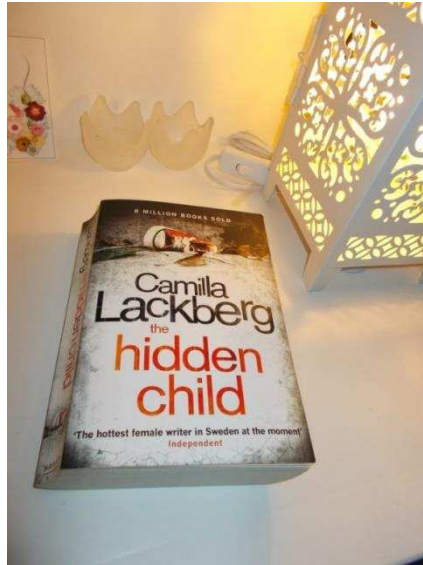


Figure 101



Figure 102

Hope, Roberta, Lottie and Ordelia also cited learning from books. Hope had the Reader's Digest on subscription although described herself as, "... not a great book reader" (Hope Interview 2). Hope particularly referred to not liking fiction, as she could not see the point of reading something that someone else had made up because, "I like to learn something from them (Hope Interview 2). For Roberta one of the purposes of reading for her was to facilitate her learning. Lottie took a photograph that captured reading (Figure 100). She explained that she 'reads a lot' and has always been an avid reader. Lottie preferred to read non-fiction books and was interested in medieval history at the time of her interview. Ordelia took two photographs that captured reading (Figure 101 and Figure 102). The second of the photographs (Figure 102) was of a book by a Canadian author. This book was not a novel and Ordelia would read this book with a pencil to hand, as it contained some interesting facts that she would mark and return to later.

4.7.1.7 Learning from the radio

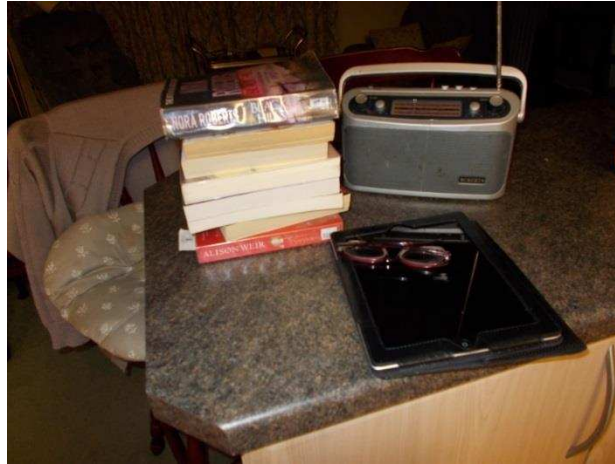


Figure 103

Whilst many of the women listened to the radio, only Lottie referred to it as a means of stimulating learning and making her think in different ways (Figure 103).

4.7.1.8 Learning from the television

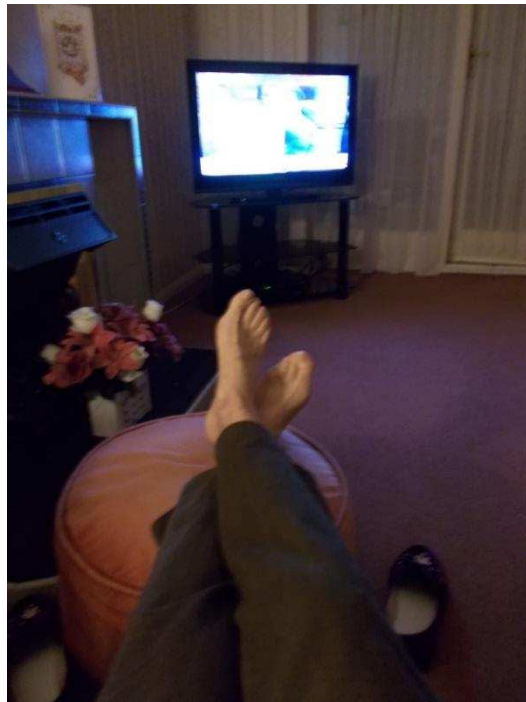


Figure 104



Figure 105



Figure 106

Anne, Lottie, Natalie, Roberta and Rebecca all expressed a preference for watching television programmes from which they could learn. Lottie took a photograph of, “Feet up. Yeah. Watching television” (Figure 104) (Lottie Interview 3) and explained, “I do. I like historical things” (Lottie Interview 3). Natalie tended to watch programmes about things that happened in real life but that you would not usually get to witness. Natalie stated that she learned a lot from films and television programmes. Roberta spoke of watching television as a way of, “ ... expanding your horizons and things like that” (Roberta Interview 4) and referred to the need for programmes she watched to be, “ ... stimulating and interesting” (Roberta Interview 1). Rebecca took a photograph that captured watching the Chelsea Flower Show on the television (Figure 105) and agreed that she liked to watch television programmes that allowed her to learn something. Whilst Hope did not specifically talk of preferring to watch programmes from which she could learn, her photograph that captured the drawer beside her armchair contained a notebook (Figure 106). Hope explained, “ ... if I’m watching TV, and anything going on, I think they mention books, I write it in there ... ” (Hope Interview 3).

4.7.1.9 Online learning

The women in this study commonly referred to using their iPads or computers to support their learning. Anne spoke of using her iPad to look things up, she explained that she would often look things up when she heard about something that was of interest. Hope spoke of listening to the quiz on local radio at half past ten but that she often missed the answers, as she would fall asleep, so she would search for them on the computer the following day.

Ordelia referred to learning about the book and author when she was presenting a book for her book group and explained, “ ... for the book group, I do research” (Ordelia Interview 4). Lottie also supported her reading by searching for information online. She commented, “The iPads are brilliant for that” (Lottie Interview 2). Lottie provided several examples of how she had done this, “ ... I want to um listen to a Beethoven sonata for example I will Google it for the facts behind it and what to listen for (Lottie Interview 2). She continued, “And I’ve just read a fabulous book on Shakespeare and it it was a lovely, lovely read. It really was and they mentioned some of his sonnets [pause] so I made a note of them and I looked one up just to see what he was talking about [pause]. And of course you got all the information on how to read it, and what to do and think about this and think [pause] I thought ‘ooh back to school’ ... and I loved school” (Lottie Interview 2). Taylor spoke of wartime events within her family and their homes, she explained that she only knew of the details because, “Well I found it out by looking in the int-, you know, research” (Taylor Interview 1).

4.7.1.10 Learning from life

For Hope and Natalie, learning was something they felt occurred through living life. Hope cited the example of walking into a shop and seeing different things, she said, “ ... everybody learns something every day I think” (Hope Interview 2). She added, “Well you can’t know everything can you?” (Hope Interview 2). Natalie provided an example of how she had learned a lesson through living her life, she explained how a bad experience had led to her learning ‘a very hard lesson’; she had been taken in on a scam through an online dating agency.

4.7.1.11 Not attending university earlier in life

Hope, Lottie and Roberta referred to not having attended University earlier in life. Hope commented, “ ... it's never too late. But now I think what, what would be the point, you know? I can do it on my own at home maybe [pause]. Read the right books and that sort of thing [pause]. You know, without the stress of the assignments and all [pause]. And anything I want to know, I'll just on my computer” (Hope Interview 1). This sentiment was echoed by Roberta who commented, “I do like learning about things” (Roberta Interview 2) although she would not want to do anything too heavy such as take an Open University course. Lottie explained, “

... I didn't go to uni. Um would have loved to have done, you didn't go in those days [pause]. It was special. You know you had to be really brainy in, in the uh, what would that have been? Ah 1952-53. You had to be really brainy" (Lottie Interview 2). Lottie felt that this was the reason, " ... why I like to read and read non-fiction" (Lottie Interview 2).

4.7.1.12 Formal learning in later life

Natalie, Yvonne, Roberta, Taylor and Ordelia had all undertaken some form of formal learning in recent years. For Natalie, Yvonne and Taylor this was due to the volunteering roles that they fulfilled. Prior to interview 3 Natalie had undertaken two courses to allow her to take on two new volunteering roles. Natalie explained, " ... I did a course, and another lady and I were the oldest two, but the other younger people, younger women, think I was great [pause]. Because of older, knowledge of experience as well ... " (Natalie Interview 3). Although Natalie explained that she was also keen to learn from people who were younger than her, "Because you're living in today's society [pause]. And you're seeing what today's society is all about" (Natalie Interview 3). Natalie explained that she would be required to attend update sessions, an experience that was also referred to by Yvonne who took a photograph that captured her volunteering for a charity that supported bereaved children (photograph not shown here to protect anonymity); a role for which she received a training update every 2 years. Of her volunteering role Roberta explained, "They give you training anyway [pause]. Um and you're mentored when you start [pause]. So yeah I liked it" (Roberta Interview 3).



Figure 107

For Taylor her formal learning linked to her hearing impairment. Taylor took a photograph that captured finger spelling and hearing dogs information (Figure 107) and explained, "So this covers several things because I do like reading and I also support hearing dogs and this is the finger spelling that we learned and it's just a cover of everything really" (Taylor Interview 2). Taylor spoke of how she had been learning to lip read for 12-14 years but intended to give up the classes and not return in September. This was in part because she did not feel as though she was learning anything anymore.

For Ordelia and Olive their formal learning related to personal interests. Olive was a member of an archaeological society, which involved an element of learning. Prior to Interview 3, Ordelia had started attending an art appreciation class with her friend. Although she initially wondered whether she wanted to be able to 'read a picture' in a gallery, she said of the class, " ... some things come out of it ... " (Ordelia Interview 3). Ordelia agreed that she was learning things from the class although did add, "I don't really need to learn to appreciate it" (Ordelia Interview 3).

4.7.1.13 Desire to continue learning

Roberta, Lottie, Natalie and Rebecca spoke of their desire to continue to learn. Roberta said, "I'm still curious, and want to know about things. Learn things. I'm not sort of very stagnated" (Roberta Interview 3). For Lottie this was evident in her desire to satisfy her thirst for knowledge, although interestingly she described herself as, " ... not a very inquisitive person" (Lottie Interview 4). Natalie concluded that she was, " ... still learning [pause]. And I've always maintained I'm never too old to learn" (Natalie Interview 3). Rebecca advised other older women to, " ... try and learn something each day if you can" (Rebecca Interview 3).

4.7.1.14 Creating opportunities to try new things

Natalie and Roberta both referred to the motivation that they found within themselves to create their own opportunities. For Natalie this centred around her desire to engage in activities with others, from having meals to going on group bus trips. She explained, " ... once a month, I'll go around to three other ladies if I, if I know they're widows, and they come back on a Sunday, and we have a roast dinner. Because how many of us will cook a roast dinner? Not many!" (Natalie Interview 1).

For Roberta her move to creating her own opportunities arose after her second husband had died. She spoke of how she had a, " ... realization that right, my life is down to me now" (Roberta Interview 4). Roberta explained, " ... for a couple of years, I was a little bit sitting knitting and doing all the things that widows do. Kicked myself hard, and said, 'Come on. You've got your health and your strength'. I suppose I was sixty, sixty-two. Around about that (cough). And a brochure came through the door for cruises. Not cruises on ocean liners, but cruises on rivers and things like that. And I looked at this cruise, in Russia, from Saint Petersburg to Moscow. I thought, yeah, that would be an adventure. I'd not really had many adventures in my life [pause]. 'Can I do that on my own? I know, I'll ring them up, if they've got a single cabin that means I'm going'. So I did" (Roberta Interview 1).

Natalie spoke of the importance of how, “ ... you've got to motivate yourself [pause]. Otherwise, you could just [pause] you might as well just curl up and go” (Natalie Interview 4). Natalie added, “ ... if you don't do these things you won't know if you can achieve it” (Natalie Interview 4). Similarly Hope said, “ ... you can always try new things. There's nothing, just age shouldn't stop you doing anything” (Hope Interview 4).

4.7.1.15 Engagement with technology



Figure 108

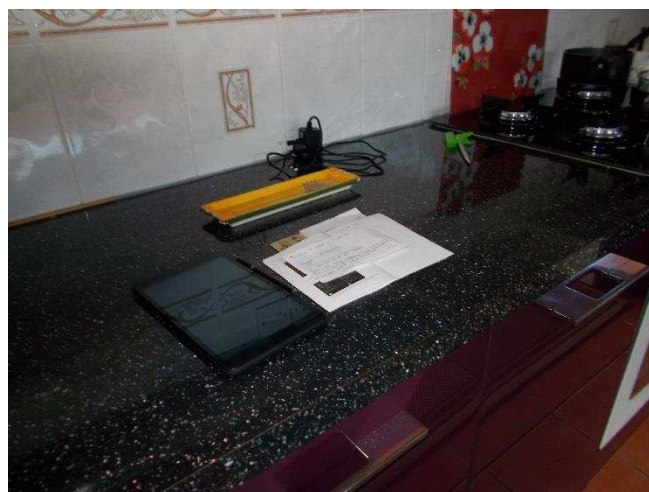


Figure 109

The period over which the women had engaged with electronic tablets and computers varied. Hope took a photograph of her computer (Figure 108) and explained that she had her first computer in the 1990s having been familiar with them through her work at a local college. Roberta had also used a computer for work over a period of about 20 years. Olive began using a computer about 20 years previously but engaged with it more when she started offering private tuition in primary subjects. She explained, "They used to come to me and it was a nice little warm up if they did 10 minutes on the computer first" (Olive Interview 2). Taylor had also had a computer for some time having been given it by her son. In contrast, Lottie had owned her iPad for about two years and Alison had bought her electronic tablet during this study (Figure 109), although Alison had owned a laptop previously.

There was not always a correlation between how long the women had engaged with computers or electronic tablets and the confidence that they held in their abilities. Hope commented that she was not very good with computer jargon and sometimes struggled to find documents that she had saved because, "They're not really organised, they're just you know, saved and that's the end of it ..." (Hope Interview 2). With regards to her computer skills Roberta felt that she was, "... not terribly computer literate, I don't do anything wonderful with it. But it [pause] I do what I need to do. I do email, I can do spreadsheets, and, and, you know [pause] write reports, that kind of thing ..." (Roberta Interview 2). Roberta later added, "I'm terrified of a computer" (Roberta Interview 4). I pointed out that she still used it, to which she said, "Oh, yeah, because there's no alternative, is there?" (Roberta Interview 4). When I suggested that Olive was very IT literate she did not entirely agree and pointed out that she had a 'computer buddy'. Of her laptop Taylor commented, "... I'm still not really proficient with it" (Taylor Interview 2). She added, "I've never had lessons on it or anything" (Taylor Interview 2), and concluded, "I can use the bits and even half the time I don't know what half the things mean. But I've got enough that I want" (Taylor Interview 2). Ordellia referred to herself as a 'technophobe' on several occasions. I suggested that Rebecca was tech savvy to which she replied, "Oh, not really. I'm not really" (Rebecca Interview 4) although she agreed that she was able to do most of what she wanted to do. Yvonne explained, "... I go so far and I think (verbal noise) I can't do any more. You know?" (Yvonne Interview 4).

How often the women used their electronic tablets or computers varied. Alison said that she did not use her tablet a lot and explained, "I never used it all last week" (Alison Interview 4). She added, "It don't, it don't, I, I'm not one of these people that has to sit with it all the time [pause]. It's handy you know ..." (Alison Interview 3). Hope had started to use her computer

more frequently since she had become the secretary of the local branch of a national organisation. Lottie commented about the use of her iPad, “ ... I do use it every day” (Lottie Interview 2), although in a later interview said, “No, I don’t use it much at all” (Lottie Interview 3). Yvonne explained that she used her tablet far more frequently than her computer ... ” (Yvonne Interview 4).



Figure 110



Figure 111

The women engaged with technology for a range of reasons, the most common being to communicate with others. Ten out of the eleven women referred to using their electronic tablets and computers as a means of communication. Lottie explained that it was useful, “For keeping in touch” (Lottie Interview 2). Lottie cited the example of how she had a friend who lived away and who had remarried in her 80s. Previously they would speak every Sunday morning on the telephone but since her friend had remarried, they had resorted to email. Although Lottie commented, “I can’t converse in the same way” (Lottie Interview 2). Yvonne took a photograph of her computer and printer (Figure 110). Yvonne associated this with contacting people through email. She also used email to receive information from the Royal Voluntary Service and confirmation of any holiday bookings. Ordella explained that she would, “ ... receive emails, send emails, um, but not a lot. I don’t give my email address out” (Ordella

Interview 4). For Taylor email was a key way of communicating (as well as texting) due to her hearing impairment. The immediate nature of email meant that Taylor was able to share information quickly all around the world, for example, her second cousin wanted a copy of the will that Taylor was waiting on and Taylor would be able to scan it and email it to Australia instantly. Rebecca took a photograph of her travel documents for her forthcoming trip to Australia (Figure 111). She explained that she had her visa, “And then um 24 hours beforehand I can go online and I can reserve my seat on the plane” (Rebecca Interview 3).

When talking about their engagement with technology, Natalie, Yvonne and Lottie all made reference to the social media site Facebook although they had different views on it. For Natalie it enabled her to keep in touch with her friends and son. Yvonne described Facebook as, “... another way of kind of keeping in touch with the family ... ” (Yvonne Interview 4). She added that she liked to, “ ... catch up with what they're all up to” (Yvonne Interview 4). Lottie spoke far less favourably of the social media site, she explained that her, “ ... granddaughter put me on Facebook, which is rubbish. I only ever look; I never ever comment” (Lottie Interview 2).

Whilst all of the ten women spoke of how they used the internet to communicate with those they knew, Natalie also used it to make connections with new people. She spoke of how she had been using online dating and said, “I’ve actually met a man on um dating line ... ” (Natalie Interview 3).



Figure 112



Figure 113



Figure 114

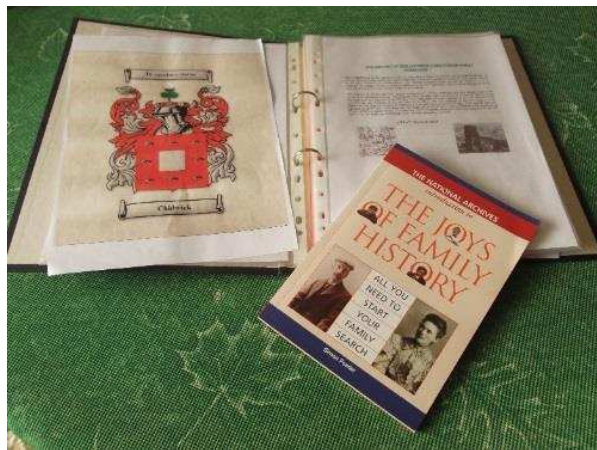


Figure 115



Figure 116

Seven of the women spoke of how they engaged with technology to carry out research. Lottie said she really enjoyed her iPad for the ability it gave her to research information that facilitated her ongoing desire to learn; an attribute also valued by Anne. Natalie took two photographs of baking (Figure 112, Figure 113) and explained that she had cookbooks but would also search for new recipes on the internet. Olive, Taylor and Yvonne all explained how they completed research online to help them with tracing their family history. Olive took a photograph that captured researching her family history (Figure 114), she explained that now most of the research that she completed was online. This experience was echoed by Taylor (Figure 115). Yvonne cited an example of going online to search for some information, “ ... we used to say to my brother and my cousins, ‘What was the name of the pub?’ And they couldn't remember, nobody could remember and then one night I thought I'd go on the internet so I went on the internet, looked it up, in the end I was horrified because they- the description of it was, um, what did they say now, it was the slums of Glasgow” (Yvonne Interview 1). Yvonne said, “That's when the the iPad was handy” (Yvonne Interview 4). Yvonne also said that she might use the computer to search for reviews of airlines. I asked if Yvonne enjoyed having the iPad to which she replied, “I do and I think it's handy to look things up, areas, or like my granddaughter's going on holiday, so she tells me the hotel and you can instantly look and see it ... ” (Yvonne Interview 4). Taylor researched insurance online, she said, “ ... now I go and compare the market and see what there is ... ” (Taylor Interview 4). Roberta did not specify what she researched online but took a photograph of using a search engine (Figure 116). Whilst these women spoke positively of the contribution that their engagement with technology made to their ability to research, Ordella said, “Sometimes I get frustrated because I can't, you know, I can't get the right information” (Ordella Interview 4).



Figure 117



Figure 118



Figure 119



Figure 120

Another reason the women engaged with technology was to play games. Lottie took a photograph of playing solitaire on the iPad (Figure 117). Roberta also played card games on the computer (Figure 118); she explained that she had a 'wonderful programme' which had 200 different games of solitaire to play with varying numbers of decks of cards. Roberta explained, "I quite enjoy the mental challenges of these things" (Roberta Interview 2). She went onto to add that she found the games great fun and a bit addictive, finding herself, "Spending too much time playing silly games on the computer [laughs]" (Roberta Interview 2). This was seen as something she could do because she lived on her own. The ability to play cards was one of the reasons that Alison had purchased her electronic tablet. Olive took a photograph that captured her playing a word game on her computer (Figure 119) and explained that she often had one on the go when she was completing other activities. She explained, "I can do it while I'm doing the mundane things like washing and cleaning and stuff" (Olive Interview 2). Taylor took a photograph of playing games on an electronic tablet (Figure 120) and Natalie referred to playing games on her tablet.

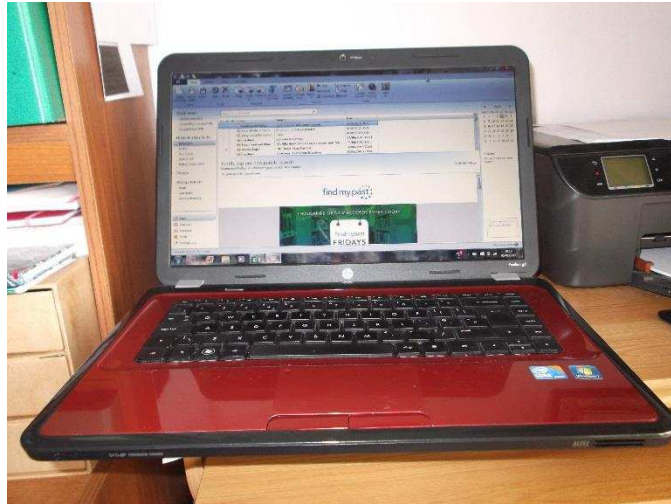


Figure 121

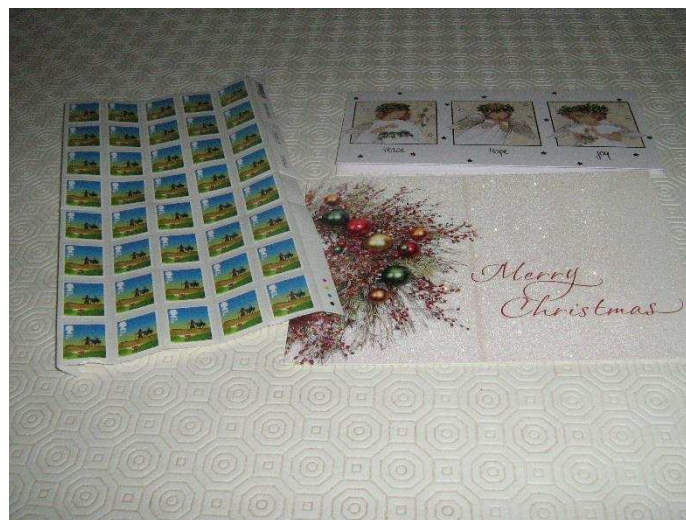


Figure 122

Taylor, Hope and Roberta engaged with technology to complete office type work. Taylor took a photograph of her computer (Figure 121) and explained that she used it mainly for word processing. Hope took a photograph of some postage stamps (Figure 122) that she was using to send her Christmas cards. She explained, “I do my labels on the computer. So I haven’t got to write everybody’s address” (Hope Interview 3). She had also taken on the role of secretary for an organisation she was involved with which required her to produce typed documents. Roberta also used her computer for work associated with her volunteer role, this included creating spreadsheets and writing reports.

Olive and Rebecca both engaged with technology to manage their health. Olive ordered prescriptions over the internet, whilst Rebecca took a photograph when she was in the process

of emailing her GP with her blood pressure readings to facilitate her medication management (not shown here to protect anonymity).



Figure 123

The degree to which the women engaged with banking and shopping online varied. Hope, Lottie and Olive all actively engaged with it. Hope received her bills online and explained how she had searched for and purchased replacement parts for her blinds on the internet whilst discussing her photograph that captured cleaning the windows (Figure 123). Alison and Yvonne spoke less favourably of using the internet to conduct their banking or other activity involving their finances. Alison explained, “I don’t pay for anything on there [pause]. I don’t like that [pause]. That way they can’t nick my money can they?” (Alison Interview 3). Yvonne commented, “I won’t actually ever bank or do anything online, mainly because I, I just feel it’s an invasion into your privacy. I do understand it’s easier for people” (Yvonne Interview 4). She did not buy anything over the internet either. Yvonne spoke of how she felt as though we were losing one to one contact with people and the sense of being able to trust someone.



Figure 124



Figure 125

Engagement with technology also included mobile telephones. Ordella took a photograph of using her mobile telephone (Figure 124). Ordella first had a mobile phone for when she was driving however her use had evolved to become a means of connection with her family, particularly her sister. She explained, “I use it particularly with my sister who is older than me, who is widowed and what’s nice when you’re watching a television programme like Strictly Come Dancing and I know she’s watching, what we do is we send a quick text because you can’t [pause] you don’t want to phone and [pause] I’m going to miss out, so we text a lot” (Ordella Interview 2). Ordella said, “ ... thank goodness for mobile phones and texting ... ” (Ordella Interview 1). Although Ordella conceded, “ ... I'd rather talk to friends rather than send a text, really” (Ordella Interview 4), she added, “ ... you want the tone of the voice, the

tone of the voice is everything” (Ordelia Interview 4). Ordelia spoke of how she did not make full use of the functionality of her mobile telephone. Ordelia explained, “ ... I don’t have any apps. I don’t know what apps are and I’m not really interested in apps. I know there’s all sorts of things I could do with this but it’s ok” (Ordelia Interview 2). Ordelia later added, “I can take photos, and I’ve learned how to send a photo now to somebody else with the right phone” (Ordelia Interview 4). Olive took a photograph of her telephone and keys (Figure 125) to which she attributed the theme of, ‘security and communication’. Olive explained that when she is contacting others she would usually do so over the telephone and that she also uses texting a lot. Whilst Yvonne owned a mobile telephone, she did not give the number out and only used it to text her family. She explained, “ ... I haven’t got the latest one. I’ve got an old one” (Yvonne Interview 4). Taylor spoke of not wanting a mobile telephone that did everything.

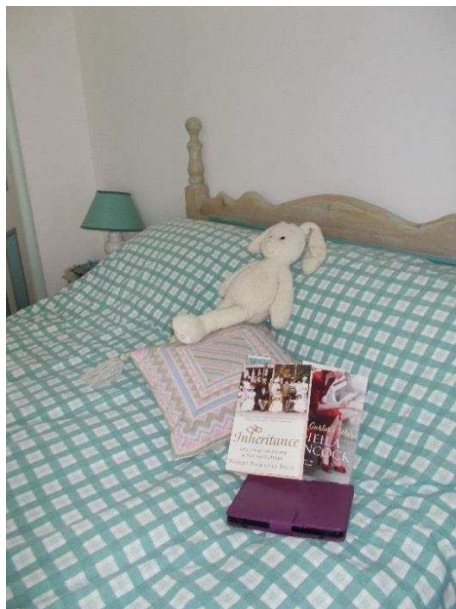


Figure 126



Figure 127

Although all of the women engaged with technological devices, many of them voiced reluctance in being dependent upon them. Taylor explained that she had not put any books onto her electronic tablet because she preferred a proper book. Rebecca took a photograph of her bed (Figure 126) and said that she preferred a proper book, particularly at bedtime, as she does not see it as a good thing to be looking at a screen before bed. However, Rebecca commented that the Kindle was very useful when she went away. Although Roberta would do most of her work on the computer, she spoke of how she quite enjoyed handwriting. Yvonne took a photograph that captured using the telephone (Figure 127). She explained that the telephone was very important to her and that she preferred the landline to a mobile. When asked about her preference in using the landline Yvonne referred to her preference as being linked to the, 'old school' and being, 'old fashioned'. Yvonne commented, "I don't think all the modern technology is that good" (Yvonne Interview 4). Hope said, "... sometimes you just really need to speak to somebody" (Hope Interview 2). Olive spoke of liking to have photographs in her bag because even though, "I've got a tablet now [pause]. But even so, I'm not going to carry both of those around just to show somebody photographs" (Olive Interview 1). Olive added, "... if the machine breaks down, you haven't got anything" (Olive Interview 1).

4.8 The environment of home and living alone

The researcher did not define the parameters of 'home' but the photographs and subsequent interviews demonstrated that the women considered 'home' to include the built property in which they lived and any immediate outside space, such as a garden.

4.8.1 Making choices about what the home looked like

A number of the women referred to being able to make choices about what their home looked like. Lottie referred to her house as being, “ ... terribly old fashioned inside, everybody is redoing this or redoing that or this, but I like it as it is so what the hell!” (Lottie Interview 1). Lottie agreed that she had created the environment that she wanted and questioned, “ ... why would I change it, you know, there is all the hassle and the worry of changing a new suite and carpet, I don't want that!” (Lottie Interview 1). She added, “You can't just do one room [pause]. No and I don't want the hassle” (Lottie Interview 1). Rebecca had similar views to Lottie on redecorating but resigned herself to the fact, “ ... it's in dire need of being redecorated because it must be all of 20/25 years when [husband] decorated it (Rebecca Interview 3). She explained that she was, “ ... not really looking forward to it, but it'll be quite nice to have it in another colour. Like I said, I'm sure that by now my husband would have redone it anyway ... ” (Rebecca Interview 3). Whilst Rebecca planned to change much of the décor she said, “...the one thing I am going to keep is the ceiling. He did the stencilling around the top there” (Rebecca Interview 3). Rebecca also spoke of other future redecorating plans; “ ... my next job is to, um [pause] I think this room will probably need doing, but it's my hall and staircase, which is enormous, as you can see” (Rebecca Interview 1). Whilst Lottie and Rebecca expressed reluctance to redecorate their homes, Ordelia explained that she liked change. The changes that Ordelia may make in the home may include decorating, changing pictures displayed or moving around items of furniture.



Figure 128



Figure 129

Hope and Natalie both referred to how others may perceive their homes, particularly in terms of cleanliness. Hope spoke of her granddaughters visiting her at home and explained that it can take up to an hour and a half to tidy up once they have gone. She commented that she had previously said to her daughter in law, “ ... one day you’ll come and you’ll see my house how it should look” (Hope Interview 2). In contrast, Natalie took two photographs that captured the activity of cleaning (Figure 128 and Figure 129). She explained that she kept her house clean and tidy but emphasised that when people visited they were coming to see her and not her house. She said that if they don’t like how her house is, “ ... there’s the door as far as I’m concerned. It’s the people coming in to see me, not my home” (Natalie Interview 2).



Figure 130



Figure 131

For Rebecca keeping her home clean and tidy was not for others but for herself. She took two photographs that captured gardening (Figure 130, Figure131) and commented, “ As long as my kitchen and bathroom are clean I’m not quite so worried about it. But it was beginning to get me down, and I saw every spare minute I had, if it was fine, I was out in the garden ... ” (Rebecca Interview 2).

Many of the women in this study had various items on display in their communal rooms, such as their lounge. Anne and Ordalia particularly referred to the value they attributed to having photographs in the home. Ordalia felt that as you got older there was more history and more photographs of family events to display. She explained that she had photographs of friends and family on the fridge, in the lounge and in her bedroom. Photographs were valued for the memories that they stimulated, for example happy times at Christmas. Ordalia explained that some photographs got replaced as children grew up to capture the changes in their appearance. For Yvonne it was the presence of personal items in the house that made it a home, “ ... the fact that it is full of all our sort of nick-knacks, life, photos, the books, um yeah, it's my place I think really” (Yvonne Interview 1).



Figure 132



Figure 133



Figure 134

Ordelia and Yvonne reflected on what influenced how they organised their home. Ordelia took a photograph that captured the activity of taking a bath (Figure 132). This led onto a

discussion about her bathroom environment. Ordella explained that the wallpaper behind her in the bathroom was a Laura Ashley print from which she had created the framed artwork. She had also purchased three candles in colours which matched the artwork and wallpaper. Ordella explained, “I like certain colours and I like the balance, you know, if you’re doing the balance of [pause] um, you either have something one, three or five that kind of balance, so again the three candles there” (Ordella Interview 2). In creating these items Ordella suggested that her home was, “Reflecting me, yes, colours and form ...” (Ordella Interview 2). Yvonne took two photographs that captured her doll’s house (Figure 133 and Figure 134) and when she was discussing these she spoke of how engaging with them had led her to realise, “I’m very much around the room. I’m not in the middle” (Yvonne Interview 2). She related this to the organisation of the furniture in her home.

4.8.2 Home as a place eliciting positive feelings



Figure 135



Figure 136



Figure 137

Olive, Rebecca, Ordella and Roberta spoke of how the light in their homes elicited positive feelings. For Olive and Rebecca this was in the form of natural light. Olive took a photograph that captured the sunlight coming through the window in her lounge (Figure 135), she said it made her home feel warmer and more welcoming resulting in a homely atmosphere. Olive also took a photograph of her bed (Figure 136) which she defined as being a nice big bed, “... comfortable, relaxing, it’s got the sun coming through in the morning” (Olive Interview 2). Similarly, Rebecca took a photograph of the sun shining from the front of her house onto the landing in the morning (Figure 137). Rebecca explained that this happened particularly in spring or early summer. If she woke up early at this time of the year, the sun shone through into her bedroom if her door was open. She commented, “... I can sit in bed and I can sort of [pause] it makes a lovely light, just a lovely light” (Rebecca Interview 2). Rebecca saw this as another unique element of her house and so decided to photograph it.

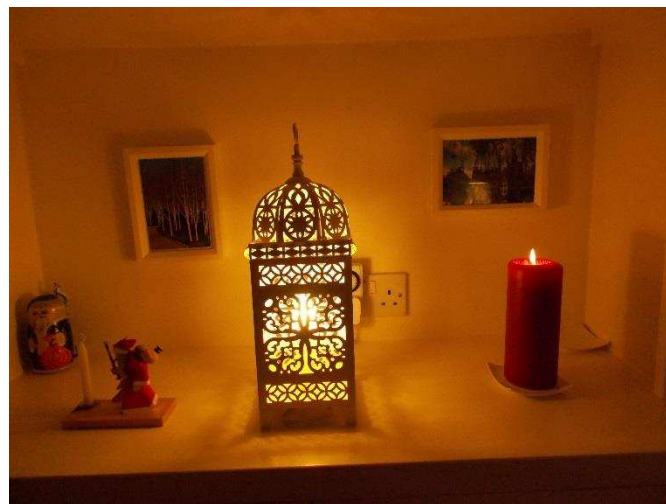


Figure 138



Figure 139

For Ordelia and Roberta the light in their home that elicited positive feelings was not from natural sources. For Ordelia the light that she captured came from candles (Figure 138). She explained that at the time of her December book group meeting she had not had her Christmas tree up but that she did have some candles lit. Ordelia said that she liked candles as they acted to ‘soften a room’. Roberta took a photograph of her Christmas tree at night (Figure 139) and explained, “ ... that was supposed to be the night of it. It’s lovely because it gets reflections in the window” (Roberta Interview 3) an effect that Roberta referred to as being ‘magic’.



Figure 140



Figure 141



Figure 142



Figure 143

Olive, Roberta and Rebecca all referred to the positive feelings elicited by the outside space surrounding their homes. For Olive and Roberta this was about the view that they saw when

they were returning home. Olive took a photograph and spoke of the outdoor space at the front of her home (Figure 140). She commented, "I see it when I come in and it's there whenever I open the door, and it's my space and it's open" (Olive Interview 2). Olive later discussed a photograph that she had taken of her plants (Figure 141) saying, "I like to see them when I'm coming up the path" (Olive Interview 2). Roberta took a photograph of getting the Christmas decorations ready to put up (Figure 142). She explained that once the Christmas tree was in its position it was possible to see it from inside and out which she agreed was welcoming when she came home. For Rebecca the view from her home was valued. She took a photograph that captured the view from her back upstairs room (Figure 143) which included the local windmill. Rebecca saw the windmill as being part of being at home, "You probably tend to take it for granted but it's a familiar view and it's something which you know when I sort of go up and I perhaps draw the curtains or something I look out at it and I suppose it's reassuring that it's there" (Rebecca Interview 2).

Five of the women referred to home as a place eliciting positive feelings of safety. Hope reflected the sentiment expressed by these women commenting, "I feel safe here" (Hope Interview 1). Two of the women referred to precautions that they had taken to help them feel safe because as Hope said, security was important, "... when you're on your own" (Hope Interview 1). This was echoed by Alison who had an alarm system in her bungalow; this included a camera in her hallway which gave her, "A piece of mind ..." (Alison Interview 2). Olive and Yvonne considered what made them feel safe at home. Olive suggested that it could be, "... maybe knowing who's living, who lives next door ..." (Olive Interview 1). For Yvonne, her previous experience helped her to feel safe at home. She explained, "... I think because I had, I had several friends from work, and I was always encouraged with Hubby to go out, um, I've never had that syndrome of coming in, Ah, I've got to open the door and close the door and then I'll be on my own" (Yvonne Interview 1).



Figure 144

For four of the women home elicited the positive feeling of comfort. When asked how Hope would define home she said, “Well, I suppose somewhere where you're comfortable, you know. You don't have to worry about anything” (Hope Interview 1). Lottie had lived in her current property for 40 years and felt that she would not, “ ... feel comfortable anywhere else now” (Lottie Interview 1). Roberta particularly valued her bedroom for the sense of comfort that it provided her. Feeling comfortable at home enabled Olive to be herself. She took a photograph of her dressing gown (Figure 144) and explained how she would wear it for most of the day over her clothes when she was at home. Olive commented that wearing her dressing gown was part of her being at home and the opportunity to just be herself. Olive was wearing her dressing gown when I complete interview 4 with her.

4.8.3 Attachment to home

Lottie and Taylor cited the length of time that they had spent living in their current properties as contributing to their attachment to home. Lottie said, “Well I suppose the length of time isn't it really, I can't say the kids were born here because they weren't” (Lottie Interview 1). When Taylor was asked where she felt had been home she replied, “ ... I suppose if anything it could be this [pause]. You know, 'cause I've sort of been here the longest” (Taylor Interview 1).



Figure 145

Ordelia took a photograph that captured her taking a bath (Figure 145) and as part of our discussion commented, “This place is mine. I mean this is absolutely my home now. It’s not my husband’s home because he didn’t [pause] he wasn’t alive, you know, to come here so this actually reflects me in a way (Ordelia Interview 2).

Rebecca defined her current property as home. She explained that she didn’t, “ ... attach too much to bricks and mortar [pause]. But I am quite attached to this place, I must admit [pause]. And, uh, to the extent that I sort of thought, um, you know, if I become infirm at all, what I can do” (Rebecca Interview 1). When Rebecca was asked what made her feel so attached to her current home, she replied, “Um, well, my husband put an awful lot of work into it” (Rebecca Interview 1).

Yvonne spoke of her current house being her favourite home because, “I think it's something we worked for and um, um, yeah, I think there's a lot of um, I'm going to say love gone into the- yeah, this is, is my favourite I think (Yvonne Interview 1). She added, “It's an achievement and it's something we both worked for so.” (Yvonne Interview 1). When asked what made her house a home Yvonne replied, “ ... um, the fact that it is full of all our sort of nick-knacks, life, photos, the books, um yeah, it's my place I think really [pause]. It's my base um” (Yvonne Interview 1). She explained, “I love my house, it is getting too big ...” (Yvonne Interview 3). She added, “I think when, when he first died, that’s 8 years ago next month, um, a lot of people, I think for something to say rather than really. [pause] They say, ‘What are you going to do, are you going to move?’, and I’d say, oh give me 10 years. So I’ve still got that two year play and I think it’s going to take 10 years to work it out” (Yvonne Interview 3). Yvonne

continued, "I love it so, financially no problems for another couple of years" (Yvonne Interview 1). Yvonne spoke of considering living in Australia for 6 months of a year and spending six months in the UK but said, " ... I don't know that I could actually give up my house and perhaps rent when I came back, I'm not sure" (Yvonne Interview 1).

The attachment, which often exists to home, was apparent when Anne spoke of her enjoyment of holidays. Anne commented, "By the time at the end of the holiday I count the days to come home! (Laughs)" (Anne Interview 1). However, she was unable to articulate why she felt this way.

Whilst a number of the women spoke of their homes as having emotional attachments, Olive referred to her home as fulfilling a practical function, " ... basically, it's, it's more of a storage unit for me and my stuff" (Olive Interview 1). In a later interview Olive said, "Home seems to be where you are [pause] when there's nowhere to go [pause] you know? It's a place to hang your hat really [sigh]" (Olive Interview 4).

4.8.4 Property ownership

Natalie, Alison, Rebecca and Olive discussed property ownership. Natalie, Alison, and Rebecca described how they greatly valued owning a property. These women defined home as a priority; this was captured by Alison who explained, " ... because you've got a roof over your head, haven't you? You can manage. You can live on bread and water if you have to" (Alison Interview 1). Olive was the only one of the 11 women in this study who did not own her property. She spoke of making a considered decision to sell her previous property and explained, " ... I sold up and yeah. I think I, maybe I feel a bit, I feel a little bit more secure actually renting, because if anything goes wrong, I can phone the landlord" (Olive Interview 1).

4.8.5 Organisation of home facilitating engagement in activities



Figure 146

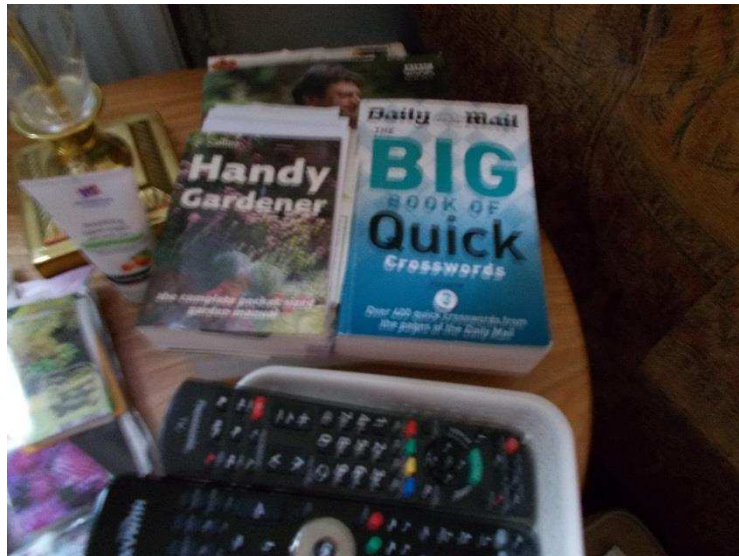


Figure 147



Figure 148

Hope, Rebecca and Olive referred to having the things that they frequently used close to hand at home. All three of the women took photographs that captured the items surrounding the armchair in which they would usually sit. Hope took a photograph of the drawer beside her armchair (Figure 146) and explained this is, “ ... where I sit. All my bits and bobs are in there” (Hope Interview 3). Rebecca also took a photograph of the items beside her armchair (Figure 147). Olive took a photograph of her settee in the lounge (Figure 148) but spoke of how she would always sit in her armchair, which was positioned so that she could see the television and the window. She explained that she had everything that she might need around her armchair.

4.8.6 Workspaces in the home



Figure 149

Roberta and Olive spoke of having workspaces within their home environment. Roberta took a photograph that captured playing games on the computer (Figure 149). Roberta said that she found it useful to have an office at home. As well as a space in which she could use her laptop, her office was also somewhere that she kept everything organised, this included the presence and use of a filing cabinet, printer and shredder. Roberta spoke of how being organised had been a key part of her training to be an accountant and subsequently within the work environment. She did not like to be disorganised and liked to know where everything was so that she could access items easily. Olive had a desk in her lounge where she spent quite a lot of her time. When I suggested that her desk might be her place of work, she agreed.



Figure 150



Figure 151

Whilst Hope did not currently have a workspace in her home, it was something she aspired to. Hope took a photograph of an upstairs room currently used for storing items for her granddaughters and explained that she had planned to change this room into a workspace once the girls had grown up a bit (Figure 150). However, when discussing her photograph of her computer (Figure 151) she added that she used her computer downstairs on her lap because she is comfortable there.

4.8.7 Visitors in the home

4.8.7.1 Preparing to have visitors



Figure 152

For Yvonne preparing to have visitors in the home required her to ensure the cleaning was completed. She took a photograph of hoovering the mats in the hallway (Figure 152) and explained that she hoovers once a week although would like to say that she does it four times a week!

Phase 3 of this study occurred over the festive period and as a result, a number of the photographs taken by the women captured the presence or absence of Christmas decorations and were commonly linked to preparing to have visitors in the home.



Figure 153



Figure 154



Figure 155

For Ordelia preparing to have people in the home around Christmas was about decorating her home for the festive period. Ordelia took photographs that captured making decorations for Christmas (Figure 153 and Figure 154) and explained, “Every year I do something a bit different” (Ordelia Interview 3). Ordelia took a photograph of her Christmas tree (Figure 154) and explained that she usually had a real Christmas tree, even if she goes away, this was because, “Sometimes people pop in for coffee ...” (Ordelia Interview 3). Ordelia also took a photograph of her Christmas house (fig 155) that she would place small gifts in for her grandchildren.



Figure 156



Figure 157

Taylor took a photograph of decorating for Christmas (Figure 156). Taylor explained that she had put her decorations up ready for her son visiting the weekend that had just passed and commented, “I mean I’m quite happy with just this little tree because I don’t see anybody [pause]. I mean they came up on Saturday and I suppose they went half past three, four ...” (Taylor Interview 3). Later in the conversation, we returned to the topic of Christmas decorations. Taylor said that she did not always put her big Christmas tree up because, “Well, if nobody’s coming, what’s the point?” (Taylor Interview 3). Taylor explained that there were items that would always be put out, such as something that her husband had made and her advent calendar (Figure 157).

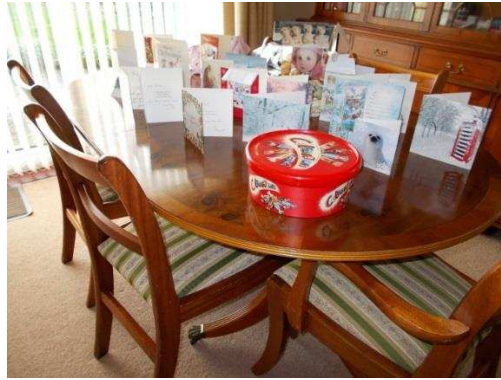


Figure 158



Figure 159

For those who were not expecting visitors there was a notable absence of preparation, particular in terms of decorating for Christmas. Anne, Olive, and Lottie all took photographs that captured not decorating the home for Christmas. Anne (Figure 158) and Olive (Figure 159) both took a photograph of their Christmas cards. I asked Anne if she had put any other decorations up to which she replied that the kids had put a few bits up but that she did not have a Christmas tree up when she was on her own. This sentiment was echoed by Olive who explained that she did not put Christmas decorations up because, “Well nobody comes. Nobody comes [pause]. I prefer to go out (Olive Interview 3).

Lottie took a photograph that captured her Christmas decoration (photograph not shown here to protect anonymity). Of this photograph Lottie said, “This is um my Christmas decoration. I didn’t put anything else up at all” (Lottie Interview 3). Lottie added that in previous years she had put up a Christmas tree in her hall but explained, “...I was so not into Christmas this year. But um that was it. I thought I’m not doing it” (Lottie Interview 3).



Figure 160



Figure 161

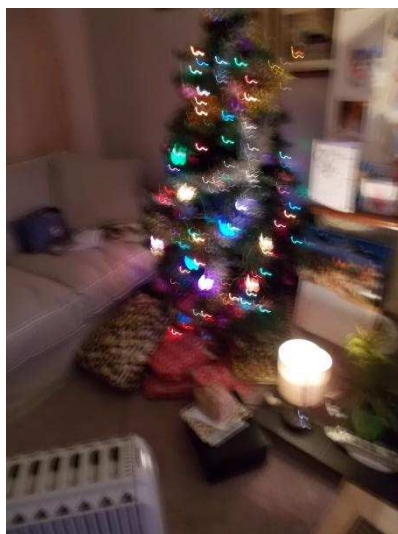


Figure 162

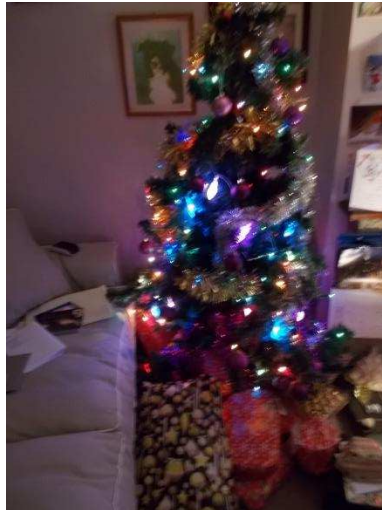


Figure 163

Not expecting visitors did not always mean not preparing the home for Christmas. Rebecca and Natalie explained that they had decorated their homes regardless of whether they were expecting visitors. The items they displayed were usually meaningful because of their link to a cherished memory or loved one. Rebecca displayed limited Christmas decorations (Figure 160), she explained that, “ ... I always put up my crib scene [pause]. For the simple reason my husband made the wooden, this, the wooden structure and it takes apart, so you can take the top off and turn, and store it sort of flat and everything [pause]. So I always put that up, and um when we, he made it we bought little porcelain figures” (Rebecca Interview 3). Natalie took five photographs which were linked to Christmas (Figure 161, Figure 162, Figure 163; two photographs not shown here to protect anonymity). Natalie had decided that she would decorate her home for Christmas this year and there was a sense that this was more for her than for any visitors that she may have in the home. However, she acknowledged that she had enjoyed the positive comments that she had received from those who had visited her over the Christmas period. Natalie explained, “I really made an effort this year ... ” (Natalie Interview 3).



Figure 164



Figure 165

Roberta took a photograph of her nativity scene (Figure 164), as it was something she really liked; this was clearly not about preparing for visitors. Roberta commented, “I like putting them up. I think they are lovely, enjoy them” (Roberta Interview 3) Roberta took a photograph of her Christmas decoration boxes and a bare tree in her lounge (Figure 165) and explained that she had an artificial tree that she had had, “ ... for many, many years” (Roberta Interview 3) and agreed that it came with many memories.



Figure 166



Figure 167



Figure 168

Natalie and Rebecca both spoke of not preparing their home specifically for visitors. Rebecca explained that she maintained her home for the benefit of her own feelings. She took a photograph that captured her garden (Figure 166) and commented, “As long as my kitchen and

bathroom are clean I'm not quite so worried about it" (Rebecca Interview 2). Natalie took two photographs that captured the activity of cleaning (Figure 167 and Figure 168). She explained that she kept her house clean and tidy but emphasised that when people visited they were coming to see her and not her house. She said that if they don't like how her house is, " ... there's the door as far as I'm concerned. It's the people coming in to see me, not my home" (Natalie Interview 2).

4.8.7.2 Having visitors in the home

When I asked Ordelia if she enjoyed having people to stay she replied, "I do, yes. Sometimes, um, some relatives are slightly easier than others" (Ordelia Interview 4). Yvonne spoke a great deal about the presence of others in the home when her husband was being cared for. Yvonne explained that they had to have equipment and 24-hour care in the home. Yvonne said that having the carers in the home was hard to get used to. She described how, "You'd be having a shower and you'd hear the front door go about half past seven and you think, that's good, she's early, the next one, and you come down and your front door is ajar but there wasn't anybody answering. I'd say, 'What happened to the front door, did you leave it open to the night girl?' 'Oh no we do that so the second carer can come in for the day'. I went, 'Oh, this door is closed'. I'm upstairs, so it was kind of ... " (Yvonne Interview 3).

Natalie spoke of how she and her husband used to have the children from the youth club in their home. She expressed her pleasure at now having friends or family around for meals, " ... I can, indulge on them, and and give them the things, you know the, I wouldn't normally eat" (Natalie Interview 1). She explained that at Church she would, " ... once a month, I'll go around to three other ladies if I, if I know they're widows, and they come back on a Sunday, and we have a roast dinner. Because how many of us will cook a roast dinner? Not many!" (Natalie Interview 1).



Figure 169



Figure 170

Lottie and Ordelia both described how their hobbies meant that at times they would have groups of people in their home. Lottie took a photograph that captured playing bridge with friends (Figure 169), although they were not present at the time. Lottie played bridge with a group of three others and the location of the games rotated around the homes of the group members so they went to Lottie's home about once every four weeks. Ordelia took a photograph that captured her book group (Figure 170). Ordelia said that there are 12 people in the book group and that 10 came to the Christmas meeting at her house.

Taylor, Roberta and Hope expressed mixed views about having visitors, particularly those that stayed a few days. Taylor said, "Sometimes it's nice to just have the freedom, but other times, like I've been, been away, and to have company [pause]. You know. It's a mixture really." (Taylor Interview 1). She added, "I don't enjoy being on my own" (Taylor Interview 2) and continued, "I like my own company sometimes but I would love [pause] and you know, when a friend comes to stay, in the end when she's going I think, 'Oh thank God for that'. But it's been nice having her you know?" (Taylor Interview 2). This sentiment was echoed by Roberta, "... even when I've had visitors, however much I like them, perhaps they have come to stay for a couple of days, I'm quite glad to see them go [laughs]" (Roberta Interview 2). Hope stated that a weekend with people in her home was often enough because, "Well, I find after a weekend, you said all you got to say [pause]. You know, and you want to get on with your own things" (Hope Interview 1). As summed up by Hope, "You know, they say the best thing about having visitors is listening to them zipping up their suitcases on the day they're going [laughs]" (Hope Interview 1).



Figure 171

Ordelia spoke of being a late riser and that it became more apparent to her when she had her sister to stay who would usually be up and dressed by the time Ordelia got up. Taylor took a photograph that captured the television with the subtitles turned on (Figure 171) and aired her frustration when her family come around to her house and turned the subtitles off.

4.8.7.3 After their visitors had gone



Figure 172

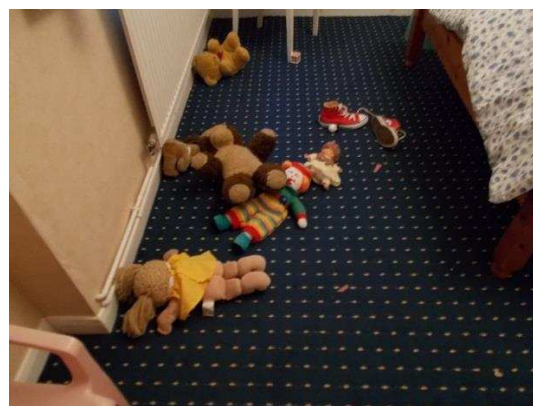


Figure 173

Anne and Hope described what it was like for them after their visitors had gone, specifically their grandchildren. Anne spoke of how her granddaughters would frequently visit her and how she enjoyed them being in her home, although she did need to sit down once they had gone. She took two photographs of her home after her granddaughters had visited along with her daughter (Figure 172, Figure 173) and commented, “It, well, it was utter chaos” (Anne Interview 3). Hope painted a similar picture as Anne. Hope explained, “ ... when they go it looks as if I’ve been burgled. So I’ve got all that clearing to do ... ” (Hope Interview 4).

4.8.8 The value of sound and silence in the home

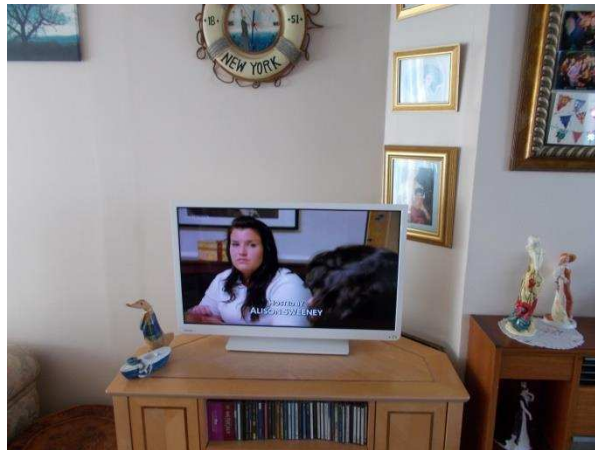


Figure 174



Figure 175



Figure 176

Six of the women in this study referred to using the television or radio as background noise when they were at home alone. Alison liked to have the television on because, “I just like the background noise, you know. I don’t sit there religiously and watch it. Unless it is something I really want to watch [pause]. It’s just on” (Alison Interview 2). Alison commented that she always had something on because, “I find it too boring that way. I think a bit depressing. So quiet ...” (Alison Interview 2). Yvonne also captured this sentiment when she discussed her photograph of her television (Figure 174). Taylor took a photograph that captured doing a jigsaw puzzle (Figure 175) and having the television on (Figure 176). The television was, “ ... on for company [pause] but I’m doing a jigsaw puzzle and not really watching what’s on” (Taylor Interview 2). Taylor added, “There’s somebody there all the time. It was, otherwise the place is so quiet” (Taylor Interview 2).



Figure 177



Figure 178

Natalie took a photograph that captured playing vinyl (Figure 177). She explained that she would listen to music, the radio or the television as she found it comforting because, “It's so quiet in here” (Natalie Interview 1). During interview 3 Natalie commented that she would have the television on when she was knitting although she would not be watching it; it would be for background noise. Lottie described how she had her radio on all day for company, usually Radio 4 or Radio 3. Lottie later commented, “You can have my television, if you wish, but the radio, I'd hate to be without the radio” (Lottie Interview 4). Olive took a photograph that captured playing music (Figure 178) and said that she always had the radio on in her kitchen, although her reason for doing this was not explicitly discussed.

Whilst both Olive and Natalie spoke of valuing the presence of background noise, they both referred to also valuing times of silence. A sentiment captured by Olive who commented that sometimes she valued the ‘peace and quiet’.

4.8.9 Desire to remain in their own home in the future

Hope considered her home environment and how this would feature in her future, she commented, “I think oh, well. When the time comes I'll worry about it then if I can't get up the stairs and there's nobody here to carry me up there [pause] I'll have to think about doing something else” (Hope Interview 4).

Lottie intended to stay living in her home in the future, she stated that she planned to be, “ ... staying here. I'm not going anywhere” (Lottie Interview 4). This was due to the number of people that she had heard say that moving, “ ... was the wrong decision” (Lottie Interview 4).



Figure 179

Rebecca took a photograph of the view from the back upstairs window of her home (Figure 179). When I asked if she thought she would ever move from her current property she responded, “Not unless I really have to” (Rebecca Interview 3). Rebecca added, “ ... I am quite attached to this place, I must admit” (Rebecca Interview 1). She had considered plans for the future which would help her to stay in her home, these included, “A stair-lift in if I had to, um, I could pay somebody to come in and clean, and probably somebody to do the garden as well” (Rebecca Interview 1). Rebecca later added, “ ... I want to stay in the house” (Rebecca Interview 4).

Of where she lived Yvonne said, “Um, I think the house is getting too big, um now I'm widowed, um but I love it so, financially no problems for another couple of years [pause]. And so I love it and so I can't see myself going” (Yvonne Interview 1). She added, “I suppose if I'm truly honest, ideal world would be six months in Australia, six months here. Um, might come off, might not. It's a pipe dream” (Yvonne Interview 1). Yvonne commented, “ ... but I do say I've had my life to a point. Um, but there's still more to live” (Yvonne Interview 1). Yvonne acknowledged that moving house would not just affect her and explained how, “I did say to the children when their dad died as a kind of, I'm going to say warning, or um, not quite sure what word to use really. I did say to them, ‘I'll give it ten years’, and I think I did that with a view to should I decide to move I can say to them, ‘I did kind of warn you’” (Yvonne Interview 1).

For Roberta her desire for staying in her own home was not as apparent. She said, “I don't really mind whether I get put into the home or what the hell happens. I mean, it happens, doesn't it?” (Roberta Interview 4).

4.9 Using photo elicitation from the perspective of the women

4.9.1 Prior experience with photography

Although almost all of the women in this study had photographs on display in public areas of their homes, only Ordelia, Rebecca and Olive spoke of the value that they attributed to photographs in their lives. Ordelia explained, “ ... I have got 20 or 30 photo albums (Ordelia Interview 2), she continued, “ ... I have got an album, you know, for each year ... ” (Ordelia Interview 2); a process which was started in about 1984. Ordelia said, “It’s a way of looking at things that we’ve done together or if I have done or the children have done and so I said if there was a fire I just want to take all my photos” (Ordelia Interview 2). Rebecca said, “ ... I like taking photographs and I took some nice ones while I was in Australia” (Rebecca Interview 4). She added, “ ... I've got photograph, probably said this before, photograph albums in there that I've got of my Mum and Dad's wedding” (Rebecca Interview 4).

Olive spoke of how, “ ... I've got photographs in my bag, and they, you know, the, [granddaughter] knows that I like to have photographs, proper photographs printed” (Olive Interview 1). Rebecca also referred to her preference for printed photographs. Her reason for this preference was, “Because in years to come, um, you know, people say, ‘Oh, you can have it on, um, a USB’, all this that and the other. I said, ‘Well, yes you can do, but are you going to have the technology to access it?’” (Rebecca Interview 4).

For some of the other women their prior experience surrounding photography was more limited. Alison spoke of how, “ ... I can take the camera away with me, and it would come back and it would be the same as when I went” (Alison Interview 4). She explained that this was because, “I'm going to enjoy meself, not take photos” (Alison Interview 4). Of her engagement in the method of photo-elicitation, Roberta commented, “It was quite fun doing because I haven't taken photographs in years. I don't have a camera” (Roberta Interview 4). Alison and Lottie also did not own a camera. Early in the study Yvonne explained, “So all my friends are trying to get me to chan- I threaten my children, ‘Please don't buy me a modern camera’ (laughter)” (Yvonne Interview 2). Her friends bought Yvonne a digital camera as a birthday present between phases 3 and 4 of this study.

4.9.2 How the women constructed their photographs

Roberta explained that when she was taking the photographs for the study, “You've got to think about what, how's this going to look visually and how's it going to relate to an activity [pause] so there was a bit more content” (Roberta Interview 4).



Figure 180



Figure 181



Figure 182

Roberta spoke of the challenge in capturing activities in photographs and commented, “ ... it had to be, um, almost like a portrait [pause] of an activity” (Roberta Interview 4). She cited the following example, “ ... for instance, making a casserole [pause] you start off with the ingredients and then the cooking [pause] and then so, so, y- y- you've got to write a story almost (Roberta Interview 4) (fig 180, fig 181 , fig 182). Roberta found herself considering,

“How can I explain to somebody through just a visual medium [pause] rather than putting words to it [pause] and action” (Roberta Interview 4). Taylor found a way of capturing action shots of the activities she photographed by including her hand in the image.

Olive explained that on two occasions, when photographing her cigarettes and making a hot drink, she had displayed the items in a way that they would not usually be kept, or used in her home. This was because she wanted to show exactly what they were.

4.9.3 Discussing the focus of activities in the home

Roberta, Hope, and Lottie commented about the focus on activities that occurred within the home. Roberta said, “Um, I wondered whether, I mean you said photographs within the home environment. I wondered whether you wanted more of what I did outside the home” (Roberta Interview 4). When the focus of the photographs was re-explained, emphasising the focus on activities in the home, Roberta commented, “ ... I do wonder that about some people. I walk around the estate and the houses are closed. Maybe there's a light, but there's a curve and then you think, what have they going on to [pause]. Particularly some of the older people. I mean you don't see them out all that [pause]. Or they're just sitting in the front of the box or what are they doing?” (Roberta Interview 4).

Hope explained, “Because I thought in the beginning when you said I want to, I want to know what you do. I thought, oh, that's all right. I can take my camera to table tennis group and then you said, ‘Oh, no. I want to know what you do in the home’ [pause]. So that was, that was, very limited wasn't it?” (Hope Interview 4). For Lottie focusing on activities in the home, “ ... was quite hard to get your head round” (Lottie Interview 4).

4.9.4 Photographs as a means of capturing everyday activities

Alison, Anne and Taylor spoke of how they carried on with their normal lives and activities whilst taking the photographs for the study. Anne felt that being asked to take photographs meant that she could provide, “ ... a bit of an insight into the kind of life that you led” (Anne Interview 4). Alison commented that she carried on as normal and Anne stated, “ ... it was the same that I always do” (Anne Interview 4). Taylor explained how she had actioned what she had been asked to do, “When you just said to me, you know, ‘What the activities you do’, so as I did an activity I thought, ‘Oh take a photo’, and that's it” (Taylor Interview 4). The systematic approach described by Taylor was also reflected in Lottie's approach; she explained that she had, “ ... tried to do my life in a week” (Lottie Interview 4). Yvonne and Hope both referred to not making anything up when taking their photographs, for example, Hope explained that she had not started any new hobbies to impress me.

Later in the conversation Taylor admitted, “ ... that the winter one, okay I knew you were coming so right, decorations out, tree out, Christmas card doing, that was planned because they are the activities, so I knew I could photograph them, they're different to what I photographed in the summer” (Taylor Interview 4). She added, “ ... the decorations may not have gone up quite as early as they did, I mean they'll go up but perhaps not quite as early because I needed a photograph of them” (Taylor Interview 4).

Hope and I discussed why the use of observation to gather information in the study had been discounted. Hope commented, “Because people wouldn't be doing what they do” (Hope Interview 4). Hope provided a couple of examples of how it would have been difficult for me to have observed her doing everything she did over a pre-defined time period, “When I can't sleep. I get up and do something now and then I go back to bed [pause]. You know, I can, be, empty my dishwasher say at half past four in the morning. You know, I'm just lying there doing nothing and I'm bored to tears [pause]. So, you might as well get up and do something [pause]. And then I usually go back to sleep for a bit ... ” (Hope Interview 4).

Lottie, Hope and Rebecca referred to their photographs as being mundane in nature. Of her second set of photographs Lottie said, “I knew that it was all repetitious. You know. You, you, I try to think of something different, but it wasn't there” (Lottie Interview 3). When she discussed her first set of photographs, Hope commented, “I just find it amazing that you find it interesting (laughs)” (Hope Interview 2). Rebecca commented, “It just seemed a little bit what I'd call mundane, but then I suppose, um [pause]. Just sort of day-to-day living, you know, it's it's important to me, um, but when it's sort of written down, you think, ‘Hmm, that looks a bit mundane, doesn't it?’ You know about different things. But, you know, the things that I photographed and I mentioned to you sort of when I think about it, are quite important to me” (Rebecca Interview 4).

4.9.5 Photographs inspiring discussions

Ordelia had been initially apprehensive about the role of the photographs, however by the end she commented, “ ... I felt that, that photographs were important” (Ordelia Interview 4). She described how her appreciation for the photographs had grown, “I wasn't sure to begin with. I wasn't sure. I don't know quite how I'm going to be presenting this but gradually I got into it [pause] and realized that, you know, you could open up what you do by, with photographs” (Ordelia Interview 4). Roberta echoed the way in which Ordelia felt the photographs had been useful in this study, “ ... I think the photographs helped because it kind of focuses what you're doing” (Roberta Interview 4). She added, “It was a trigger to go on to something else”

(Roberta Interview 4). Roberta also felt that the photographs gave, “ ... you a better talking point if you've got something to say [pause] rather than just talking” (Roberta Interview 4).

Rebecca came to appreciate the depth of information that a photograph offered visually and commented, “It's funny, until you look at the photo, you don't always appreciate what's in [it]” (Rebecca Interview 2). Rebecca later said that the photographs, “ ... sort of embellished the whole thing. It sort of gave, gave me a chance to sort of think about, you know, why this photograph and that sort of thing. Um, it sort of probably enhanced the [pause] your research I suppose” (Rebecca Interview 4). A view she later reinforced by adding, “Yes, I think the photographs did enhance it actually” (Rebecca Interview 4).

4.9.6 Photographs facilitating reflection

For Rebecca, Natalie, Taylor and Hope the process of taking and talking about their photographs had stimulated a process of reflection. Rebecca explained how her engagement in the study had, “ ... made me think quite a bit actually. Sort of look at in a different perspective I must admit” (Rebecca Interview 4).

Natalie found it, “Interesting to know what I do do, to be honest [pause]. You know, over the period of time [pause] of what I, of what I've actually achieved with myself to be quite honest” (Natalie Interview 4). She added, “ ... you do things and you don't hon-, at times, don't realize you're doing it [pause]. Especially when you're on your own ...” (Natalie Interview 4). This was echoed by Taylor who explained, “It made me think, ‘What do I do? Oh yes I do do that don't I?’” (Taylor Interview 4). Taylor added that you, “ ... don't realise what you are doing ... ” (Taylor Interview 4). Natalie, Anne, Yvonne, Taylor and Hope all expressed surprise at how busy they were.

4.9.7 Having two opportunities to take photographs

Taylor, Ordelia and Lottie felt that taking the second set of photographs was more challenging than the first set. Taylor suggested that this was because, “ ... I'm thinking, ‘Oh God what can I do extra in the second lot? Ah it's Christmas’” (Taylor Interview 4). This concern led Taylor to completing Christmas related activities earlier than perhaps she would normally do, so that she could capture the activity in a photograph. Of her second set of photographs, Lottie observed that, “Yeah. And, I knew that it was all repetitious. You know. You, you, I try to think of something different, but it wasn't there” (Lottie Interview 3). Although Lottie did concede, “I was okay with the second lot” (Lottie Interview 4) which she agreed was due to her increased familiarity with the process involved. This was further reinforced by my input, Lottie recalled, “ ... you'd said that they were all right” (Lottie Interview 4).

Once their first set of photographs had been discussed, Yvonne and Taylor both referred to photographs that they were considering taking during the second round of photo-elicitation. Yvonne said, “Yeah, there was another couple of things that I thought that I did, um, which, I, I’ll think for next time, I think, if I can do them. Yeah” (Yvonne Interview 2). Taylor spoke of how she made the hats for innocent bottles around Christmas and commented, “So that will be on the Christmas photographs” (Taylor Interview 2). Taylor later added that she had some ideas for the Christmas photographs, “Well I thought, no I won’t do that this one this time” (Taylor Interview 2).

Alison and Yvonne spoke of having taken duplicate photographs during the two rounds of photo-elicitation. Alison took three photographs the same in round two of the photo-elicitation process and questioned, “How have I could done three of him? They all look the same” (Alison Interview 3). On completion of round two of photo-elicitation, Yvonne commented that there was, “ ... probably loads I could have done but it’s all what you had before really” (Yvonne Interview 3).

4.9.8 Photography skills: personal reflections

Alison and Natalie both spoke of being pleased with the photographs they had taken. When discussing a photograph she had taken of her dog, Alison commented, “I was quite pleased with that” (Alison Interview 2), in reference to the quality of the photograph that she had taken. Natalie observed, “I’m getting better at taking photos” (Natalie Interview 3). Alison and Yvonne referred to liking the cameras that had been lent to them during the study, as they were easy to use.

Natalie and Rebecca both referred to having enjoyed taking the photographs for the study. When asked if she had enjoyed taking the photographs Natalie replied, “Well, yeah, yeah, so long as I, I, I, cause I didn’t take anything of me. I didn’t mind taking photos of what I’d done [pause]. Because I looked at that and thought to myself, ‘Well, that’s not bad’. I really have achieved doing it, and I know that that blanket wa-, was [pause] I was giving it with love, and they’ve used [pause]. And things like that. So what I’ve done [pause]. And I’ve enjoyed doing it” (Natalie Interview 4). When I asked if Rebecca had enjoyed taking the photographs, she replied, “Yes, I did actually” (Rebecca Interview 4).

Anne, Yvonne, Taylor and Rebecca all referred to not being happy with the quality of the photographs that they had taken. Anne referred to a photograph that she was unable to identify and commented, “I suppose it clicked and ... ” (Anne Interview 3). Yvonne said of one of her photographs, “ ... I didn’t photograph them very well ... ” (Yvonne Interview 2). Taylor

said, “ ... I wasn't happy with the ones I took the second time but I think it's because, I think I might have used a different camera [pause]. Because it was darker as well and we were indoors and, but they showed what I was doing that's the thing.” (Taylor Interview 4). When she discussed her photograph of the windmill viewed from her back bedroom, Rebecca commented, “I wanted it to be a better photograph, but we didn't have a decent sunset ... ” (Rebecca Interview 2).

Alison spoke of how she had not used all of the functions on the camera and explained, “ ... I won't mess about, I didn't go back to see what they was like as I cleared them off” (Alison Interview 4).

Natalie described herself as, “ ... not good at photography” (Natalie Interview 4) although demonstrated a desire to improve her skills when she said, “I wish I was a better photographer [pause] cause I would do that as a hobby” (Natalie Interview 4). Not being knowledgeable about photography and not feeling as though she could ask her son to help her, prevented Natalie from pursuing this activity as a hobby.

4.9.9 Forgetting to take photographs

Alison and Taylor both referred to forgetting to take photographs for the study. Alison explained, “ ... I used to forget to take them, didn't I, and then it used to be, ‘Oh, she's coming, I better take some’” (Alison Interview 4). Similarly, Taylor explained, “Yeah and then I suddenly I think, ‘Oh God, the weeks nearly up I better put a few photos on’” (Taylor Interview 4).

For Hope the challenge on occasions was recalling why she had taken a photograph. When looking at her photographs during interview 3, Hope commented, “ ... I can't remember taking that” or “I don't know why I've taken this” (Hope Interview 3).

4.9.10 Perceived benefits of engaging in the study

Natalie, Hope and Roberta spoke of how their engagement in the study meant that they had been given a voice; an opportunity to share their own experiences and views. Natalie commented, “You know, because not often you get [pause]. You know. And to be honest, not often do we get a young person asking us about how we feel” (Natalie Interview 4). She continued, “You're a voice for us ... ” (Natalie Interview 4).

For Hope her involvement in the study meant that she could challenge the views held by others, she commented, “I supposed the interesting bit is that people have a funny idea about people. You know, we're all sitting knitting all day and [pause]. Some people, you know, think

you can't walk without a walking brain or [pause]. You know. That sort of thing [pause]. You, you do what you can at any age, don't you, so" (Hope Interview 4).

For Roberta she valued the fact, "It's so much easier talking to somebody who's evidently interested [pause] rather than somebody's who just there, you're just ticking off a list of questions that, you know, okay, next" (Roberta Interview 4).

For some of the women their reason for engaging in this study was to support me. Rebecca commented, "I'm glad more than anything that it's been of use to you" (Rebecca Interview 4). The desire to support my learning was the reason Alison cited for taking part in the study, she said, "I don't know. I thought, 'Well, everybody got to learn something, don't they'" (Alison Interview 4).

Yvonne, Hope, Taylor and Rebecca hoped that they had given me what I needed. On several occasions Yvonne said, " ... I hope I gave you what you were needing" (Yvonne Interview 4), or something very similar. Hope commented that taking part in the study was not difficult particularly regarding, "Taking photographs, but I might have thought, 'Am I doing enough for what she wants?' Have I got to start new hobbies so that I can impress her maybe. Might, might, might have done" (Hope Interview 4). Hope said, "I didn't see what you were getting out of it, frankly ... Because it seemed a bit, well with the photo just discussing them [pause]. I suppose because they were mine, I thought they were a bit boring, but probably, hopefully, you found them interesting" (Hope Interview 4). Hope later clarified that she had not taken up new hobbies and she felt that had she done so, " ... that wouldn't have been fair to your study" (Hope Interview 4). Taylor commented, "Well I didn't really know what you wanted" (Taylor Interview 2). Rebecca said, "I just hope that what we've done is of use to you. That's the main thing" (Rebecca Interview 4). She added, "You know, your time and my time is not being wasted" (Rebecca Interview 4).

4.9.11 Views of the women on continuing to take photographs after the study

When asked if taking photographs was something she would like to continue to do, Natalie replied, "Oh, yeah, if I could" (Natalie Interview 4), although cited challenges in her current level of knowledge and understanding that she felt would inhibit her doing so.

In contrast, Roberta answered the same question by saying there was no point, "Well, what am I going to photograph. I'm not going anywhere. I'm not doing anything very much. It'd be the same old thing over and over (Roberta Interview 4). She continued, "I have so many

photographs from all my travels and adventures [pause] that I don't need anymore” (Roberta Interview 4).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the findings that were generated from the 4 phases of this research study. I will draw on the literature and research presented in chapter 2 to establish the significance of my findings. The aim of this study was;

To explore the experience of living alone for 11 women aged 70 – 80 years.

The 4 objectives to facilitate the achievement of this aim were;

- 1. To understand how participants define their own experience of being an older woman**
- 2. To understand older women as occupational beings**
- 3. To explore home as a place for occupational engagement**
- 4. To consider the potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement**

Understanding how women define their own experience of being an older woman

In this study I wanted older women to have the opportunity to define their own experiences because there is a paucity of literature exploring the experiences of older women from their own perspective. I provided the women in my study with the opportunity to define their own lived experience of being an older woman; using interpretive phenomenological and feminist research (e.g. Creswell 2013; Ramazanglu and Holland 2002). The first objective was, '**To understand how participants define their own experience of being an older woman**'. The findings included what the women considered being old to be, their experience of the natural ageing process, the changes they faced in their personal health, and how they felt they were perceived as an older woman by others. The women also discussed the unique experience of caring for and losing a partner.

5.1 Being an older woman

This study concerned the lived experiences of older women aged 70-80 years; a time that is considered to be a transition between independence and increased frailty (DH 2001). I was interested to understand whether the women considered themselves to be an older woman

and when they considered the transition into later life to occur. In the literature there is little consensus surrounding when a woman becomes an older woman. However it is agreed that old age is socially constructed (Vincent 2003), and that in the United Kingdom it is usually accepted to start around the age of 65 years (Kite and Wagner 2002). The 11 women in my study were all aged 70-80 years, which in the United Kingdom is commonly considered as being old. Four of the women referred to how old they felt and all expressed that they did not feel their chronological age, with one of the women commenting that she did not know how she should feel. In interpretive phenomenological studies such as this, the individual experiencing the phenomenon of interest is valued for their ability to define their lived experience (Dowling 2007; Starks and Trinidad 2007; Balls 2009; Creswell 2013; Tuohy et al 2013). However the women in this study found it challenging to articulate the contribution that age makes to being an older woman. This finding is not unique to this study. Whilst the women in this study did not consider themselves to be old, they saw others as being so. This was particularly apparent in a discussion with Hope who described how she would refer to the 'elderly people' at her table tennis club but commented, "... that doesn't include me" (Hope Interview 4). This notion that an older person is 'someone else' is echoed in the findings from the study by Queniart and Charpentier (2011) where they found that none of the 25 women over 65 that they interviewed viewed themselves as old, but viewed others as being so. If an older woman is always seen as being 'someone else' then this raises questions about who is actually able to define what it is to be an older woman. Whilst the findings from my study have provided additional evidence of the complex nature of defining when a woman becomes an older woman, it has not added any clarity about the exact time at which a woman becomes old.

5.1.2 Changes in the body and mind of an ageing woman

Whilst there is little consensus in the literature about when a woman is older, there is agreement that with increased age comes changes in the body and mind. Beckett and Taylor (2010) remind us that ageing is a biological fact, and whilst there are many universal features of the ageing process, there can be considerable variation in how these features evolve and affect individuals. The World Health Organisation (2015) explains that the variations in the individual experience of ageing occur because of genetics, lifestyle choices, and environmental factors. Feldman (1999) used creative writing to explore how older women perceived their health and wellbeing. She concluded that the experiences of the older women were best viewed on a continuum to demonstrate that there were positive and challenging aspects that featured in their experiences of the ageing process.

Seven of the women in this study spoke of the changes that they had observed in themselves and their abilities as they had grown older. These changes included having less energy, a decline in mobility, and a slowing of their cognitive processes. Whilst the women acknowledged that these age related changes had implications for their engagement in everyday activities, they spoke of them with an air of acceptance. The women considered ageing to be a normal process, and echoed findings from the study by Feldman (1999), that demonstrated that the experience of ageing was both positive and challenging. This varied experience was considered by the women in my study to reflect their experiences across their life course, and not just a consequence of getting older.

It is purported by authors such as Garner (2013), that women in developed countries are valued for their youthful appearance which inspires many to seek ways to reduce the observable features of ageing. Lottie was the only woman who referred to the changes in her physical appearance; she commented that she did not like how skinny she had become and how she had “lost her boobs” (Lottie Interview 1) as a result. The other ten women made no reference to their physical appearance. This may suggest that once they enter later life this is not a concern that they have. It would be interesting to explore the attitudes that the women had towards ageing earlier in their life; this would help to establish whether a change of attitude occurred once they entered later life or whether this reflected long held beliefs.

5.1.3 Personal health

It is widely acknowledged that the natural ageing process increases the likelihood of an older woman experiencing poor health (e.g. Marieb 2013), though Becket and Taylor (2010) state that there are no health conditions that are unique to older people. Information captured by the National Office for Statistics (2013) demonstrates that women are more likely to experience a prolonged period of illness rather than an acute medical event in later life. This is reinforced by Lloyd et al (2013) who acknowledge that most conditions faced by older women are considered to be long term. All of the women in my study described challenges that they had faced to their personal health in more recent years, many of which they continued to experience at the time of their engagement in my study. The women identified physical conditions that affected their cardiovascular, sensory, and musculoskeletal systems. One of the women spoke of experiencing poor mental health (depression). Although one other woman captured anti-depressant medication in a photograph, but did not choose to discuss this with me in her interview. This omission could be attributed to the fast pace of conversation that I had with this particular woman which resulted in a missed opportunity, or simply that she did not want to discuss this further. All of the conditions that the women in

this study were experiencing were long term in nature. Therefore the findings from this study reflect the conclusions drawn by the Office for National Statistics (2013) and Lloyd et al (2013). It is anticipated that the increased prevalence of long term conditions faced by older women will contribute to their unique lived experience of later life.

5.1.4 Evaluating health and wellbeing through comparison with others

In their study exploring how older people experience living with multiple chronic conditions, Clarke and Bennett (2013) discovered that older women evaluate their own experiences by comparing themselves to others. The older women they compared themselves to were commonly experiencing greater challenges to their health; therefore the women concluded that they were having a more positive experience of later life. Six of the women in my study spoke positively of their current level of health and wellbeing, regardless of any conditions that they had, or the effects of ageing that they were experiencing. They rated their experiences positively as a result of comparing themselves to others they considered to be in the same stage of life as them, but whom they perceived as being worse off. These women often had a condition that the women in this study were thankful that they did not have, for example arthritis (Olive), or were experiencing greater limitations to their participation in everyday activities, for example needing to use a walking aid (Hope). The women always concluded that they were not as bad as someone else which resulted in them judging their own health and wellbeing positively. This may present a challenge to obtaining a true understanding of the health and wellbeing of older women from their perspective.

5.1.5 Assumed need for ongoing support from health and care services in later life

Whilst women themselves may evaluate their health and wellbeing in later life positively, it is assumed by authors such as Silcock and Sinclair (2012), that they will face challenges that are likely to require ongoing support from health and care services. This support is costly and attracts considerable attention from the government as they attempt to create a solution to the increasing demands being placed on the diminishing funding available for the provision of health and care services (NHS 2014). The women were all taking various medications which indicate their ongoing engagement with health services, such as General Practitioners and Pharmacists. However, none of the 11 women were receiving support from care services; challenging the assumption that a decline in abilities and health in later life indicates the need for the extensive provision of costly statutory services. 6 of the women provided support to others through their volunteering roles which included befriending older people through Age UK, supporting families of people with motor neurone disease, assisting at Age UK groups, mentoring teenagers, refugees, and families, and providing mental health support over the

telephone on behalf of a national charity. The volunteering roles that the women pursued reflected the roles that they would have been traditionally expected to fulfil as a woman, roles that focused on caring for others (e.g. Marsh 2006; Bradley 2013). The findings of this study challenge the suggestion that older women will inevitably require extensive support from statutory services in later life and suggest that it is older women who provide informal support to others.

5.1.6 Losing their husband or partner

Due to the discrepancy that exists between the life expectancy for men and women, it is highly probable that a woman will experience the loss of her husband or partner (Martin-Matthews 2011). Nine of the women had experienced this significant loss; the amount of time since their loss ranged from 3 to 17 years and indicated the time they had spent living alone. All nine of the women referred to their absent loved one throughout their engagement in the study which may be seen to suggest that their loss remained part of their life; regardless of the time that had passed. The women expressed complex emotions when talking about their loved one, for example Alison explained that she had always wanted her husband to die first as she felt he would not have coped well on his own, a wish that was obviously granted. However, she also described the guilt that she felt about not being with him when he died in his care home. It appeared that the emotions experienced by the women varied over time. For example, Natalie referred to recently having a bad week because it would have been her husband's birthday. Whilst the nine women acknowledged that the loss of their husband or partner had been very difficult they appeared to find ways to continue with their lives. They all spoke of the need to reach a point of acceptance that their loved one had gone, for Rebecca this meant continuing with her life with the loss of her husband being carried alongside her. The loss of their husband or partner appeared to have a significant ongoing influence in the lives of the nine women, and acted to inform the unique experience of later life which they described.

5.1.7 Perceptions of ageing women

It is often the negative perceptions of older women that dominate how they are expected to behave and inform how they are treated by others (Age UK 2011). Many of these negative perceptions are informed by the observable consequences of the natural ageing process and the decline in personal health associated with getting older. These negative perceptions lead to the creation of stereotypes which result in all older women being judged in the same way because of their age and gender (Bruce and Yearly 2006). Five of the women in my study cited examples of how they believed that they were perceived negatively by others due to their age

and gender. They felt that people assumed that they were vulnerable and lacking in ability based on their external appearance. In some of these situations the women felt able to confront this by standing their ground in an argument and not feeling intimidated by the behaviour of others. For some of the women this was not about a specific situation, but a general sense that because of their age and gender they were considered to be less able and not valued. For all of the women in my study there was a sense that they wanted to challenge the way that they felt they were perceived by others; this may have motivated their decision to engage in my study.

Nash (2014) raises the concern that ongoing exposure to negative stereotypes has undesirable consequences for the health and wellbeing of older women. Nelson (2005), Coudin and Alexopoulos (2010), and Karpt (2014) all argue that when older women face continued exposure to negative stereotypes, a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs whereby the behaviour and abilities of the women will start to reflect these stereotypes. It is suggested that this will inspire further decline as demonstrated in the study by Levy (2006) which showed that exposure to negative stereotypes reduced memory performance. Whilst the women in my study described being exposed to negative stereotypes because of their age and gender, there was no evidence to suggest that they had internalised these stereotypes or that they were fulfilling them. This could be a reflection of the sample of women, that is, women who had the confidence to partake in a research study. The women who took part in this study mostly portrayed a happy and confident persona, and they all appeared to be comfortable with who they were as older women.

5.2 Thinking about the future

5.2.1 Taking steps to age well

Organisations such as Age UK (2011) and the World Health Organisation (2015) promote the importance of taking steps to ensure that an individual has a positive experience of health and wellbeing in later life. These steps include engaging in exercise, eating well, keeping their mind active, and taking time to relax (Age UK 2011). The women described actions they were taking to preserve the health and wellbeing of their body and mind. Three of the women spoke of changes they had made to their diets, Alison and Olive implemented their changes to help manage ongoing health issues whilst Yvonne wanted to lose weight for a better later life. 9 of the women engaged in activities that promoted relaxation. These activities included reading (Lottie, Yvonne and Rebecca), colouring (Natalie), ironing (Olive), having a bath (Ordelia), and doing a jigsaw puzzle (Taylor). Rebecca, Alison, Ordelia and Hope also took part in exercise

activities, however these occurred outside of the home and this study was concerned with the activities that the women engaged in at home. The women did not disclose what had led them to take these actions to ensure a more positive experience of later life, but they appeared to be having the impact upon their health and wellbeing anticipated by Age UK (2011) and the World Health Organisation (2015).

5.2.2 Desire for control over their future

Clarke and Bennett (2013) and Prentice and Carranza (2002) explain that the roles traditionally fulfilled by women are associated with the expectation that they will prioritise the needs of others above their own. The consequences of this expectation can be seen in the study findings presented by Arber et al (2008). They found that older women were more likely to decline interventions that could act to extend their life if they thought they would become a burden to others as this would detract attention away from those who 'should' be receiving it. The desire to not put their needs before others was explicitly expressed by Roberta. She was the only woman who stated that she did not want to be a burden to her family in the future and was therefore happy to go into a care facility if required.

Anne, Natalie, and Ordelia did not refer to not wanting to be a burden; they explained that they did not want to live forever however this was linked to their desire to have control over the future direction of their own life. Anne and Ordelia had given careful consideration to what they would do to ensure that they had control over their demise. Anne was adamant that once she hit 80 she would cease taking medication that was considered to prologue her life because she did not want to become dependent and isolated. Anne felt that she had come to this decision because of her experience of working as a nurse in geriatrics earlier in life. Ordelia explained that she also wanted to have control over her own death and did not discount taking her own life in the future if she felt it was required. The findings provide little support for the notion proposed by Clarke and Bennett (2013), Prentice and Carenza (2002), and Arber et al (2008) that women are concerned with becoming a burden for others, however only 4 women raised this topic providing a very limited insight.

5.3 Concluding remarks

The first objective of this study was;

To understand how participants define their own experience of being an older woman

The women in this study all spoke of experiencing the natural ageing process and personal health challenges, however they were discussed with a tone of acceptance and motivation to problem solve to ensure ongoing engagement in everyday activities. The women in this study did not identify with being an older woman, deeming an older woman to be someone else. They also evaluated their own health by comparing themselves to others who they considered to be worse off than them; this meant that they evaluated their own health positively regardless of the challenges they were facing. The women themselves did not show any evidence of internalising and enacting negative stereotypes of being an older woman, instead they were keen to challenge these as not being a true representation of who they were and what they were capable of doing. The loss of a loved one was a significant event for nine of the women in this study and contributed to their unique experience of being an older woman.

Understanding older women as occupational beings

As an occupational therapist I am interested in how my profession can develop our practice, particularly with older women. To achieve this we need to have a comprehensive understanding of older women as occupational beings, including what they do, where they do it, and how they do it. There is a notable absence in the occupational therapy literature concerning the lived experiences of older women as occupational beings in their own voices. Therefore, the second objective of this study was, **'To understand older women as occupational beings'**. The findings revealed the occupations of older women living alone, the gendered experience of being an occupational being, and later life as a time of 'becoming'.

5.4 The occupations of older women living alone

Occupational therapists view the world through an occupational lens where all people are seen as occupational beings, with an inherent need to engage in personally meaningful activities (occupations) (Law et al 1998). This need is considered to be a lifelong requisite and essential for the achievement of health and wellbeing (Law et al 1998). However, theories such as disengagement theory (Cummings and Henry 1961) propose that as people age they go through a period of withdrawal from society which is characterised by a reduction in the social roles expected of them. For the women in this study engaging in occupations was valued highly. Many of the women referred to the enjoyment that they experienced from being busy, with several speaking of their inability to sit down when they found themselves at home during the day. Whilst all of the women valued being busy, several also explained that there were times when they did not appreciate being so busy. This was often linked to needing to complete everything because they lived on their own. The older women in this study continued to be active occupational beings, predominantly out of choice although for some with a little resentment.

In order to develop the depth of my understanding of older women as occupational beings, I asked the women in this study to take photographs of and discuss the activities that they engaged in when they were at home alone. This was particularly addressed through the two rounds of photo-elicitation that were conducted; one during phase 2 and one during phase 3 of my research. The women in this study identified a total of 396 Activities that they engaged in when they are at home alone (see appendix 17); although not all of the activities that were discussed were photographed. Whilst it could suggest that the women attributed less value to those activities that were not photographed, the conversations that occurred during the interviews suggest that this was not necessarily the case. For example, Alison took only a few photographs but the activities that she discussed were greater in number and appeared to be

attributed considerable value. She later explained that she did not think that the photographs were of great use in my study. The information that the women shared about their activities that they engaged in when they were at home alone provided evidence of the complexity of their ongoing nature as occupational beings.

As an occupational therapist I am concerned with the personal meaning that the women attributed to their activities that they engaged in when they were at home alone. As Creek (2010) explains, an occupation emerges when an activity is given personal meaning by the individual engaging in it. Previous studies have provided limited insight into the occupations that older women engage in, tending to focus on single occupations (e.g. Shordike and Pierce 2005), or engagement in occupations following a decline in health (e.g. Borley and Hardy 2016). Chilvers et al (2010) attempted to extend our understanding of the variety of occupations that older women engage in, however their findings were limited because they asked the women in their study to define the meaning of their occupations using three pre-coded words. In my study I used the qualitative methods of unstructured interviews and photo-elicitation to enable the women to define the meaning of the activities that they engaged in using their own words and images.

The personal nature of the meaning attributed to an activity was evidenced in the findings. There were some activities that were common amongst the women, such as cleaning, gardening, and meal preparation. There were also activities that were unique to individual women, for example making sewn cards (Taylor), dismantling an old chair (Natalie), and organising a dolls house (Yvonne). The meanings that the women attributed to their activities were unique to each of the women. This was particularly apparent when different women attributed different meanings to the same activities. For example, watching television was used by the women for relaxation, learning, and to provide background noise when alone at home. Different activities were also linked to the same meaning, for example relaxation was achieved through reading (e.g. Rebecca), watching television (e.g. Hope), and completing art work (e.g. Natalie). The findings demonstrate commonalities and individuality in the meanings that the women ascribed to their activities.

A number of authors have attempted to categorise the personal meaning of the occupations in which people engage. The categories proposed have included self care, productivity, and leisure (Creek 2010); physical, psychological and social (Rudman et al 1997); “pleasure and productivity and restoration” (Pierce 2003:45). Whilst I did not specifically ask the women in this study to categorise the occupations that they captured in their photographs, I was aware

that some of the activities and occupations they pursued would not easily fit into categories previously proposed in the literature.

The meanings that the women attributed to the occupations that they pursued were complex and part of their personal narrative. Their activities that appeared to challenge the categories of occupation included those that helped them to maintain a connection to their husband. Limiting the meaning of occupations to predefined categories is reductionist and challenges the person centred ethos of occupational therapy.

Rudman et al (1997) observed that the older people in their study engaged in activities as a means of maintaining a connection to the past. They suggested this could be seen in the way that they drew on previous experiences to simulate memories, and skills that they had developed in the past to complete activities performed in the present. This was echoed by Bennett (2010) who found that the women in her study valued the bond. For example, a number of the women engaged in activities to sustain an ongoing connection to their husband. Anne fed the pigeons, Alison maintained the pond in her garden, Yvonne completed the lottery and continued with her membership at the leisure centre which her husband originally had set up for her.

5.4.1 The gendered experience of being an occupational being

As highlighted by Molineux (2010), the context in which a woman exists contributes to the complex nature of the occupations in which she engages. Creek (2010) explains that part of this context includes the social, cultural and political environments that surround a woman. These environments are dynamic and change over time which means that different generations will have different experiences as occupational beings. The women in this study were raised between the 1930's and 1950's, a time when patriarchy was inherent in the social, cultural and political environments that surrounded them. It is argued that a patriarchal society functions for the benefit of men and consequently women have a unique, often challenging experience of life as a result (e.g. Oakley 1985; Hooks 2015). McPherson (2004) sees this difference in experiences for men and women as arising from the different role expectations that are placed upon them. Marsh (2006) explains that for women these roles commonly centre on the home and include being a wife and mother; this has consequences for the opportunities that women are afforded throughout their life course. For the women in my study, the impact of living in a patriarchal society was evident in the way that they spoke about their education, work experience, and daily family life as an adult.

Authors, such as Oakley (1985) and Turner (2006), who wrote about the early and mid-20th century in the UK, describe a patriarchal society where women were prepared for their future home based roles and occupations from an early age. Charles (2002) explains that at this time, once girls entered formal education, they were all encouraged to pursue subjects that would enable them to fulfil the roles and occupations required of them in their future family centred life. Turner (2006) acknowledges that in the 1940s young woman rarely pursued a university level education. This was because it was considered irrelevant when her future priorities would revolve around having and nurturing a family. The women in this study described experiences of education that reflected this emphasis on preparing for future family life. Three of the women spoke of not having the opportunity to attend university earlier in life, although only one offered a suggested reason as to why this was the case. Lottie felt that not continuing into higher education was due to university being something very special at that time and that there was a need to be very clever to gain a place. Whilst it could be the case that they were restricted in their access to university because they were female, at least one of the women did attend university. This suggests that there may be other reasons for not attending university at this time, such as socio-economic status. Even when the women had the opportunity to engage in further education, the knowledge and skills that they developed were considered to be appropriate for a woman.

Turner (2006) reminds us that most careers, particularly professional roles, with good future prospects require a university level education and this was not commonly available to women of this generation. Therefore the women would have been guided into careers that offered little prospect of progression. All of the women in my study entered jobs that were considered to be suitable for women; these included administration, nursing, teaching, domestic services, seamstress, accounting, and child care. All of these jobs enabled the women to develop the knowledge and skills that they would require when they became a wife and mother. Growing up in a patriarchal society resulted in the women in this study experiencing restrictions in the career opportunities that were available to them.

5.4.2 Factors influencing occupational choice

Within occupational therapy literature authors such as Whiteford and Hocking (2012) acknowledge that there are numerous factors that influence the occupational choices made by an individual. A number of these factors are considered to be intrinsic to the individual, such as motivation, interests and values (e.g. Kielhofner 2008). Other factors are said to exist in the

physical, social, cultural, and political environments in which an individual exists (Creek 2010). The women cited examples of when they had not been able to make the occupational choice that they wanted. For example, a number of the women expressed their desire to continue in paid employment after they had their children; however they were expected to remain in the home to fulfil their role as housewife full time. Taylor spoke particularly passionately about being made to give up her job, even before she had her children in order to provide her husband with a meal at lunchtime. Taylor explained that she had not wanted to give up her job but that it was expected of her. Other women spoke of careers that they would have been interested in pursuing, with one woman having been guided into a career selected by her father and another not able to achieve the qualifications needed as she did not have the opportunity to attend university. It appears that for the women in this study the assumptions made about what was appropriate for them to do because of their gender restricted the occupational choices that they could make.

5.4.3 Occupational injustice as a lifelong experience for women

Occupational therapists believe that all people have the right to engage in personally meaningful occupations; this is defined as occupational justice (Townsend and Wilcock 2004). Wicks and Whiteford (2005) explain that occupational injustice occurs when there are factors external to the individual that act to limit the occupational choices available to them. The findings suggest that the women in my study had previously experienced occupational injustice throughout their lives due to the expectations placed upon them because of their gender. Whiteford (2005) also discusses the relationship between gender and occupational injustice for women and my study contributes unique empirical evidence to the subject of women and their experiences of occupational injustice.

The roles and occupations concerned with caring for others is commonly attributed to women, these can be observed as extending across their life course (Scholtz 2010). For nine of the women in this study their caring role took on a new focus when their husband or partner became unwell. When the women became the carer for their husband or partner, they did so with the entirety of their being. The activities that the women described completing at this time centred on the needs of their loved one; they said very little of how their own needs were being addressed. The specific activities that they completed when caring for their husband or partner were not identified; they referred to caring as though it was an activity and did not acknowledge the complexity of such an activity. Natalie described feeling as though her life had been put on hold during the five years that she spent caring for her husband. Alison described how she could not go out because her husband had a tendency to leave the house

and get lost. Natalie was also limited in her ability to go out when she was caring for her husband but this was because her husband did not want to go out. Through an occupational lens, at this time the women would have been experiencing occupational injustice in the form of occupational deprivation because they were being deprived of the opportunity to engage in personally meaningful activities (Townsend and Polatajko 2013). The experience of caring for their loved one appears to have led to a unique lived experience for the women, an experience that restricted their opportunities in life at this time.

Whilst Scholtz (2010) purports that women are expected to fulfil a caring role throughout their lives, these women were not caring for their loved ones to merely meet social expectations. Had this been the case I would have expected to pick up on a sense of resentment during our conversations. Assuming that roles are only performed to meet social expectations placed upon women acts to devalue the personal meaning that an individual attributes to what they do.

Occupational Therapists are concerned with enabling people to engage in the occupations that they want and need to do (Chard 2010; Creek 2010). In occupational therapy literature 'want and need' are commonly presented as being synonymous with each other; with the assumption appearing to be that if a person 'needs' to complete an occupation, they will 'want' to complete the occupation. However the findings from my study challenge this assumption, with many of the women clearly indicating a discrepancy between what they wanted to do and what they actually did. For example Taylor wanted to continue to engage in employment outside of the home, however her husband expected her to stay at home to fulfil her role as a wife; an expectation that at the time she did not challenge. For the women in this study there was a sense that 'needing' to do an occupation superseded 'wanting' to do an occupation.

5.4.4 Past experiences as occupational beings influence the experiences of women in later life

Being an occupational being is a lifelong experience. As stated by Hasselkus (2002) it is important to understand the experiences that older women have had of engaging in occupations in the past, because they will influence the meaning that they attribute to what they do in later life. Wright-StClair (2012) drew the same conclusion from her study that used photographs of the hands of older women engaging in occupations alongside individual interviews to establish what the women valued regarding being occupied in later life. For both of these authors continued engagement in occupations across the life course is seen to increase the value that they are attributed. This reflects the ethos of continuity theory devised

by Victor (1994), which states that continuing to engage in occupations that have featured throughout their life course is a facilitator of successful ageing. However, the findings from my study suggest that the relationship between engagement in occupations in the past and those pursued in later life is far more complex, with some being given up, some replaced, and new ones being introduced.

The experiences that women have as occupational beings earlier in life have consequences for them when they find themselves living alone in later life. Women are expected to fulfil certain roles and occupations in life as a consequence of their gender. This results in them developing a particular set of skills to fulfil the expectations that are placed upon them. This becomes problematic when a woman finds herself living alone in later life as she is unlikely to have had the opportunity to develop the skills that were previously the responsibility of the male member of the household. Stone (2001) refers to the loss of the skills that would have been performed by the man of the house as a 'secondary loss'. Four of the women in my study describe examples of secondary losses, the activities that these losses related to include gardening, car maintenance, and decorating; all activities that are not usually the realm of a woman. For one of the women, the secondary losses that she experienced did not relate specifically to gender allocated roles and occupations. Yvonne's husband had assumed responsibility for the cooking at home, an occupation normally fulfilled by a woman. For some of these women their secondary losses led to them seeking support from outside sources to complete the activities that they did not have the skills to complete. For others their loss was seen as an opportunity for them to develop new skills. For example Anne described how she had taken on the garden when she lost her husband, this had included learning about the plants and using a range of tools. Encountering secondary losses is not always a negative experience, for some this provides an opportunity for self-growth through learning new skills.

5.5 The impact of ageing on engagement in activities

The women in the studies by Terrill and Gullifer (2010) and Petry (2008) described a number of biological changes which they were experiencing because of the natural ageing process. These changes affected their cognitive and physical abilities, and had consequences for their ongoing ability to engage in meaningful activities. This experience was mirrored by 6 of the women in my study. Hope, Rebecca and Natalie spoke of having less energy to engage in activities. They explained that they were not able to do things quickly anymore which led to activities being more time consuming. For example, Natalie explained how a job in the garden that previously would have taken a short period of time may now extend over a couple of days. Roberta and Taylor described the restrictions they faced because of a reduction in their mobility. Roberta

found that her reduced mobility restricted her ability to use a bath, put her socks on, and do the gardening. Taylor explained that her reduced mobility stopped her from getting a dog. Ordella, Roberta, and Hope were aware of changes that were occurring to their cognitive processes, including a decline in their memory and the speed at which they were able to articulate what they were thinking. For Ordella this was a challenge that she experienced all of the time. For Roberta and Hope their reduced ability to articulate quickly influenced their engagement with television quizzes. The natural ageing process has consequences for ongoing engagement in activities for older women; however the exact nature of these consequences is unique for each individual.

5.5.1 Taking steps to enable ongoing engagement in activities

The women in the studies by Terrill and Gullifer (2010) and Petry (2008) emphasised the importance of adopting a positive attitude when faced with changes due to the natural ageing process. They emphasised the importance of finding ways to adapt to enable ongoing participation in the activities of their choice. All 11 women in my study took steps which enabled them to continue to engage in a range of different activities, these steps included changing the tools they used, the technique they applied, or the temporal nature of the activity. Alison, Anne and Taylor changed the tools they used, Alison, Hope and Ordella changed the technique they applied. Changing the temporal nature of the activity commonly involved completing it over a drawn out period of time instead of in a single block of time; this was cited by Natalie and Hope who acknowledged the need to pace themselves due to a decline in their energy levels. For Hope this meant anticipating how she would feel later in the day and changing her routine to accommodate this, for example using the slow cooker so that her meal was ready when she returned home.

Reflecting the positive, can do attitudes captured in the studies by Terrill and Gullifer (2010) and Petry (2008), the women appeared to accept the changes in their body and mind that affected their ability to engage in meaningful activities. The women described how they found ways to deal with the challenges they faced without support from health and care services. In particular, Roberta described how she enjoyed the challenge of solving the problems that she faced in everyday life which resulted from the natural ageing process. None of the women had given up activities because of the limitations to their body or mind that they were facing. This suggests that the women were resourceful and able to independently deal with any challenges they faced.

The ability to analyse and make changes to enable ongoing participation in meaningful activities is a key component of the role of the occupational therapist. However the women were identifying what needed to be changed and how independently. This raises questions regarding the best time for occupational therapy services to get involved, because for the women this does not appear to be necessary at this time. We need to be careful not to disempower individuals who are perfectly able to resolve their own challenges. These reinforce the need to ensure that we fulfil our person centred ideal.

5.5.2 Taking risks

Atwal et al (2011) define modern health and care services as having a risk averse culture, where professionals are expected to take steps to manage any factors that may lead to an untoward event occurring. This implies that risk is something that needs to be managed by a professional, yet everyone assesses and takes risks in everyday life. Six of the women discussed how their physical abilities had changed as a result of ageing which led to them exercising more caution when engaging in activities. Natalie and Rebecca attributed their reluctance to take risks in later life to them living alone and therefore not having someone that could look after them if they injured themselves. This suggests that older women are able to evaluate the risks associated with engaging in different activities and can identify a safe and appropriate course of action, without input from a professional. Engaging older women in the risk assessment process when they come into contact with health and care services could improve person centred practice by valuing their opinion and ability to make decisions.

5.5.3 Seeking support from others

The older women in the study by Clarke and Bennett (2013) expressed sadness when they were no longer able to perform activities that appeared to be associated with being a woman, such as domestic chores. Whilst Coleman et al (2016) discovered that older people are less likely to seek support with activities in the home, because they believe it will make others perceive them as being incapable. The women had a range of views on asking for help to complete activities. Natalie had no qualms about seeking someone to help her complete activities that she did not feel able to do; recent support had been provided by a male friend from church and a neighbour. In contrast Anne expressed her displeasure at the need to seek support, particularly from her family; this reflected her independent nature.

A greater concern for the women who required support with activities around the home was ensuring they employed the best person for the job. Roberta explained how she had struggled to find a suitable gardener, citing the example of one person who did not know the difference between a plant and a weed. Anne and Hope expressed their concern about the cost of

support and knowing how much they should be paying. However, Anne stated that this did not lead to her feeling vulnerable and Hope resolved this issue by asking others to recommend people to complete a job.

Seeking support from others was not always about relinquishing all aspects of the activity. Natalie described how she had someone who would tend to her garden, however they would work together to get the jobs done. It may be that using support in a way that did not suggest that she was entirely dependent made it easier for Natalie to seek help when it was required.

Support was not always used as a way to compensate for a decline in abilities. For example, Olive and Alison sought support to develop their skills using items of technology, and Lottie informed me on several occasions that the support she has with domestic chores was because she did not like doing them.

The findings do not appear to support the notion that older women are reluctant to seek support with daily activities as previously identified by Coleman et al (2016), indeed Natalie was very positive about the support that she received from others. However, Lottie wanted to make it clear that the support that she received with cleaning and gardening was not because she was incapable of doing these activities herself but reflected her dislike of these domestic chores. Occupational therapists could play an important role in helping women to identify their support needs and facilitating the process of finding the right person for the job.

5.6 My time is now

Lemish and Muhlbauer (2012) suggest that when older women find themselves living alone in later life they are in a good position to focus on their own development, careers, and interests. The older women in studies by Petry (2008), and Terrill and Gullifer (2010) reported that they found themselves with increasing amounts of free time available to them. The women said that this additional free time emerged because they were not required to fulfil as many social roles later in life; this enabled them to experience a sense of freedom. The women in these studies valued the opportunity to choose what to do with their free time, with selected activities being a combination of those that they had taken part in before and those that were new to them.

Natalie, Ordalia, and Roberta all defined now as being their time to do things for themselves, and to prioritise what was important to them. Ordalia explained how she had made a conscious decision shortly after her husband died, that she would not be joining any groups that required regular attendance or engage in any volunteering. She felt that she had spent a

large part of her life caring for others, in her personal and professional life, and she wanted the opportunity to be able to be spontaneous without the worry of regular commitments. Nine women described the best part of living alone as being able to do what you want, when you want. This appeared to be valued highly, as described by Alison this can relate to small decisions like choosing what to watch on television or when to go to bed. The women mirrored the attitudes of the women in studies by Petry (2008) and Terrill and Gullifer (2010), by placing value on the time that they had to do as they wished now they were living alone.

5.7 Later life as a time of 'becoming' for women

The two prominent theories proposed to explain the way that older women occupy their time are disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry 1961) and continuity theory (Victor 1994). These theories take opposing stances. Disengagement theory suggests that older women will withdraw from society as they age, focusing increasingly on themselves, and preparing for their inevitable death (Cumming and Henry 1961). In contrast continuity theory (Victor 1994) proposes that older women will continue to engage in activities that they have always pursued. The women in my study defined a more complex process when describing the nature of their engagement in activities, now that they were living alone in later life. There were activities that the women continued to engage in but they changed when or how it was performed. For example, Alison and Taylor changed the time that they had their main meal of the day from the evening to lunchtime. There were activities that the women chose to give up, however their reasons did not reflect a desire to withdraw from society. For example, Lottie explained that she had only played bowls previously because of her husband so after his death she gave up this activity. When the women stopped engaging in an activity it was commonly replaced by something else. For example, Lottie replaced bowls with bridge. Disengagement theory and continuity theory do not appear to go far enough to explain the experiences of engagement in activities for older women living alone.

Theories of how older women occupy their time fail to acknowledge that later life can be a time for continued self-growth and development. As part of her 'doing, being, belonging, becoming' framework, Wilcock (2006) proposes that an integral aspect of engagement in occupation is the opportunity that it provides for 'becoming', where an individual is able to develop and achieve their potential. She explains that the opportunity to 'become' is just as important to health and wellbeing for older women, as it is for those at all other stages of the life course. However she also acknowledges that in order to ensure that older women have the opportunity to 'become', the negative assumptions about ageing as a time of decline need

to be challenged. The women in my study provide compelling evidence to support the notion that later life is a time to develop and achieve their potential.

Wilcock (2006) acknowledges that there are many ways in which an older woman can continue to develop and achieve their potential in later life. The women in my study engaged in a wide range of activities that enabled them to continue to learn, try new things, and keep up to date with the way of the world. All of the women in my study spoke about their ongoing engagement in activities that enabled them to learn. These activities included engaging in formal learning sessions, learning informally from other people, and learning from life. The women also described ways in which they facilitated their own learning through reading, watching the television, listening to the radio, or searching online. Four of the women spoke of how they still had a considerable thirst for knowledge which fuelled their desire to continue learning. Three of the women explained how they created their own opportunities to try new things, including going on day trips and undertaking long haul travel. Eight of the women in my study referred to a desire to keep up with current affairs. This was achieved by reading the newspaper, watching the news, or listening to the radio. They demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of current issues during their interviews in which they were keen to share their opinions. The activities cited by the women in my study illustrated how 'becoming' was a feature in their experience of later life.

5.8 Concluding remarks

The second objective of this study was, **'To understand older women as occupational beings'**. The women in this study provide compelling evidence to support the notion that older women continue to be occupational beings in later life. They engage in a wide range of personally meaningful activities (occupations) and value the opportunity to be busy. The experiences that the women share challenge the two key theories previously devised to explain the nature of what people do in later life as they were neither disengaging from society nor merely continuing with activities that they had completed in the past. They describe a far more complex existence as an occupational being in later life, one focused on self-growth and development. For the women in this study, their gender had a significant lifelong impact upon them as occupational beings. This included limiting the occupational choices available to them earlier in their life. Their engagement in gender defined roles and occupations earlier in life had lifelong consequences which were both challenging and positive.

Exploring home as a place for engagement in occupations

Occupational therapists believe that there are external factors to individuals that will influence their experiences as occupational beings. These external factors form the environment which Polatajko et al (2007) see as comprising two key components; the physical environment and the social environment. The environment of interest in this study was the home, due to its integral place in the life of a woman. The third objective of my study is, **'To explore home as a place for occupational engagement'**. The women in my study referred to their homes during all phases of the research process. The issues that they discussed included how they defined their home, the attachment that they felt towards it, their ability to maintain their home, the importance of accessibility, the home as a place to return to, and the presence or absence of others in the home.

5.9 Defining home

The women in my study were asked to take photographs of the activities that they completed when they were alone at home. However, I did not define what I considered to be home, instead allowing the women to decide where the parameters should be. I felt that this was a way in which I could enact my feminist approach to methodology, by encouraging them to play an active role in the research process (Hammersley 1992). Interestingly all of the women drew the same conclusion, defining home as including the built property in which they resided and any immediate outside space, such as a garden.

Authors such as Rapport (1995), Dupuis and Thorns (1998), and Blunt and Dowling (2006) define home with far more complexity than just the physical parameters. They all consider the home to comprise physical structures, the social relationships that exist within, and the emotional responses that are elicited. In this study all of the women identified issues that related to these three components of home, although to varying degrees.

5.10 Attachment to home

Wiles et al (2017) found that the attachment that we feel to our home has important consequences for our health and wellbeing. Anton and Lawrence (2014) explain that there is a lack of agreement regarding the factors that inform the attachment that an individual has to their home. However they did suggest that contributing factors include, whether they own their property, their age, and the time that they have lived in their property for. Where owning their property, being older, and having spent longer living in their property were all seen to contribute to a greater sense of attachment between the individual and their home.

Ten of the women in my study owned their own home; although only three of them cited this as contributing to the attachment that they felt towards their home. Although the one woman who privately rented her property, spoke in a less emotive way about her attachment to where she lived, explaining that her home was somewhere to keep her belongings and to work. This could suggest that home ownership does increase the attachment felt to a property, as found by Anton and Lawrence (2014).

Two of the women cited the extended length of time that they had spent in their property as contributing to the attachment that they felt towards their home. However, Ordelia appeared to have a greater attachment to her current home which she had lived in for a relatively short period of time, having moved in following the death of her husband. She attributed her attachment to her home as resulting from the place being hers and reflecting her personal preferences. This suggests that the length of time spent in their property was not the only factor that contributed to her attachment to her home.

Ordelia, Roberta, and Olive had not lived with another person in their current home. Ordelia and Roberta purchased their properties after their loved ones had had died, and Olive had been living in her privately rented flat for only five years. All three women spoke positively about where they lived and neither had plans to move on. The findings from my study make a contribution to the ongoing discussion surrounding factors that influence the attachment between a person and their home.

The women in my study identified two of the same factors as Anton and Lawrence (2014) when describing the attachment that they felt towards their home; property ownership, and the time that they had spent in their current home. They did not acknowledge the impact of their age on the attachment that they felt to their property. Rebecca indicated another reason for feeling attached to her home which was not explored by Anton and Lawrence (2014). For Rebecca the attachment to her current property resulted from the amount of work her husband had put into making it a home. He had built furniture and decorated the home throughout, turning a shell into their home. This was clearly a significant factor for Rebecca as was evident from our discussions about her future plans to decorate. The findings from my study make a contribution to the ongoing discussion surrounding factors that influence the attachment between a person and their home.

5.11 Home eliciting positive feelings

Gillsjö and Schwartz-Barcott (2010) purport that the emotional response that we have to a physical structure is essential in transforming a house into a home. This emotional response

can be positive or negative, with a positive response said to increase the attachment that is felt towards the home (Blunt and Dowling 2006). The factors that the women identified as leading to the positive feelings they felt when they were at home included the ambience in the home, the outdoor space surrounding their home, and how they perceived the security of their home.

Four of the women referred to their appreciation of how the light in their home created a particular ambience. For Olive and Rebecca this was provided by natural light entering their property through the windows; something that they could not fully control. Olive felt that this natural light made her home feel warmer, more welcoming, and homely. Two of the women described how they used artificial light to create a particular ambience in their home by using candles (Ordelia) and fairy lights on the Christmas tree (Roberta). Ordelia described how she used the light from candles to soften a room. Light within the home, natural and artificial seemed to have a role to play in creating a homely feel to a property, however only four out of the 11 women referred to valuing this feature.

Olive, Roberta, and Rebecca spoke of how they experienced positive feelings towards their home as a result of the outside space which surrounded their property. For Olive and Roberta value was attributed to the view of their property and front garden that they saw when they returned home. For Rebecca it was the view from within her home that elicited positive feelings, a view that she described as unique because it included a windmill.

For five of the women, the way that they perceived the security of their property elicited positive feelings. They referred to their home making them feel safe. For Alison this was achieved by the installation of an alarm system, and for Yvonne being used to entering the home on her own prior to living alone. Olive thought she felt safe at home because she knew who her neighbours were. Two of the women, who referred to feeling safe at home, did not specify the reason for this.

The positive feelings that their home elicited appeared to facilitate engagement in particular activities for the women. Four of the women described how feeling comfortable at home enabled them to be themselves and not worry about anything. Olive enacted this feeling by wearing her dressing gown over her clothes when she was at home. This experience that Olive defined was interesting as when considering what constituted a home for her she emphasised the role of her home was as a storage place for her belongings; reflecting a practical rather than emotional function. All of the emotional responses to their home that the women identified were positive; however it may be possible that the direction that the interviews took

did not allow the women to discuss the more negative emotional responses that they associated with their home.

5.12 The way that home looks

Molony (2010) explains that the way that we choose to personalise the physical environment of our home reflects who we are and our personal preferences. Peace et al (2006) suggest that the selection and organisation of decoration or objects enables an individual to leave a personal mark which is said to be of particular value later in life.

Ordelia had moved into her current property after the loss of her husband and described it as reflecting her as she had decorated and furnished it to meet her personal preferences. Ordelia also enjoyed changing elements of her home, such as the colours used or the position of furniture. In contrast Lottie and Rebecca were not keen to make changes to their home environment, this was because they were happy with the way it was and did not want to experience the stress that they associated with making changes. For Rebecca not making changes reflected her desire to keep the environment as her husband had planned, although she had recently been required to consider redecorating due to some damage that had occurred in the lounge. For all three of these women there was a sense that they had their homes the way that they wanted them to be and therefore did not see the purpose in making big changes, suggesting their homes did reflect their personal preferences (e.g. Molony 2010).

Whilst the women spoke of their home looking the way that they wanted it to look, three of the women considered how their home would look to others. For one of these women (Anne) there appeared to be a way that she wanted to present her home to others. Natalie and Rebecca stated they did not keep their home clean and tidy for the benefit of others.

Phase 3 of this study occurred over the festive period, and as a result many of the women captured photographs of the presence or absence of Christmas decorations. It appeared that if the women were expecting visitors then they would decorate their home. Several of the women who did not decorate their homes for Christmas cited the reason as being because they were not expecting any visitors. There were two women, Roberta and Natalie, who did not follow this pattern. They both decorated their homes for their own appreciation.

The findings appear to support the notion proposed by Molony (2010) that the physical environment of a home will reflect the personal preferences of the resident. However, there is also a sense that the preparation of the home environment is for the benefit of visitors. This

may link to the way that the women wish to be perceived by those who enter their home, although this would require further exploration.

5.13 Home maintenance

Sixsmith (1990) and Steward (2000) suggest that older women can use their home to demonstrate their ongoing ability to look after themselves, where a home that is in a good state of repair, clean and tidy suggests that they are still competent. The women in this study photographed and discussed many activities that demonstrated their ability to maintain their home environment; these activities included cleaning, gardening, and do-it-yourself. The women attributed considerable value to being able to maintain their homes and garden. Whilst some of the women were able to complete these activities without any challenges, others were aware that they were facing limitations due to ageing and a decline in personal health. However, the majority of those that were facing limitations still completed these activities independently but adapted the method or tools used. This included taking their time or dividing an activity over a period of time. When they sought support to complete activities, the women often continued to contribute to the completion of the activity by working alongside the hired help. Lottie explained that she had a cleaner and gardener and on several occasions she made it clear that someone else completed these activities because she did not like doing them, not because she was incapable. Lottie was very independent in all areas of her life and I had no reason to question her reasoning. She explained that she had made this change since she had been on her own. The timing of this change could indicate that in the absence of others in the home there was no longer an expectation that she should be completing these activities.

5.14 The importance attributed to the accessibility of home

Saunders (1990) and Sixsmith (1990) suggest that as a person ages the accessibility of their property becomes more important than its economic value. This is supported by Oswald and Wahl (2005) and Peace et al (2006) who believe that the home of an older person can help to compensate for a decline in their health or functional abilities. None of the women in my study had felt the need to make changes to their property to improve accessibility. However, three of the women described how they had given consideration to the changes that they may need to make in the future to enable them to remain in their current home. For two of these women the stairs were a particular area of concern, Rebecca intended to get a stair lift fitted if required whilst the other woman decided to deal with the situation when it arises. None of the women in my study referred to the economic value of their property; this could have been because they did not see this as important or simply that they did not wish to discuss this with

me. The findings of my study support the suggestion that accessibility of a home is more important than the economic value of the property for older women.

5.15 Reducing the distance travelled from home

Echoing the sentiment of disengagement theory, Sixsmith (1990) suggests that as people age they will go through a process of 'spatial disengagement'. He explains that spatial disengagement can be observed in the way that older people reduce the distance that they travel from their home to engage in activities. This process is seen to emerge as a consequence of increased frailty, having less money, a reduction in the number of social roles being performed, and paucity in the places accommodating their interests or needs. In this study four of the women had engaged in long haul travel in the previous year and Yvonne was considering living in Australia with her siblings for six months of each year, which would have required ongoing frequent long haul travel. These four women did not appear to be experiencing spatial disengagement. In contrast, Roberta explained that she no longer felt confident to travel abroad due to her reduced mobility. This appears to challenge the assumption made by Sixsmith (1990), that older women will experience a process of spatial disengagement. However, the distance that they travelled from the home was not discussed by the other seven women and therefore it is not possible to be sure that not experiencing spatial disengagement was a common experience across this sample.

5.16 Home as a social environment

Rapoport (1995), Dupuis and Thorns (1998), and Blunt and Dowling (2006) all acknowledge that the home environment has a social component. This is created by the relations that an individual has with others in this environment and informs the attachment that they will feel towards their home (Molony 2010; Schenk et al 2004). The women in this study were living alone and therefore the social component of their home appeared to be more transient in nature, characterised by both the presence and absence of others.

5.16.1 The presence of others in the home

All of the women welcomed visitors into their home, however they appeared to consider there to be an optimum time for them to stay for. Three of the women explained how they enjoyed having visitors for a period of time but also appreciated when they went home. 1 of these women, Taylor, had openly discussed feeling lonely on occasions and how she could go days without speaking to anyone, yet she was still pleased when visitors left when they had been with her for a few days. This appears to suggest that the women had realigned their experience of the social component of the home to not include the ongoing presence of others.

Whilst the presence of others in the home for prolonged periods of time appeared to present challenges to the women, they all used the television or radio as background noise to instil a sense of company. The silence that living alone often generated appeared to be perceived as problematic, emphasising the absence of others. This appears to challenge the desire they had to be on their own. This could be explained by the differences in the level of interaction expected of them, with the television and radio being a far more passive presence.

5.16.2 The absence of others in the home

When authors consider the experience of living alone it is often perceived as being interchangeable with solitude, isolation, and loneliness (Forbes 1996; Victor et al 2000; Cattan et al 2003; Savikko et al 2005). All of which are commonly perceived as negative experiences. However, studies conducted by Peace et al (2006) and Dahlin-Ivanhoff et al (2007) indicate that living alone in later life is associated with an increase in autonomy. Mason (1989) suggested that this is particularly experienced by older women because the absence of close family members in the home means that she can now put her own needs first.

The three women who described their experiences of having visitors in the home explained what they valued most when their visitors left. This included not having to worry about making conversation, having the opportunity to enjoy their own company, and being able to exercise the freedom that living alone afforded them. This was particularly illustrated by Ordelia who described how a recent visit from her sister had impacted upon her usual routine. Ordelia was a late riser but felt the need to negotiate a wake up time with her sister, who would be up and dressed by the time that Ordelia emerged. The experiences of these women suggest that living alone is not an entirely negative experience, supporting the findings previously presented by Mason (1989), Peace et al (2006), and Dahlin-Ivanhoff et al (2007).

5.16.3 More complex than the presence or absence of others

It is important to note that for Rebecca and Yvonne, the social component of their home appeared to be more complex than merely the presence or absence of others. Both of these women had the ashes of their husband in a casket placed in a prominent place in their home. Yvonne described how she kept her husband's casket beside the front door and how he was often greeted first when their daughters visited. There was a sense that for Rebecca and Yvonne their husband remained a part of the social component of the home, as defined by the ongoing interaction that occurred with them.

5.17 The decision to move or to stay living where they are

Pope and King (2010) suggest that the reasons why an older woman may choose to move from, or stay in, their current home are many and complex. They explain that these reasons may be reactive (including the loss of a partner) or proactive (anticipation of future changes). Of the nine women who were widowed, two had moved into their current properties since their loss; Roberta moved to relocate back to the area she originated from, and Ordellia chose to purchase a smaller property.

Alison, Rebecca and Lottie expressed their desire to continue living in their current home. For Alison this was because she felt everything had been done to her home, including the installation of a security system. Rebecca spoke of not wanting to move and described how she had begun to consider what she would need to do to her home to enable her to stay if her abilities declined. This included seeking help with domestic chores and installing equipment such as a stair lift. Lottie voiced her reluctance to move from her current property, this was informed by the experiences had by others who had moved but later felt a sense of regret. Yvonne had been contemplating selling her home for some time, although explained that she always said she would wait until ten years after the death of her husband. Yvonne had two daughters living nearby, had spent a large portion of her life in the area, and over 40 years in her house; all of these factors contributed to her indecision. Yvonne explained that her future plans would have consequences for her family as she would be selling the family home that contained many memories, particularly those relating to her husband and their father. The experiences defined by the women appear to support the suggestion made by Pope and King (2010), that the decision to move home is complex and informed by many different factors.

5.18 Concluding remarks

The third objective of my study was, **'To explore home as a place for occupational engagement'**. It is acknowledged that home is a complex environment to define, however all 11 of the women considered the home to include the property in which they live and the outside space surrounding it. The issues that the women discussed referred to both the physical and social components of home, with evidence of the connection that exists between the two. There appeared to be some differences in the perceptions of home held by those that owned their property and the one woman who lived in a rented property; however none of the women expressed negative feelings towards their home. The home as a place of occupational engagement is complex and unique to each older woman. This has consequences for the practice of occupational therapy which is often concerned with entering, adapting, and providing other interventions in this most intimate of environments.

The potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement

Photo-elicitation has had limited use in occupational therapy to date, both in research and practice. Photo-elicitation is a participatory research method, and one way of implementing it is to ask those being researched to generate the photographs and identify the issues that they wish to discuss. Therefore I considered it important to provide the women who took part in this study with the opportunity to evaluate photo-elicitation. This led to the fourth objective of this study being, **'To consider the potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement'**. Most of this evaluation occurred during interview 4; although a few comments were made during interviews 2 and 3. In the unstructured interview during interview 4, the women guided the discussion focusing on the issues surrounding their involvement in the process of photo-elicitation. They discussed their photography skills, the ability of photographs to capture engagement in activities, being able to take photographs of activities when and where they occur, photo-elicitation as a method to encourage reflection on engagement in activities, and the challenges that they faced when using photo-elicitation.

5.19 Photography skills

As highlighted by Tinkler (2013), it is not essential that photographs are in focus or set in a way that makes the subject obvious because the photographs are used to inform interviews that give people the opportunity to explain the personal meaning of the photograph. Therefore prior experience with using a camera was not a prerequisite of engaging in this study. I lent cameras and memory cards to those who did not own a digital camera; which meant that women were not excluded from this study because they did not own the necessary equipment. The women had a range of prior experiences of camera ownership and taking photographs. All of the women in my study produced a range of interesting photographs that made a substantial contribution to the success of this study. I made it clear from the outset that I would not be judging their photographs in any way, and specifically not in terms of their quality. However, there were several occasions where the women voiced their disappointment with the quality of the photographs that they had taken. For example, Taylor was not very happy with her second set of photographs because the colour was tinged with orange. This could have been because they felt that this suggested that they were not as able as they claimed.

5.20 The ability of photographs to capture engagement in activities

Three of the women reflected on the challenge of capturing the dynamic nature of an activity in a still image. It was apparent that they had spent time considering how to best capture

what they did, therefore the process was more than a point and shoot activity. Taylor sometimes took photographs with her hand in view to indicate the action; this is similar to the method used in a study by Wright-StClair (2012). Although the photographs in the study by Wright-StClair (2012) were taken by the researcher, not those engaged in the activities. Even though the photographs in my study did not necessarily capture the dynamic nature of the activities, the interviews in which they were used was able to address this.

Four of the women in my study spoke of the restrictions they felt that they faced by being asked to only take photographs of activities that they engaged in when they were at home alone. They appeared to be concerned that this would provide a very limited representation of the activities in which they engaged as many of their activities either involved the presence of others or occurred beyond the parameters of their home. Several of the women took photographs of visitors or asked others to take a picture of them beyond their home. These photographs were discussed during the interviews but have not been presented in this thesis to protect the anonymity of the women and their visitors. It felt as though the women needed to demonstrate to me that they were still accessing the world beyond their home to challenge the negative assumptions that are often made about them as older women.

5.21 Being able to take photographs of activities when and where they occur

To date there has been very little time spent exploring ways that occupational therapists can gain an understanding of the context surrounding an activity, beyond the traditional methods of observation and the conventional interview (e.g. Creek 2010; Hocking 2010). Collier (1957), Clark-Ibáñez (2004), Noland (2006), Pink (2013), and Tinkler (2013), explain that photo-elicitation enables people to capture activities in their natural context. They suggest that this can provide the occupational therapist or researcher with a unique insight into the lives of people as occupational beings. Three of the women in my study spoke of how they had carried on with their usual lives and activities, taking photographs as they moved through their day or week. Hope particularly valued the opportunity that taking the photographs herself at a time that suited her meant that she could capture all of her activities, including those she may have been doing at four in the morning because she could not sleep. The ability to capture an activity when and where it naturally occurs would be beneficial for occupational therapy practice which is often challenged by being governed by traditional working hours and limited time available to spend with the people they are working with.

5.22 Photo-elicitation as a method to encourage reflection on engagement in activities

Pink (2013) explains that photo-elicitation is a valuable tool for encouraging reflection on the taken for granted. She argues that by asking people to focus on the everyday activities that they engage in they are encouraged to think about them in a different way. Three of the women in my study spoke of their photographs as being mundane and just reflecting day to day living. However, six of the women described how taking the photographs had demonstrated to them how much they did do, which for some led to them taking a different, more positive perspective regarding how they spent their day to day life. This study provides additional evidence to support the use of photo-elicitation as a means to inspire people to reflect on what they do.

5.23 The challenges faced by the women when using the method of photo-elicitation

Tinkler (2013) cautions that photo-elicitation is dependent upon the person taking the photographs remembering to do so. Without the photographs the process of photo-elicitation cannot occur. Two of the women in my study told me that they had forgotten that they needed to take photographs or that they had lost track of time and realised that I was due to collect the camera before they had taken their planned photographs. This led them to take photographs in close succession which may mean that they were unable to give a detailed representation of their engagement in activities across a period of time. One of the women in my study explained that she remembered to take the photographs but when we came to discuss them she could not always recall why she had taken them. This could have been addressed by asking the women to complete a short diary alongside their engagement in the study. Consideration needs to be given to how people engaging with photo elicitation can be prompted to take photographs without the researcher influencing what is being captured. If photo-elicitation were to be adopted in occupational therapy practice, further consideration would need to be given with regards to the ownership of the photographs and how they are stored to ensure confidentiality is maintained. The women in my study identified very few challenges in their use of photo-elicitation, the key issue discussed was the need to remember to take photographs.

5.24 Concluding remarks

Photo-elicitation has the potential to enable occupational therapists to gain an enhanced understanding of the people they work with as occupational beings. This includes the ability to capture detailed information about the context that enables an activity to become an

occupation. Participant led photo-elicitation reflects the person centred ethos of occupational therapy by enabling women to capture and discuss what is important to them. It also appears to be an effective means of getting women to reflect on their experience as an occupational being, often helping them to view their engagement in occupations and life as a whole more positively. Photo-elicitation is not without challenges but for the women in this study these centred on remembering to take their photographs.

5.25 My reflections on the methods

When implementing the methods I found that I naturally reflected on what I was doing. My reflections included what was going well, what I needed to work on, and any changes that needed to be made. I captured my reflections in my research diary and present them here for consideration. The issues that I will explore are the process of applying for and receiving ethical clearance, recruitment of women to my study, establishing rapport with the women, logistical issues, taking photographs, and unstructured interviews.

5.25.1 The process of applying for and receiving ethical clearance

The process of applying for and receiving ethical clearance to complete this study was a drawn out and sometimes challenging process. One of the challenges I faced was that my study was concerned with viewing older women as independent, capable people who happened to be in the latter years of life. However, older people are commonly assumed to be vulnerable and it was through this lens that my application appeared to be viewed. In order to be successful in my application I needed to view older women as vulnerable to ensure that I attended to all of the issues that the ethics panel expected me to address.

5.25.2 Recruitment of older women to my study

I initially distributed the participant information sheet (appendix 1) to anyone who showed an interest in taking part in my study. However, the information was very detailed and I was not able to accompany it with a user friendly verbal explanation because it was often passed on through a third party. I believe that I lost a couple of potential participants by taking this approach. I addressed this issue early on by creating an A4 flier (see appendix 7) which could be distributed easily and did not contain an overwhelming amount of information. These fliers were handed out to various people who thought they may know someone who would like to take part in my study. The fliers included my contact details so that the women could get in touch with me. Interestingly one of the women in my study did not know how she came to have my flier.

I attempted to use social media (Facebook and Twitter) to help recruit participants, however this was unsuccessful. I found that being a Brownie leader proved to be very good currency during the recruitment process. It appears that this suggests to people that I am a particular type of person. Being a Brownie leader also enabled me to easily access the Trefoil Guild from which four of my participants were recruited. I found it challenging to recruit women that I had no connection with; I believe this was because we did not have an intermediary who was able to offer them reassurance about me.

5.25.3 Establishing rapport with the women

I learned that it was easier to recruit people to my study if I spoke to them on the telephone, rather than just using email to communicate prior to our first meeting. I think this was because on the telephone it was possible to explain the requirements of the study and answer any questions that the women might have had. It was also a good opportunity to start to establish rapport with the women prior to us meeting face to face.

I feel that I was able to effectively use my communication skills to establish a good level of rapport with all of the women in my study. I even managed to achieve this with those that I initially found difficult to get to know. I believe that sharing some of my own personal experiences during the interviews helped to elicit more information from the women and enabled me to establish a greater degree of rapport.

5.25.4 Logistical issues

The use of photo-elicitation introduced an interesting dimension to the logistics of my study. I initially only purchased two digital cameras for the women to use, but this proved to be very restrictive to the progress of my work. This was because I could only have two women taking photographs at any one time. This was further complicated because I wanted the women to choose how long they had to take the photographs, to meet the feminist approach I was using, which made planning ahead difficult. I made the decision to purchase a third camera, and created a table to log where cameras and memory cards were and where they were going next (see appendix 14). This proved extremely useful and enabled me to plan my meetings with the women in my study more effectively. I gave the women the choice to use their own cameras and to borrow a memory card from me. Although only two of the women took up this offer it did make it logistically a little easier as it meant that I could have five women working on taking photographs at the same time.

Even the women who had not used a digital camera before were able to use the digital cameras that had been purchased for this study. Before I purchased these cameras I read

reviews for various digital cameras and looked for one which was valued for its simplicity and large viewing screen.

There were a couple of times when the women were confused as to what I was doing when; this became apparent when I turned up to do the next part of the study. Although these issues were always satisfactorily resolved I think it would be useful to create a way of making the process clearer. This could be achieved by using a flow diagram that includes exactly what is expected of them at each stage to support the written description in their information sheet (see appendix 1).

5.25.5 Taking photographs

I had initially decided that I would not provide the women with examples of photographs that could be taken as I did not want to influence what they chose to share with me. However, a number of the women asked about the kind of photographs that they should be taking. I felt as though if I did not give them examples they would struggle to engage with this part of the study. Therefore I described the same two examples to each of the women; these were watching the television and making a hot drink. This appeared to provide the women with adequate reassurance.

During phase 3 of my study, the women were asked to take a second selection of up to 25 photographs of activities that they completed when at home alone. However this second round of photo-elicitation generated fewer photographs than anticipated. I found myself needing to reassure the women that the number of photographs that they had taken was adequate enough for the study.

There were times when the women in the study took photographs that did not meet the provided brief. Tinkler (2013) suggests that this can be an issue when participants engaged in photo-elicitation have their own agenda. For example I received several photographs that were taken outside of the home, photographs of the woman themselves which had been taken by someone else, and photographs of visitors to the home. However, these photographs elicited some very interesting conversations. I have not included these photographs in my thesis to protect anonymity; however I have drawn on the information shared in the conversations where appropriate.

There were three occasions when the camera appeared to have a fault. This was overcome by taking a different camera to the women when we met for the interview so that they could take any additional photographs that they had wanted to take; this was only two to three-

photographs. We still discussed these additional photographs in the interview but printed copies were provided at a later date (usually at the time of the next interview). However, I was mindful that the activities had not been captured at the time that they would have usually occurred.

5.25.6 Unstructured interviews

On several occasions, particularly early in the research process, I became aware that the questions I was using were potentially stifling the information that I was able to obtain from the women. Rather than using probing and open questions during the interviews I found that I was increasingly employing closed and leading questions. Being able to identify this flaw in my questioning style early on enabled me to change my approach and elicit more detailed information.

Conducting the interviews in the homes of the women was advantageous for several reasons. Firstly I felt as though this gave the women the opportunity to feel in control of their engagement in my study. I tried to behave in a way which reinforced this, such as offering to take my shoes off, waiting to be offered a seat, and allowing them to choose where we sat for the interviews. Being in their home also meant that the women could show me belongings and areas of their home as we spoke; this reinforced what they were saying and also gave me a true sense of the context of their home and the activities that they engage in.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

This final chapter will provide an overview of my study. This will include a recap of the research aim and objectives that I set out to address, provision of a summary for each of the chapters I have presented, and provide responses to my research aim and objectives. I will indicate the contribution that my study has made to three fields of research and to my own knowledge, understanding and ethos. I will then identify the limitations that exist within my study. Finally, I will consider the implications that this study has for practice and issues that would benefit from additional exploration in future research.

6.1 Research aim and objectives

The aim of this study was;

To explore the experience of living alone for 11 women aged 70 – 80 years

Four objectives were proposed as a means of addressing my research aim, these objectives were;

- 1. To understand how participants define their own experience of being an older woman**
- 2. To understand women as occupational beings**
- 3. To explore how home influences and is influenced by the activities that women engage in when they are at home alone**
- 4. To consider the potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement**

6.2 Summary of chapters

My thesis comprises six chapters, including this conclusion. This is a summary of those chapters which will demonstrate an overview of the process that I followed to establish and address my research aim and objectives.

Within **chapter 1** I explained why I wanted to embark on this study from a personal and professional perspective. I was particularly concerned with reconciling the incongruity that I had observed between by personal and professional experiences of older women. My Nan was extremely influential in my formative years which led me to view all older women in a

positive light. However, my previously positive perceptions of older women were challenged when I started practicing as an occupational therapist. The older women that I worked with in practice were frail, dependent on others, and facing a transition into a long term care facility. I envisioned that this study would enable me to gain some clarity regarding my understanding of the real lived experience of being an older woman.

In **chapter 2** I explored the literature and research that I considered to be pertinent to my study. My exploration focused on what it is like to be an older woman, older women as occupational beings, the significance of home for older women, and how photo-elicitation could be used in occupational therapy practice. This enabled me to demonstrate what was already known about my research topic and where there were opportunities to develop further knowledge. I was able to conclude that my study had the potential to make a contribution to the bodies of knowledge that already existed. This review of the literature and research enabled me to consolidate the aim and objectives of my study.

In **Chapter 3** I provided a description of the methods that I selected and the processes that I followed to collect the information to enable me to fulfil my research aim and objectives. Reflecting my desire to capture the lived experiences of older women, my study was influenced by the principles of interpretive phenomenological and feminist philosophical approaches. Both of these approaches attribute value to capturing experiences of a phenomenon in the voices of those experiencing it; in this study the phenomenon of interest was the experience of living alone for older women. In this chapter I also described the process I had followed to identify my selected research methods of unstructured interviews and photo elicitation. I explored the ethical issues relating to my study before I described how I would use purposive sampling to recruit 11 women to participate in my study. This chapter concluded by clearly detailing the processes that I intended to follow to collect my findings and how I would subsequently analyse the information that I gathered.

In **chapter 4** I introduced the 11 women who took part in my study and presented the findings that I captured by implementing my methods. The 11 women were recruited using a purposive sampling technique as they needed to be aged 70 – 80 years and living alone at home to fulfil the requirements of my study. The findings I gathered were organised under the seven themes which emerged during my analysis of the findings. These themes were;

1. Ageing as a lived experience for older women
2. The loss of a loved one
3. The desire to challenge the misconceptions about them as older women

4. Unique experiences of women in this generation
5. Later life as a time of self-growth
6. The environment of home and living alone
7. Using photo-elicitation from the perspective of the women

The findings presented comprised of the photographs which were taken by the 11 women supported by quotes from, and summaries of, discussions that occurred during the process of photo-elicitation and the unstructured interviews.

In **Chapter 5** I discussed the findings from my study in light of the literature and research explored in chapter 2. The discussions in this chapter enabled me to address the research aim and objectives that I set at the outset of my study. Within my discussions I was able to provide additional evidence to support what was already known (as identified in chapter 2) as well as challenging assumptions that had previously been made. The opportunity to challenge what was previously considered as fact enabled me to make a significant contribution to the understanding of older women as occupational beings.

6.3 Responses to my research aim and objectives

The findings from my study have enabled me to address my research aim and objectives that I establish at the outset of this thesis. I will now present a concise response to my aim and each of my four objectives. The aim of my study was;

To explore the experience of living alone for 11 women aged 70 – 80 years

I successfully recruited 11 women who were living alone and aged 70 – 80 years. All of the women participated in the four phases of my study, engaging in two rounds of photo-elicitation and two unstructured interviews. The overwhelming message from the women was that living alone in later life was a predominantly positive experience. They considered this to be because they could do what they wanted, when they wanted to do it without needing to answer to anyone else. The experience of living alone that the women describe demonstrates that the restrictions on the opportunities that they had previously faced due to their gender, contributes to their unique experience of living alone in later life.

To enable me to address my research aim I set out 4 objectives, I will now address each one in turn by providing a concise response drawn from my findings and discussion. The first of my objectives was;

1. **To understand how participants define their own experience of being an older woman**

The women in my study spoke of their experiences of the natural ageing process and any personal health issues that they were facing with acceptance, and when they were faced with challenges they created their own solutions. The ability of the women to resolve the challenges that they encountered was reflected in the independence that they demonstrated in their everyday life. Many of the eleven women saw an older woman as 'someone else', against whom they would measure their own experience. They always compared themselves to someone who appeared to be having a more negative experience of later life than them and therefore always viewed their own lived experience more positively. The same process occurred when they considered their personal health issues, which again led them to conclude that they were not as bad as someone else.

My second objective was;

2. **To understand women as occupational beings**

The 11 women in this study provided evidence that they were continuing to be occupational beings in later life, due to the number and variety of occupations that they captured in their photographs and chose to discuss in their interviews. The occupations that they engaged in were a combination of those that they had always completed and new ones. The new occupations that the women engaged in emerged as a consequence of giving up activities that they no longer wished to pursue, fulfilling activities that were previously completed by their husband, or because they could now do what they wanted to do. All of these reasons for the women engaging in new activities in later life were a result of the occupational injustice that they had experienced earlier in their life, due to their gender. Once living alone, the women felt able to challenge the roles and activities that were previously expected of them and to finally pursue their own occupational choices which enabled them to strive towards achieving their occupational potential. Later life for the women in my study was a time of 'becoming' where they could do what they wanted, when they wanted to do it.

My third objective was;

3. **To explore how home influences and is influenced by the activities that women engage in when they are at home alone**

All 11 of the women in my study were happy with where they were currently living, with attachment to their home reflecting the amount of time they had lived there for. Home

elicited positive emotional responses from the women because of the design of the physical environment, feeling comfortable, and feeling safe. Although all eleven of the women in my study lived alone, for most of them home remained a social environment which they would share with others. This was apparent from the activities that they engaged in to prepare the environment for visitors, the objects that they chose to display in the public areas of their home, and the activities that they engaged in as a response to being alone at home. However the women expressed mixed views about having others in their home, suggesting that there was an optimum length of time that people were welcome to stay before the women wanted their own space and time. Only one of the women in my study referred to experiencing loneliness.

My fourth and final objective was;

4. **To consider the potential of photo-elicitation in the exploration of occupational engagement**

The women in my study valued the opportunity that the method of photo-elicitation afforded them to capture their everyday activities at the time when and in the place where they naturally occurred. When the women were deciding what they wanted to photograph, they were reflecting on the activity that they were capturing and the meaning that they attributed to it. This enhanced the information that was shared during the interviews that followed. The women described how capturing the activities that they engage in when they were at home alone enabled them to understand how much they were doing; for many this was far more than they had initially anticipated. I valued the insight that the photographs gave me into the time that the women were at home alone, and the contextual components that were captured and discussed. By asking the women to take photographs of the activities that they engage in whilst I was not present, they were able to decide what they wanted to capture and discuss with me; this reinforces my feminist approach to methodology. Photo-elicitation has the potential to be an effective tool to use to explore occupational engagement in research and practice.

6.4 Contribution to fields of research

My study makes a valuable contribution to three fields of research; they are gerontology, feminism, and occupational therapy.

Gerontology comprises of a number of different disciplines that are united by their shared ambition to improve the perception and experience of later life. Their work is concerned with developing the knowledge and understanding that is held about the process of ageing, older

people, and their experiences in later life (Stuart-Hamilton 2011). Gerontologists view later life as a time that is characterised by complexity, hence the need to take an interdisciplinary approach to developing knowledge and understanding.

The findings gathered in my study further support the notion that later life is a complex experience. It was apparent from the experiences described by the 11 women in my study that there were numerous factors that appeared to influence their experience of later life. Three of the factors formed part of my inclusion criteria; age (70 – 80 years), gender (female), and residential status (living at home alone). Additional factors adding to the complexity of later life emerged from my findings, these included past experiences (e.g. family ethos when growing up), opportunities that they had or had not been afforded across the life course (e.g. following their own path regarding career and family life), and any issues that they were currently facing (e.g. ongoing health concerns). The complexity of later life can be seen to emerge from these numerous individual differences experienced by the women in my study, with this complexity only increasing further when they combine in various ways for each of the women.

Gerontologists value the opportunity to gather detailed accounts regarding the complexity of later life by capturing the lived experience from older people themselves. In my study I was keen to use research methods that would enable me to capture the lived experience of later life in the words used and images captured by the 11 women. Using the research methods of unstructured interviews and photo-elicitation enabled me to achieve this ambition. By capturing the lived experiences of the 11 women in my study I am able to contribute to the person centred body desired by gerontologists.

Whilst it is accepted that later life is a complex time, best defined by those experiencing it, there also appear to be some generalisations that can be made to enhance our understanding of later life for larger groups of individuals. For example, within my study the gender of the women that took part played a crucial role in the experiences they defined now that they found themselves living alone. This was apparent from the positive views that they expressed, particularly relating to the opportunities that they now felt they had which enabled them to do what they wanted to do, when they wanted to do it. By identifying the factors that can help us to better understand the experience of later life for groups of people, the potential for making a positive difference increases considerably.

As an occupational therapist I was keen to contribute to the interdisciplinary nature of gerontology and therefore I took the opportunity to explore theories proposed within

gerontology through an occupational therapy lens. An occupational therapy lens is informed by the view that engagement in meaningful occupation as essential to the achievement and maintenance of the health and wellbeing of an individual (e.g. Law et al 1998). Introducing occupational therapy language and concepts into the field of gerontology has provided a different perspective to that previously considered by academics. For example, the findings from my study suggest that considering engagement in activities in later life as being characterised by continuity (e.g. Victor 1994) or disengagement (e.g. Cumming and Henry 1961) is too simplistic. Engagement in activities in later life is a far more complex process which includes continuity, disengagement, and starting new activities that have not previously been pursued. As a result I have been able to offer a valuable contribution to the understanding of engagement in activities in later life, beyond that previously explored by gerontologists.

The second field of research that this study makes a contribution to is that of feminism. Feminism is informed by the ethos that everyone, regardless of their gender, has an equal opportunity to engage in everyday life.. However feminists commonly focus on ensuring that women have the same opportunities available to them as men (Walby 2011; Hooks 2015). Feminism strives to achieve this by capturing, presenting, and aiming to resolve the experiences of inequality that women are subjected to. My study makes a contribution to feminism by capturing and presenting the narratives of the 11 women, and by highlighting the inequalities that they appear to have faced across their life course as a result of their gender.

Feminism defines society as being patriarchal, where the voices of women are attributed less value than those of men (e.g. Usher 1996). In my study I was keen to give the 11 women the opportunity to tell me about their experiences in their own words and images. I worked towards achieving this by using unstructured interviews and photo-elicitation as my research methods. As a result the women were able to choose what they wanted to discuss in relation to their experience of living alone in later life using language and images that were meaningful to them. Using research methods that enabled the women in my study to take control and which valued their voices challenges the patriarchal nature of society.

My study further contributes to the field of feminism by highlighting the inequalities that all of the women described facing earlier in life as a result of their gender. Within my findings, discussions, and conclusions I have emphasised how the 11 women cite numerous examples of how being a woman restricted the opportunities that were available to them across their life course. These restricted opportunities included limited access to higher education and the

expectation that they would stay at home to care for their family to the detriment of their own career. This is an important aspect of my study as the experiences that the women described as occurring earlier in their life appeared to have consequences for their current experience of living alone. All of the women described living alone in later life as a predominantly positive experience due to the freedom they now felt that they had regarding the choices they could make about what they did and when. My study provides additional evidence of the ongoing nature of the inequalities faced by women and the continuing need for feminism to work towards identifying and addressing them. .

The third and final field of research that my study makes a contribution to is that of occupational therapy. Occupational therapists view all people as occupational beings who have an inherent need to engage in personally meaningful activities (occupations) of their choosing (e.g. Law et al 1998). The fulfilment of this need is shown to directly relate to the health and wellbeing of an individual (e.g Rudman et al 1997). My study has provided new evidence that gender is an integral defining feature when considering women as occupational beings and the degree of opportunity that they have to make personally meaningful occupational choices. ,

The women in my study cite numerous examples of how their gender has, and still does influence their experiences as occupational beings, and the occupational choices they have been able to make. When discussing the occupations that they pursued earlier in life the women made a clear distinction between those they had chosen to engage in and those they were expected to do. The occupations that were expected of them related to being a mother and wife; these were often fulfilled instead of occupations that they wanted to engage in, for example developing their own career. This is an area which has attracted limited attention in occupational therapy research.

Occupational therapy literature and research that is concerned with the experiences of older women commonly focuses on the decline in their abilities that are seen to be associated with increased age. However, the 11 women in my study provide clear evidence of their ongoing existence as active occupational beings. All of the women identified a wide range of occupations that they engaged in, both inside the home and beyond. The women mainly spoke of their independence in completing these occupations, although when challenges arose they would independently find a solution to enable their ongoing participation. The findings from my study suggest that occupational therapists should consider older women as

competent occupational beings who are still able to achieve their occupational potential without professional intervention.

As demonstrated, my study has made contributions to the research fields of gerontology, feminism, and occupational therapy. I believe that the interdisciplinary nature of this study has added an interesting dimension to my work. I am particularly able to appreciate the contribution that gerontology and feminism can make to the development of occupational therapy.

6.5 Contribution to my knowledge, understanding, and ethos

Completing this study has enabled me to reconcile the incongruity that I had observed between my personal and professional experiences of older women. The women in this study demonstrated what I long hoped to be true, that older women do have a positive experience of later life. However, I did not anticipate the extent of the impact that their gender had on their experience as an occupational being in the past and present. This has acted to strengthen my feminist values which I now vocalise more frequently and with greater confidence.

I now accept enabling occupational justice as an integral part of the role of the occupational therapist and believe that this needs to be embedded in all occupational therapy education and services. I believe that it is important that we challenge the traditional parameters of practice, by adopting a proactive rather than reactive approach to service provision. This will be beneficial for both people accessing occupational therapy services and the development of the profession.

6.6 Implications for practice

This study has implications for occupational therapy practice with older women. It has demonstrated that older women are active occupational beings that are able to creatively address the challenges that they face due to natural ageing or poor health. This indicates that it is essential to provide bespoke support to an older person that focuses on prevention of future decline but in a way that values their ongoing abilities. By assuming that older women need support to age well we are encouraging dependency. Consideration needs to be given to when and how occupational therapists intervene in the life of an older woman.

It is common in the United Kingdom for an individual to gain access to occupational therapy services at a point of crisis and through a referral made by another professional. This approach is dependent upon the other professional having a sound knowledge and

understanding of the scope of occupational therapy practice, and deeming the individual to be in need of this input. The power in this process resides with the professionals rather than the individual requiring support. This challenges the person centred nature of practice that is informed by the notion that an individual is the expert in their own life and lived experiences of health, illness and disability. The women in my study demonstrated considerable insight into the challenges they faced and the steps that they needed to take to address these. Providing individuals with the opportunity to self-refer to occupational therapy services could lead to professional input that is timely and more meaningful to the individual resulting in a more successful outcome

This study has indicated that occupational therapists need to consider how their current practice reflects the original ethos of occupational therapy. Our roots are embedded in social action, yet this is often lacking in the services that we provide. Rather than accepting the parameters that act to shape a woman's occupational engagement we should find ways in which we can take positive action to enhance their experiences as an occupational being. It is essential that we actively engage with the concept of occupational justice, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their occupational potential regardless of their individual differences.

An increased focus upon occupational justice could be achieved by reframing the current focus in occupational therapy practice. Occupational therapy practice in the United Kingdom commonly adopts an individualistic approach, addressing the needs of each individual. This is valued highly because it addresses the person centred ideal which is expected of health and social care service provision. Moving away from an individualistic approach to a more societal or community based approach could enable an occupational therapist to identify where occupational injustice exists and to begin to challenge this by taking social action. This has the potential to extend the reach and therefore impact of occupational therapy in society as a whole with positive consequences for the identity of the profession.

The findings from this study, combined with my own reflections, suggest that photo-elicitation could be advantageous as a method used in occupational therapy practice. Within this study photo-elicitation was found to be an effective means of capturing occupational engagement. It allowed the women to capture what is important to them at the time at which the activity naturally occurs, and in the natural context of the occupation. This could be a useful way of enhancing the person centred ethos of occupational therapy. Photo-elicitation could be used

to support all stages of the occupational therapy process, including assessment, intervention, and final evaluation.

Occupational therapy services are often hindered by the time constraints that are placed upon them because of the demand on services; this has an impact upon the scope of the service that can be provided. This may mean that occupational therapists are unable to visit people in their natural environment (home) and that the time they can spend with them is limited to a pre-determined appointment pattern; this restricts the person centred nature of practice.

Photo-elicitation is able to capture occupational engagement over a prolonged period of time and within the context in which it naturally occurs. This would enable an occupational therapist to gain a greater degree of understanding of the individual as an occupational being. Photo-elicitation has the potential of alleviating the demand placed upon occupational therapy services yet improving the person centred input that is received by individuals who are referred to them.

If photo-elicitation were to be adopted by occupational therapists in practice it would be essential to consider the logistical demands that this may raise. In this study I provided cameras and memory cards to most of the women to enable them to take photographs, this presented challenges in terms of ensuring I had enough resources available at the right time, and the need to deliver and collect these items over a wide geographical area. However, it is now increasingly common for people to own a mobile phone that has an in-built camera and internet access. This could enable people to take their own photographs pertaining to their occupational engagement and send them to their occupational therapist. Making use of everyday technological advances would reduce the need for the therapist to consider the logistics of providing and collecting cameras, thus making photo-elicitation a more viable option to use in practice.

Using photo-elicitation in practice raises additional issues pertaining to confidentiality and data protection.. A photograph can capture details beyond those which an individual may choose to discuss and freely share. Who views the photographs that are taken and where they are stored would require careful consideration to ensure that the data is protected, just as it is when information is captured in a written format. This would need careful consideration by those who hold responsibility for ensuring data protection in individual organisations prior to the implementation of this new way of working.

6.7 Limitations

Whilst I am able to demonstrate that my study has made a valuable contribution, there are a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. These limitations are concerned with the transferability of the findings, and what I have learned about managing the research process. Giving consideration to these limitations will enable the quality of this study to be evaluated more effectively.

For qualitative studies to be deemed transferable from one context to another it is essential that a rich and detailed description is provided of each stage of the research process (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Whilst I aspired to provide this level of detail in my study there are several issues regarding my sample of participants that need to be highlighted in order for the transferability of my findings to be evaluated. Factors that I propose may influence the transferability of my findings concern the recruitment, selection, and description I provide of the women who participated in my study.

In order to recruit the 11 women who took part in my study I took several different approaches, however all made use of an intermediary person. I created a flier that I emailed to contacts I had made through my role as a Brownie leader for Girlguiding UK and ex-colleagues who I asked to forward on the details of my study to anyone who they felt fulfilled my criteria. I also asked the chair of the county Trefoil Guild (part of Girlguiding UK for those aged 18 years and over) to publicise my study at their AGM. My final approach was to attend a community café where I spoke one to one to people that were recommended to me by the person in charge. Using an intermediary person meant that I came with a recommendation that appeared to encourage participation. However by taking these approaches to participant recruitment I restricted the pool of women that I was accessing to those connected to people I knew; taking alternative approaches may have resulted in different findings being generated.

The approaches that I took to recruit women to my study could have meant that I limited involvement to a particular type of person. Apart from my attendance at the community café, all of the approaches I took to recruit women to my study required the women to make the initial contact with me, either by telephone or email. Whilst this ensured that they were taking control over their choice to be involved, it may have resulted in a certain group of women being recruited; those who were confident to make the initial contact. The women I recruited may have been those who had a point they wanted to make and the confidence to share this with me.

Although I did not explicitly collect information about the social and economic context of the women in my study, it is possible to draw a number of conclusions from the observations that I made. Only two of the women referred to having limited financial resources available to them in later life, and only one of the women did not own her own property. The other 9 women appeared to be comfortable in the financial situation they were in. It is also important to acknowledge that all of the women lived in the South East of England which is associated with higher levels of wealth. Of course these are only assumptions and need to be treated with caution.

Completing this study has enabled me to develop a detailed knowledge, understanding, and practical experience of completing the process of research. This experience elicited many emotions from me at different stages, from elation at having recruited a woman to realising I needed another 10, and from feeling competent to questioning the decisions I was making. I accepted these experiences as part of the normal learning process. However there are two issues concerning my engagement in the research process that need to be considered in terms of the limitations they may place on my study; these are the restrictions imposed by the ethics committee and the limitations of fully engaging with an interpretive phenomenological methodology.

Due to the nature of my study it was necessary to gain approval from the University ethics committee prior to undertaking my research. Gaining this approval turned out to be a long and arduous process which centred on three main issues. The first issue I faced was that the panel members wanted the women in my study to be considered to be vulnerable; I found this problematic as the aim of my study was to demonstrate that the opposite is actually true. As a result I needed to change my view point for this process to be successful and for ethical approval to be granted. Another concern raised by the panel was my decision to use the research method of photo-elicitation; they were unable to see the benefit of using such a participatory method. This linked to the third issue concerning participatory research where they were not happy for me to engage the women in the process of analysis of my findings. In order to gain ethical approval I was required to adhere to several restrictions imposed by the panel.

The restrictions imposed by the ethics panel challenged my ability to fully implement the feminist and interpretive phenomenological methodological principles that I aspired to use. When taking a feminist methodological approach, Hammersley (1992) explains that it is important that women should have the opportunity to be actively involved in all stages of the

research process. This can be seen to also facilitate the implementation of an interpretive phenomenological approach which emphasises the importance of enabling experiences to be defined by those who are living them in a way that is meaningful to them (e.g. Dowling 2007). Due to the research ethics process that I needed to complete before embarking on my research, and the time that I had available to me, it was not possible to include the women in the planning of my study. Whilst I devised the means by which the women were to collect information for my study, they decided what they were going to photograph and subsequently discuss with me. I asked the women if they wanted to help me create a 'pen picture' of themselves for use in my thesis, however all of the women declined this offer. To improve my application of a feminist and interpretive phenomenological methodological approach in the future I would strive to give the women more influence over the research process throughout.

It is important to acknowledge that it is possible that my use of feminist and interpretive phenomenological methodological principles may have limited the findings that I collated. It is important to acknowledge that there may have been activities that were not photographed and experiences that were not discussed. There are numerous reasons why they may not have discussed particular issues; these may include not considering the issue to be relevant to the study and not wanting to discuss something to protect their privacy. This may have enabled them to portray a particular depiction of themselves; one that they wanted me and wider society to see. The information gathered may not have provided a full representation of the experience of living alone for all women aged 70-80 years.

6.8 Areas for future research

In my study I found that older women living alone in later life were experiencing a time of 'becoming' because they were finally able to do what they wanted, when they wanted to do it. I would suggest that this study should be replicated with older women who are living with their husband or partner to establish any similarities or differences in their experience as an occupational being in later life. If they were yet to experience their time of 'becoming' this could have ongoing consequences for their health and wellbeing.

The women in my study were keen to discuss the activities that they engaged in outside of the home, although this was not a concern of this study. As a feminist researcher I am interested in exploring the issues that women identify as being important to them. It is therefore appropriate to provide the opportunity for the women to pursue future research in this direction. It would be interesting to establish how activities within and beyond the home interact to inform the experiences of older women as occupational beings.

It would be interesting to explore further the relationship between occupational therapy and feminism. Occupational therapy and feminism share a similar ethos that focuses on enabling equality for all, however, this relationship has not received the attention that it deserves. By exploring the links between occupational therapy and feminism I believe we (occupational therapists) would be inspired to return to our activist roots. Exploiting this relationship could facilitate all people to achieve their occupational potential by experiencing equality in the occupational choices that are available to them.

It would be advantageous to consider further the notion that women experience occupational injustice throughout their lives. Continuing with this line of enquiry would help us to understand the lived experiences of all women as occupational beings, the barriers that they face, and how these barriers can be addressed. This would enable women to have the opportunity to make their personal occupational choices and to fulfil their occupational potential throughout their life.

Finally, additional work is required to establish the full potential of using photo-elicitation to explore occupational engagement in practice. Using such a method in this way would facilitate occupational therapists to fulfil their person centred ethos. However, using photo-elicitation with those accessing services will raise additional ethical concerns, which would need to be addressed. Although I believe that the benefits of using such a participatory method to collect information about people as occupational beings would outweigh the concerns.

6.9 My reflections

As a feminist researcher I was keen to establish a research relationship with the women that was based on collaboration, non-exploitation, and reciprocity (Hammersley 1992; Creswell 2013). However this challenged my preferred structured approach that informs everything I do. I found that I experienced a sense of anxiety about my ability to obtain the information that I was seeking through unstructured means. This was exasperated by not having a list of questions to work through due to using unstructured interviews. My previous practice as an occupational therapist was in acute healthcare which was characterised by the use of structured interviews and techniques. I did settle into this new way of working once I had completed interview 1 with all of the women. I believe this was because I could observe my success at implementing my method and I had built a good rapport with each of the women which made it easier to elicit information.

I found the time that I spent engaging with the women recruited to participate in my study extremely rewarding. The narratives that they shared have had a lasting impact on me. I have

restarted old hobbies, such as knitting. I have dealt with an ongoing health issue following an honest reflection from one of the women about a similar issue. The women also made me consider what I want to achieve in the latter years of my life and how I can prepare for a positive end of life.

Fulfilling the role of a researcher rather than an occupational therapy practitioner proved challenging for me. For at least two of the women I could see the potential for their engagement with an occupational therapist; however not in a way provided by statutory services which tend to focus on dealing with times of crisis rather than prevention of further decline. It felt as though I was initiating the occupational therapy process by gathering information about the women, their occupations, and their environment but was then unable to use this to inform interventions.

Every step of the research process was a joy, from the initial conversations that I had with the women through to the farewell hug from Natalie, and Ordelia taking my photograph to put in her album recording her year.

6.10 My Nan, 11 women and me...

I embarked on this study in an attempt to address the incongruity between my professional and personal experiences of older women. I aspired to reassure myself that older women do have a positive experience of later life as I had observed in my Nan during my formative years, rather than the dependent and frail existence that I witnessed in my professional life. Using unstructured interviews and photo-elicitation with the 11 women in my study enabled me to capture the experience of living alone for women aged 70-80 years. The women described facing challenges throughout their lives but defined a predominantly positive experience of later life. This acts to reaffirm the positive experiences that I had with my Nan (Figure 180) and encourages me to view those I meet in my professional life as being the exception rather than the norm.



Figure 180

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Appendix 1 – Participant Information sheet

A Study Exploring the Experience of Living Alone for Women Aged 70 – 80 years

Information Sheet

Introduction

I am doing my PhD in Health and Social Care at Canterbury Christ Church University.

My study aims to explore the experience of living alone for women aged between 70 and 80 years. If you choose to take part in my study you will be asked to take photographs of activities that you complete alone at home. These photographs will be used to guide interviews with you. The focus of the interviews will be on the meaning you give to the activities that you have photographed, how the meaning you give to home is linked to these activities and how the meaning of home links to your experience of living alone.

The Process

My study will be made up of 4 phases which will be completed over a period of 11 months:

Phase 1 and 2 (March/ April 2015): During our first meeting I will introduce you to my study and give you some written information that you can keep. This will be followed by an interview lasting approximately 1 hour 30 minutes which will start by asking you to talk about the places that you have lived. After the interview you will be given a camera and/ or memory card to borrow and will be asked to take 25 photographs of activities that you do at home when you are alone; the photographs will need to be taken before we are due to meet again. The camera and/ memory card will be collected at an agreed time with a date and time being set to discuss the photographs. The discussion of the photographs will last approximately 2 hours.

Phase 3 (December 2015): A day and time will be set for me to give you a camera and/ or memory card to borrow. I will remind you of the details of the study and ensure that you are happy to continue taking part. If you are happy to continue you will again be asked to take 25 photographs of activities that you do at home when you are alone; the photographs will need to be taken before we are due to meet again. The camera and/ or memory card will be collected at an agreed time with a date and time being set to discuss the photographs. The discussion of the photographs will last approximately 2 hours.

Phase 4 (February 2016): A date and time will be set between us to allow a final interview to be completed. This final interview will aim to discuss the use of photographs as a way of

looking at activities that you complete in the home. The interview will last approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

What will happen to the information collected?

All of the interviews will be recorded on a Dictaphone to help me to analyse the information after. The recordings will only be listened to and transcribed by me. All of the information I collect will be stored on a computer and protected by a password that only I will know.

I would like to use quotes from your interviews and the photographs that you create within my thesis, presentations and publications. I will not use your name when using these quotes and photographs.

I will keep all records, photographs and transcripts for 5 years; this is in line with my university requirements. Any paper documents will be scanned to enable them to be stored on a computer. All information collected will be encrypted and stored on a password protected pen drive which will be locked away when I am not using it.

Withdrawal from the Study

Whilst this study does not set out to discuss difficult issues, it is possible that through the interview something difficult might arise for you. You can always ask that we stop the interview.

You can withdraw from the study at any stage, and you do not need to give me a reason for doing so. I will ask if you are happy to continue to take part in this study at the beginning of each session.

If your living arrangements change, such as you are no longer living alone, it could affect the research, and therefore I could no longer keep you in the study. We may also need to stop if either you or I feel that the study is affecting your health and wellbeing in a negative way, or if you find using the camera too difficult.

My contact details are:

Gemma Wells

Telephone: 07716292790

Email: gemma.wells.research@gmail.com

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Appendix 2 – Consent Form

Consent Form

Please read the information sheet provided before signing this form.

Please initial each box to indicate your agreement with the statements and sign at the bottom of the page to confirm your consent to participate in this study.

I have received enough information about the study

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any stage without providing a reason

I agree to anonymised quotes being used in the thesis, presentations and publications

I agree to interviews being recorded for the purposes of data analysis

I agree to images being published in the thesis, presentations and publications

I have had the opportunity to have my questions about this study answered

I consent to participate in this study

Signed

Print Name

Date

Appendix 3 – Contact details for local Organisations

Local Organisations Offering Advice and Support

Action on Elder Abuse	A national organisation focusing on dealing with abuse of older people. Types of abuse may include physical, psychological, financial, sexual abuse and neglect. 'Action on Elder Abuse' provides a confidential freephone helpline.	08088088141
Age UK – Thanet	Age UK Thanet provide a wide range of services including day centres, meal delivery, home based support and domestic help.	01843 223881
Citizens Advice Bureau	The Citizens Advice Bureau is able to offer free, confidential and independent advice on a whole range of issues including housing, discrimination, debt and benefits.	01843 225973
CROP – Citizens Rights for Older People	A confidential advocacy service specifically for older people. They are able to help with (though not limited to) benefit claims, financial affairs, consumer issues and dealing with abuse.	01227 787777
CRUSE	Provides support to bereaved people of all ages. This service is free and confidential.	0845 6030024
KCC Social Care Help	You can refer yourself to Kent County Council if you feel that you would benefit from support to complete daily activities.	03000 416161
Out of Hours NHS Services	This is an NHS medical advice service which operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	111
Samaritans	Available 365 days a year and 24 hours a day. The Samaritans provide someone to talk to about anything. This is a confidential service – you do not even have to provide your name.	08457 909090

Appendix 4 – Ethics Application Form



FACULTY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FOR FREC APPROVAL

Please type your application documents. Remember that applications must be printed out, authorised, and then one hard copy sent to: Mr Simon Hannaford, FREC Chair, together with an emailed copy to: simon.hannaford@canterbury.ac.uk and elizabeth.melville@canterbury.ac.uk

For Faculty Office use only

FREC Protocol No:

Date received:

Your application **must** comprise the following documents (please tick the boxes below to indicate that they are attached):

Peer Review Form

Application Form

✓

Declaration Form

✓

Risk Assessment Form

✓

Copies of any documents to be used in the study:

Questionnaire

Introductory letter(s)

Participant Information Sheet(s)

✓

Consent Form(s)

✓

Data Collection Instruments

Focus Group Guidelines

Other (please give details)

Instructions on how to use the camera

List of local organisations



FACULTY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FOR FREC APPROVAL

Please type your application and send an **authorised** hard copy to Mr Simon Hannaford, together with an emailed copy to: simon.hannaford@canterbury.ac.uk and elizabeth.melville@canterbury.ac.uk

Please ensure that you have answered all questions.

For official use only

FREC Protocol No:

Date received:

1. LEAD RESEARCHER

Name: Gemma Wells

Status: Staff member / Postgraduate student (please underline as appropriate)

Department: Faculty of Health and Social Care/ Graduate School

Email: gmt6@canterbury.ac.uk

Previous experience of research on human participants:

As part of my MSc in Interprofessional Health and Social Care I completed a research study exploring the perceptions of weekend working held by Occupational and Physical Therapists in East Kent. This study involved the planning, running and analysis of 2 focus groups.

2. STUDY TITLE

The Experience of Living Alone for Women aged 70 – 80 years

3. OTHER RESEARCHERS/COLLABORATORS *(please note their employer if they are not employees of CCCU)*

None

4. Intended start date: December 2014

5. Projected date of completion: September 2016

6. RESEARCH SPONSOR/OTHER ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

If your study involves another organisation, please provide details. Evidence that the relevant authority has given permission will be needed (i.e. a letter).

None

7. OTHER REC APPROVAL *(Has the proposed study been submitted to any other reviewing body? If so, please provide details).*

No

8. LAY SUMMARY *(NO MORE than 300 words)*

This study aims to enable 11 women aged 70-80 years to explore their experience of living alone. The women will be asked to take photographs of activities that they complete alone at home, these photographs will be used to guide individual unstructured interviews; this is called photo elicitation. The focus of the interviews will be on the meaning given to the activities that the women have photographed, how the meaning given to home is linked to these activities and how the meaning of home links to the experience of living alone. The aims of the study are as follows;

1. To identify the activities women aged 70-80 years engage in when alone at home.
2. To explore how the activities influence the wellbeing of the women.
3. To establish how engagement in activities within the home environment influence the meaning attributed to home by the women.

The aims of the study will be addressed through the use of four unstructured interviews over an 11 month period; one at the beginning of the data collection process (phase 1) and one at the end (phase 4). There will also be two cycles of photo-elicitation in between the two unstructured interviews (phase 2 and phase 3). Photo-elicitation in this study will require the women to take photographs of the activities that they complete when they are at home alone over a negotiated period of time.

Using photo-elicitation as a research method in this study leads to a forth aim;

4. To consider how photographing and discussing activities may be of use in occupational therapy practice and research.

The findings generated will be analysed to establish both the individual nature of the experience of living alone and whether there are any commonalities within the group.

9. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To enable women aged 70-80 years to explore and define their own experience of living alone.

10. STUDY DESIGN, METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS (*please outline in brief*)

This study is underpinned by a constructionist epistemology where knowledge is believed to be constructed as a result of a process of social interaction with people and the world (Crotty 1998; Burr 2003). Adopting an interpretive phenomenological theoretical perspective the focus within this study will be upon the lived experience for the individual (Dowling 2007; Balls 2009; Tuohy et al 2013) with value attributed to personal experience (Balls 2009).

A feminist approach to methodology will be taken which holds the lives of women as a central concern (Hammersley 1992; Scholtz 2010). Such an approach also reinforces the value of personal experience and calls for collaborative relationships in the research process between the researcher and people taking part (Hammersley 1992; Creswell 2013).

This qualitative study will use the research methods of unstructured interviews and photo-elicitation to generate findings.

An unstructured interview is a useful way of exploring a person's lived experience (Bowling 2009) and is thus reflective of the methodological approach informing this study. The interview will have a focus however the questions used in the process are non-scripted with the researcher approaching the interview with a general list of topics which may be explored (Bowling 2009).

Photo-elicitation is where photographs are used during the interview process to stimulate discussion (e.g. Harper 2002). There are different approaches to the generation of photographs used in the photo-elicitation process; for this study the photographs will be taken by the women. This reflects the collaborative nature of the research relationship promoted by a feminist methodology (Hammersley 1992; Creswell 2013).

This study will consist of four phases of data collection extending over a period of 11 months to enable potential seasonal differences to be captured; the details of each phase are as follows;

During **phase 1** (December 2014) an initial meeting with each woman will be completed to fully introduce the study and to answer any questions that they may have about the study. During this initial meeting an information pack will be provided, this will include;

- Information about the study
- Copy of the consent form
- Instructions on how to use the digital camera (if borrowing a camera from the researcher)
- Contact details for the researcher

Verbal consent will be obtained at this point.

During this initial meeting an unstructured interview will be completed. The opening question will be something like “please can you tell me about the places that you have lived throughout your life?” It is anticipated that this question will open discussion and enable rapport to be established.

Potential follow on questions may include, but are not limited to*;

- How long did you live there for? (3)
- Who did you live with at the time? (3)
- What were your most important roles at that time? (1, 2, 3)
- What activities do you recall completing within your home at that time? (1, 2, 3)
- What would a typical day have looked like for you? (1, 2, 3)
- Have you ever lived anywhere that you would not have called a home? (2, 3)
- Out of all of the places that you have lived, which was the most important to you? (2, 3)

*the numbers indicate the objectives to which the questions relate.

It is anticipated that questions such as these will provide a historical perspective on the meaning of home and the activities completed within the home environment. Literature pertaining to the meaning of home suggests that there may be a link between the past experience of home and the meaning attributed to the current home. Occupational Therapists believe that activities are explicitly linked to roles and routines therefore questions pertaining to these elements will enable exploration of activities performed at this time. Exploring feelings surrounding the periods discussed may facilitate an understanding of the wellbeing of the women at that time.

The unstructured interview will last for approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

The final element of this initial meeting will be to introduce the concept of photo-elicitation and to demonstrate how to use the digital camera (if this is being borrowed from the researcher). The women will be asked to take 25 photographs over a negotiated period of time of activities that they complete when they are alone within their home environment.

Phase 2 will commence when the researcher collects the camera or memory card from the women. At this time the researcher will schedule a time to return with the printed images to complete the photo-elicitation process. Informed written consent will be obtained when the researcher returns to the participant with the images. During the photo-elicitation process an unstructured interview will be utilized. In order to start the unstructured interview a question such as, "Please can you choose your favorite photograph and tell me why you have chosen that particular photograph?" will be used to begin the conversation.

There is no limit applied to the number of photographs to be discussed; this will be controlled by how the conversation develops and the choices made by the women. To enable the women to move between the photographs they may be asked to group them in a way they see fit, identify the activity that they have photographed which they value the most or identify the activities which they find most challenging.

Potential follow on questions may include but are not limited to*;

- What does the photograph show? (1)
- Why did you choose to take this photograph? (1,2)
- How often do you complete this activity? (1)
- What motivates you to complete this activity? (1, 2)
- How does this activity make you feel? (2)
- How long have you completed this activity for? (1)
- Are there any times when this activity has not been part of your life? (1, 2)
- Where within your home do you complete this activity? (1, 3)
- How does the environment influence your completion of this activity? (2, 3)
- How does this activity influence how you feel about your home? (3)

*the numbers indicate the objectives to which the questions relate.

Questions of this nature will enable exploration of the activities being completed within the home environment. Whilst the photographs will capture a single moment, the unstructured interview will allow the exploration of the before, during and after of the activity captured. Occupational Therapists believe that engagement in activity is influenced by motivation, routines, roles and the capacity to perform; the questions pertaining to activity in this study will be informed by this ethos. Occupational Therapists also perceive the environment as influential in the performance of activity;

for the purpose of this study the environment is the home. Reference is often made to enablers and barriers to the performance of activity which may include (though not limited to) individual health and wellbeing, level of control over the environment, and opportunities available to individuals; these may arise in the unstructured interviews.

The process of photo-elicitation will last approximately 2 hours.

Phase 3 (July 2015) will be initiated when the researcher arranges a time to visit each woman to reconfirm consent to continue with the study and to provide the camera or memory card to enable the fulfilment of the next element of the study.

By this time preliminary analysis of the data which emerged from the first cycle of photo-elicitation would have been completed which will enable a process of 'progressive focusing' to occur where the researcher will be able to refine the focus of data collection in order to further explore concepts which may have emerged (Parlett and Hamilton 1976). The themes which have been identified by the researcher as emerging from phase 2 will be communicated with each woman prior to being asked to take their second set of photographs. The themes will be those from the individual unstructured interviews and any common themes which have been identified across the group of women as a whole. An opportunity to discuss these themes will be provided with any feedback from the women being recorded and used within the thesis findings, discussion and conclusions. When discussing themes the researcher will need to ensure that the personal lived experience and collaborative approach to the research relationship remains the focus so as to reflect the methodological approach informing the study as a whole.

As in phase 1 the women will be asked to take 25 photographs over a negotiated period of time of activities that they complete when they are alone within their home environment. At an agreed time the researcher will arrange to collect the camera or memory card and print the images. A time will be scheduled to complete the second cycle of the photo-elicitation process.

During the photo-elicitation process an unstructured interview will be utilised. In order to start the unstructured interview a question such as, "Please can you choose your favorite photograph and tell me why you have chosen that particular photograph?" will be used to facilitate the building of rapport and to initiate the conversation.

There is no limit applied to the number of photographs to be discussed; this will be controlled by how the conversation develops and the choices made by the women. To enable the women to move between the photographs they may be asked to group them in a way they see fit, identify the activity that they have photographed which they value the most or to identify the activities which they find most challenging.

Potential follow on questions may include but are not limited to*;

- What does the photograph show? (1)
- Why did you choose to take this photograph? (1,2)
- How often do you complete this activity? (1)
- What motivates you to complete this activity? (1, 2)
- How does this activity make you feel? (2)
- How long have you completed this activity for? (1)
- Are there any times when this activity has not been part of your life? (1, 2)
- Where within your home do you complete this activity? (1, 3)
- How does the environment influence your completion of this activity? (2, 3)
- How does this activity influence how you feel about your home? (3)

*the numbers indicate the objectives to which the questions relate.

The process of photo-elicitation will last approximately 2 hours.

In **phase 4** (October 2015) an unstructured interview will be completed with each of the women. In order to start the unstructured interview an opening question something along the lines of, "How did you feel about taking photographs of the activities that you complete in your home?" will be used to start the conversation.

Potential follow on questions may include but are not limited to*;

- Are there any activities that you decided not to photograph? (1)
- Were you concerned about what I might think about the photographs that you had taken? (4)
- How did any concerns influence your photographs? (4)
- Did you find it useful to have a photograph to focus on during the interviews? (4)

- Since the interviews discussing the activities that you had photographed, have you noticed any changes in the activities that you complete or how you complete them? (1, 2, 4)
- Do you think that photographing the activities had an influence on your wellbeing at the time or since the study was completed? (2, 4)
- Has involvement in this study influenced the meaning that you give to your home in any way? (3, 4)

*the numbers indicate the objectives to which they relate.

The unstructured interview will last for approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

These questions are aimed at exploring the potential use of photography as a means of assessment, intervention or research method for use by Occupational Therapists. There is very limited evidence of photography being used by the profession in this way.

Data Analysis

All interviews will be recorded on a Dictaphone and transcribed by the researcher; the transcripts will form the findings which will be analysed in this study. The analysis of the transcripts will be guided by a process of thematic analysis. The themes which emerge from individual transcripts and from the group of women as a whole will be presented back to the women in the study for discussion. The outcome of these discussions will inform the analysis of the findings. The photographs will be used for purposes of illustration in the results but will not be analysed by the researcher.

The photographs in this study will be taken by the women and will have the advantage of capturing a range of activities at a variety of times during the day. The photographs will provide a unique insight into the lives of the women. Whilst a photograph will provide a single still image, the meaning of the content (both present and absent) can only be defined by the participant themselves and therefore the researcher is not in a position to analyse the photograph. The photographs are therefore being used as the means by which the women can identify what is important to them. The photographs will then act as a trigger for the discussions which follow. Within the method of photo-elicitation the participants are seen as teachers enabling the researcher to learn about

the person behind the photograph; this is akin to the feminist approach to methodology being used within this study.

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis the researcher will maintain a research diary. The information documented will facilitate reflexivity throughout the research process and will be cited, at least in part, within the thesis. It is believed that the researcher's thoughts (as a woman and Occupational Therapist) will add a significant dimension to this study and therefore the views of the researcher will be acknowledged. .

11. WHO ARE THE REQUIRED PARTICIPANTS FOR YOUR STUDY?

Approximately 11 women aged 70-80 years who live alone. Women with a range of experience of living alone will be sought, for example those who have lived alone for more than half of their lives, widows, women who are divorced and those who have moved to their current home in the past 5 years.

12. HOW WILL PARTICIPANTS BE RECRUITED?

A purposive sampling technique will be used to recruit participants. The researcher will distribute information about the study through family, friends and community groups. Community groups will include (though not limited to) Girlguiding UK, Rock Choir and church based groups.

Participants from another CCCU Faculty

Will you be recruiting STAFF or STUDENTS from another Faculty? If so, which Faculty?

No

IMPORTANT: If you intend recruiting participants from another Faculty, this form must be copied to the Dean of the Faculty concerned, and to the Chair of that Faculty's Research Ethics Committee.

13. SELECTION CRITERIA (Inclusion and exclusion criteria)

Inclusion: Participants will need to be female, aged 70-80years and living alone. Participants need to have been living alone for at least 2 years.

Exclusion: Older women who have a visual impairment. Older women who have a cognitive deficit; this includes those with poor memory, those who are unable to process the information provided to them or those who do not have the language skills necessary for the participation in an oral interview. Any cognitive deficits will be determined by the researcher through observation of how the women engage within the research process. Particular attention will be given to how the women engage in discussions with the researcher, whether they appear able to retain the instructions and information provided about the research process, and their ability to action the instructions provided. Older women who have a physical impairment e.g. restrictions in hand movements as a result of arthritis, which results in an inability to effectively utilise a digital camera will also be excluded from the study.

14. CONSENT

14a. How will consent be obtained? (*Attach copies of any information sheet(s) and consent forms that will be used*)

I feel it is important to gain verbal consent during the first meeting with the participant before completing the unstructured interview; this verbal consent will be sought once the researcher has gone through the information sheet verbally and in detail. Informed written consent will be obtained during the second meeting with the participant to allow them time to consider the information provided previously and to ask any additional questions they may have. If the participant is not happy to provide written consent at this stage the data collected in the first meeting will be destroyed by the researcher and not included in the study. Consent will be reconfirmed verbally at the beginning of each subsequent meeting. Consent obtained will need to cover participation in the study and use of the photographs generated to support the thesis, publications and conference presentations (British Sociological Association 2006).

To enable participants with poor literacy to provide their consent for participation in the study the researcher will spend additional time in the first two sessions working through the information on the 'participant information sheet' and the 'consent form'. Copies of these documents will be left with the participants and the researcher will encourage them to discuss the information further with a trusted friend or relative. If the participant is unable to sign the consent form due to poor literacy, the researcher will record confirmation of informed verbal consent at the beginning of the second meeting. This verbal consent will need to include the participant confirming their name, their agreement to each of the statements on the consent form and the date on which the consent is being provided.

Understanding of the information provided on the participant information sheet will be ascertained through discussion with the participants with regards to what they see the expectations of their involvement in the study to include. These discussions will occur at each phase of the research process as preparation for the next phase is commenced. Understanding (or otherwise) will also be evident as the research process progresses with particular reference to the photographs taken by the participants.

14b. Will the participants be from any vulnerable groups? (Tick as appropriate)

Those under 16

Those with any form of learning difficulties

Those who may have a particularly dependent relationship with the researcher (e.g. students)

Any other vulnerable group (please give details)

X

The participants within this study will be older women living alone who may be considered vulnerable based upon their age and living circumstances.

14c. How will you ensure that vulnerable participants are competent to consent to take part? (Please attach any correspondence to parents, guardians, carers, keyworkers etc.)

Through my practice as an Occupational Therapist I have experience of establishing an individual's ability to consent at a basic level. It is anticipated that within this study it will be clearly evident to the researcher if a person does not have the capacity to consent due to the complexity of the instructions which need to be followed at each phase. Questions over the ability of the individual to consent would be raised if they appeared unable to process and action what was being asked of them, if there were difficulties in using the camera or if they were unable to recall information in the

necessary detail from one phase to the next. Such difficulties would make the continued engagement of the women in the study difficult to maintain.

At the beginning of each phase of the study the researcher will meet with the women to ensure their ongoing consent to participate in the study and that they are clear with regards to the instructions they need to follow. This will provide the opportunity for the researcher to make an ongoing assessment with regards to the cognitive abilities, physical abilities and capacity of the women to engage in the study as defined in the previous paragraph.

If any women are identified as lacking the capacity to consent for their involvement in the study this would be discussed with the researcher's PhD supervisor. If it is deemed inappropriate for the women to continue to be part in the study this will be explained to them and the opportunity provided for them to have any questions they may have answered. If there are concerns held by the researcher that require further follow up, the researcher will refer onto the appropriate organisation. The researcher will discuss the woman's withdrawal from the study with a relative or trusted friend if this is requested by the participant. A follow up telephone call to the participant will be completed approximately 7 days after their withdrawal from the study to provide them with the opportunity to ask any further questions which may have arisen.

- 14d. Is there anything that might make it difficult for people to refuse to take part in the study (e.g. the potential participants are students or colleagues of the Researcher)? How will you address this?**

People who are linked to friends or acquaintances may feel that they need to participate. I will ensure the initial discussion with participants highlights that the decision to take part needs to be solely theirs and that it is acceptable to withdraw from the study at any stage with no reason required and no consequences to them.

15. PARTICIPANT'S INVOLVEMENT: RISKS, REQUIREMENTS AND BENEFITS

- 15a. What potential hazards, risks or adverse effects associated with the study?**

See attached risk assessment form.

- 15b. Has a full risk assessment been carried out in line with University Health & Safety procedures? If NO please explain why.**

Yes (see attached)

- 15c. Will group or individual interviews/questionnaires discuss any topics or issues that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting? If so, please list and explain how you will prevent, or respond to, volunteer discomfort.**

Whilst this study does not set out to discuss sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting issues, it may be that the discussions which arise from unstructured interviews and the process of photo-elicitation could raise such issues. These issues may include: loss of loved ones, changes in life circumstances, changes in health situation, decline in functional abilities, loneliness, isolation, relationship issues.

As an Occupational Therapist I have the appropriate therapeutic communication skills to deal effectively with these issues in a sensitive and supportive manner.

My practice experience as an Occupational Therapist was within an acute physical NHS Trust where my role focused upon facilitating the safe transition of patients between hospital and home. Whilst I worked with all people over the age of 18 years, the local demographics resulted in most of my caseload being over 65 years of age. I have experience of working with complex and challenging situations which have demanded effective communication skills to deescalate situations and confront difficult discussions such as a decline in functional abilities indicating a need for individuals to move into residential care.

Should sensitive issues arise in this study I will provide women the opportunity to discuss these without judgment. I will need to be fully aware of the limitations of my boundaries as a researcher and refer onto other agencies if longer term support is indicated. If women become distressed at any point during the data collection process their wellbeing will be treated with the utmost importance. Discussions will be drawn to a close and comfort offered. I will offer to contact a friend or family member and refer onto other agencies if indicated. I will not leave any of the women in a state of distress without organizing appropriate support.

Contact details of local organisations who offer a range of support and advice will be provided to the women at the outset of the study enabling them to self-refer at any point.

It will be important to consider and maintain appropriate boundaries between the women participating in the study and the researcher. Rapport will be an essential foundation for this research to ensure the women feel comfortable to share personal experiences. It has been suggested that rapport is facilitated through a degree of the researcher drawing on and discussing their own personal experiences in relationship to the research being undertaken. Any disclosure on the part of the researcher will not reveal personal details, such as addresses or the names of other people in their life or present themselves as vulnerable.

Within this study it is important to keep the voice and experiences of the women at the forefront to ensure the feminist approach to methodology is maintained throughout and therefore personal disclosure on the part of the researcher will be kept to a minimum. In establishing rapport with the women in the study the researcher needs to exercise caution with regards to how the relationship progresses, avoiding moving from a researcher- participant relationship onto friendship; this will be achieved by ensuring the study remains the central focus.

The degree of involvement in the study and the potential for sensitive issues to be disclosed or discussed could prove emotionally challenging for the researcher. A research diary will be maintained by the researcher as an immediate reflective tool. Use will also be made of supervision with PhD supervisors and peer support from fellow allied health PhD students (a support group which already exists); any discussions will maintain confidentiality for the women. Should additional emotional support be required by the researcher access to University based counselling service will be sought.

It will be made clear from the outset that the study is completed over a set period of time to help manage the expectations of the women in terms of the termination of the study. The women will be reminded during the 3rd contact that the next meeting will be the 4th and last of the study; they will again be reminded when the researcher telephones to make the appointment to meet for the 4th contact. The 4th contact will encompass a sense of reflection on the study as a whole and so provides a good

opportunity to conclude the researcher-participant relationship. The researcher will ensure that the women have the contact details of local organisations who offer a range of support and advice should they wish to self-refer.

The researcher will inform the women that they will receive a summary of the findings from the study approximately 1 year after their participation.

The telephone number that will be used by the researcher for the purpose of this study will no longer be accessible to the women 7 days after the final woman has completed their engagement in the study.

- 15d. Is it possible that criminal or other disclosures could be made by participants in the study that require action (e.g. evidence of professional misconduct)? *What procedures will be put in place to deal with these issues?***

Issues which may be disclosed may include but are not restricted to: mistreatment by others, financial difficulties and not coping.

As a registered Occupational Therapist I am bound to act in accordance with the College of Occupational Therapists' 'Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct' (College of Occupational Therapists 2010) and Health and Care Professions Council's 'Standards of Proficiency. Occupational Therapy' (Health and Care Professions Council 2013). Both of these documents give clear direction on dealing with disclosures by people with whom I work. The best interests of the women must be taken into account at all times and a duty of care must be actioned where indicated, including reporting concerns to an appropriate other. Within the context of this study this may involve referral onto appropriate services for additional assessment and support.

Should anything untoward be disclosed or happen during this research study the researcher would seek to discuss these confidentially with her PhD supervisors, one of whom is an Occupational Therapist and able to consider the situation from the perspective of the profession. Should such a situation arise, clear documentation will be maintained by the researcher. This documentation would be dated, timed and signed enabling a clear record of events to be drawn upon and potentially communicated to external agencies if the nature of the situation indicates action to be taken, particularly in relation to safeguarding the individual. These documents will be stored as per all other documents as indicated in 17c and 17d.

15e. Please describe any expected benefits to the research participant.

It is anticipated that this study will provide older women with the opportunity to challenge commonly held stereotypes and assumptions frequently attributed to them as a cohort by enabling them to present their own perspective. The women will have the power to decide what photographs they take, they will be able to raise issues important to them during the unstructured interviews, and will influence the themes cited and discussed in the thesis. The participatory nature of the method to be utilised may also enable some of the participants to enhance their skills in the use of digital photography.

15f. What circumstances might lead to termination of the study in part or as a whole?

Women recruited may withdraw from the study at any phase with no requirement for justification to be provided.

Women may be withdrawn from the study by the researcher if there is a change in their living circumstances which results in them no longer being classified as living alone; this may include someone moving in with them or a move to a supported living environment such as residential care. Women will also be required to cease involvement in the study if they are unable to engage in the process of the study, for example using a camera effectively. Further reasons for an individual's withdrawal from the study include the researcher becoming aware that the study is having a detrimental effect on the women or concerns emerging for the safety of the researcher in accessing the participant and their home.

Detrimental effects on the women in the study may include the women becoming distressed in discussions, the women showing signs of decreased mood due to their engagement in the study or evidence of the study causing stress in terms of the commitment required. Should any of these detrimental effects become apparent whilst the researcher is present with the woman discussions will be drawn to a close and comfort offered. The researcher will provide the opportunity to discuss the effect the study is having on the woman. I would offer to contact a friend or family member and refer onto other agencies if indicated. I will not leave any of the women in a state of distress without organizing appropriate support. Should the detrimental effects become apparent in the absence of the researcher (for example information obtained through a telephone call) the researcher will offer the opportunity to have a face to face meeting to discuss the situation. The

women may choose to have a family member or friend present for this discussion. If it is deemed appropriate by the researcher and the woman for the research study to continue with their participation the situation will be monitored by the researcher to ensure the detrimental effects do not reoccur. It may be appropriate to terminate the involvement of the woman in the study if the detrimental effects cannot be addressed by the researcher or the woman is not happy to continue their participation. The researcher will communicate any concerns of this nature with her PhD supervisors, one of whom is an Occupational Therapist and able to provide profession specific advice.

If the termination of participation in the study is due to a decision made by the researcher, a face to face meeting to discuss the issues which have arisen will be arranged between the researcher and the women. This face to face meeting will provide the opportunity for the women to reflect on their involvement in the study to date and for them to pose any questions they may have. The researcher will ensure the women have the contact details of local organisations who can offer a range of support and advice enabling the women to refer themselves onto these organisations if they feel it is appropriate. The researcher will also complete a follow up telephone call to the women approximately 7 days after the termination of their engagement in the study to provide the opportunity for them to ask any further outstanding questions.

If the termination of participation in the study is due to a decision made by the women, the researcher will offer the opportunity to meet face to face. The format of this face to face meeting will be the same as if the researcher had made the decision.

Regardless of who makes the decision with regards to the termination of the involvement of the woman in the study, all data collected and held by the researcher specific to the woman will be destroyed; this will include the photographs, interview recordings and transcripts. Prior to destroying the photographs the woman will be offered the opportunity to have them herself.

16. FINANCIAL INCENTIVES, EXPENSES AND COMPENSATION

16a. Is any financial or other reward (e.g. travelling expenses) to be given to participants?

If yes, please give details and justification.

Participants will be provided with printed copies of their images used within the study and a brief one page summary of the key findings once the study is completed.

16b. Will the study result in financial payment or payment in kind to the department?

Please specify, including the amounts involved.

No

17. CONFIDENTIALITY, ANONYMITY AND DATA STORAGE

- 17a. What steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality?** Give details of the anonymisation procedures to be used, and at what stage they will be introduced.

Within the first meeting the women will be ascribed a pseudonym to be utilized in the study; this will be used from this point on. A record of the ascribed pseudonym will be kept electronically, separate from the research data, on a password protected pen drive.

Photographs taken by the women in the study will focus on the activity they are completing when alone at home and to this end will not include images of people. Photographs which are considered as being explicitly evident as belonging to the individual, such as a photograph of a photograph or of very personal items will not be used in publications, presentations or the thesis. Photographs will be associated with the pseudonym given to the woman who took them throughout the research process.

- 17b. Who will have access to the records and resulting data?**

Records and findings will be accessed by the researcher and shared with her supervisors as required to facilitate thesis development.

- 17c. Where, and, for how long, do you intend to store the consent forms and other records?**

All documents pertaining to this study, including consent forms, photographs and interview transcripts will be kept for 5 years after the degree has been awarded. All documents will be kept in an electronic format held as encrypted data on a password protected pen drive. The pen drive will be kept in a locked box. All data will be backed up on a second pen drive protected in the same way.

Throughout the research process the photographs taken by the women in the study will be stored in an electronic format and held as encrypted data on a password

protected pen drive. The only hard copies of the images will be kept by the individual women who took them once printed by the researcher. The photographs will be stored in a locked box during the time between the photographs being printed by the researcher and the point at which they are given to the participant. Printing of the photographs will occur no earlier than 24 hours prior to the researcher meeting with the participant.

Consent for the use of photographs for the purpose of the thesis, presentations and publications will be sought when obtaining written consent and reconfirmed verbally on completion of data collection.

17d. How do you propose disposing of the consent forms and other records at the end of the retention period?

Original consent forms will be kept until the women have received their brief summary of findings on completion of the study; at this point the original consent forms will be shredded. Prior to shredding the documents will be scanned with the scanned images being kept on a password protected encrypted pen drive. All data will be backed up on a second pen drive protected in the same way. All electronic files will be deleted at the end of the retention period.

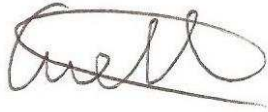
18. DISSEMINATION AND OUTPUTS

Please indicate how you will disseminate the findings from your study:

Thesis/dissertation	X
Journal article	X
Monograph or chapter in book	X
Conference paper	X
Conference poster	X
Research reports to Funders	

AUTHORISING SIGNATURES

The information supplied above is to the best of my knowledge and belief accurate. I have read the notes to Researchers and clearly understand my obligations and the rights of study participants, particularly in so far as to obtaining valid consent.



.....

Date 01-10-14

Researcher

MAILING ADDRESS

31 Mill View Road,

Herne Bay,

Kent,

CT6 7JF.

TELEPHONE: 07775537801/ 01227 363144



...

Date.....28/9/14

Signature of Supervisor [student applications] or Head of Department [staff applications]



FACULTY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

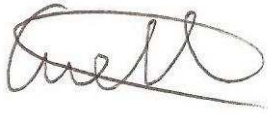
DECLARATION

Project Title: The Experiences of Older Women Living Alone

Project No:

- The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to conduct this research according to the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care and in accordance with University Research Governance procedures.
- If the research is approved, I undertake to adhere to the study protocol without agreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter sent by the Faculty REC notifying me of this.
- I undertake to inform the Faculty REC of any changes in the protocol and to seek their agreement and to submit annual progress reports. I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and appropriate guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of participant or other personal data, including the need to register when appropriate with the appropriate Data Protection Officer.
- I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future and that research records should be kept securely for five years.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application will be held by the Faculty REC and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act.
- I CONFIRM that, if required by the nature of my study, I have a current CRB Check in place.

Signature of Researcher:



Print Name: Gemma Wells

Date: 01-10-14

I have read the research proposal and application form, and support this submission to the REC.



Signature of the Supervisor

Print Name: Dr Sally Robinson

Date: 28/9/14

Appendix 5 – Ethics Approval Letter



25 February 2015

Ref: 14/FH&W/030

Ms Gemma Wells
31 Mill View Road
Herne Bay
Kent CT6 7JF

Dear Gemma

Project Title: *"The experience of living alone for women aged 70 – 80 years."*

Your revised application was reviewed by the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee on 25 February 2015. The Committee were agreed that the revised application fully addressed their original concerns, and that final approval could be given.

I am writing to give formal confirmation that you can commence your research. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct of the study over its course should be notified to the Research Office, and may require a new application for ethics approval. [This approval is conditional on you informing me once your research has been completed.](#)

With best wishes for a successful project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger Bone".

Roger Bone
Research Governance Manager
Research Office, Eg21
Tel: 01227 782940 ext 3272 (enter at prompt)
Email: roger.bone@canterbury.ac.uk

cc: Dr Sally Robinson
Dr Ian Marsh

Research Office
Research and Enterprise Development Centre

Canterbury Christ Church University
North Holmes Campus, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 1QU
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Professor Rama Thirunamachandran, Vice Chancellor and Principal

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Registered Charity No: 1098136

Appendix 6 – Recruitment email

Email to Brownie Parents:

Hello,

I hope you don't mind me sharing this request with you.....

For those that don't know I am currently doing my PhD. My study aims to enable women aged 70-80 years to explore their experience of living alone. I am currently looking for 11 women who are aged 70-80 years and living alone in Kent to take part in my study. If you know someone who fits my criteria and might be interested please could you contact me and I will send you some additional information to share with them.

Thank you :)

Gemma

New Research Study

Are you:

- ✓ A woman
- ✓ Aged 70-80
- ✓ Living alone for 2 years or more

If you can answer yes to all of the above, are you interested in taking part in a PhD study which aims to explore the experience of living alone for women aged 70-80?

If so, please contact:

Gemma Wells

Telephone: 07716 292790

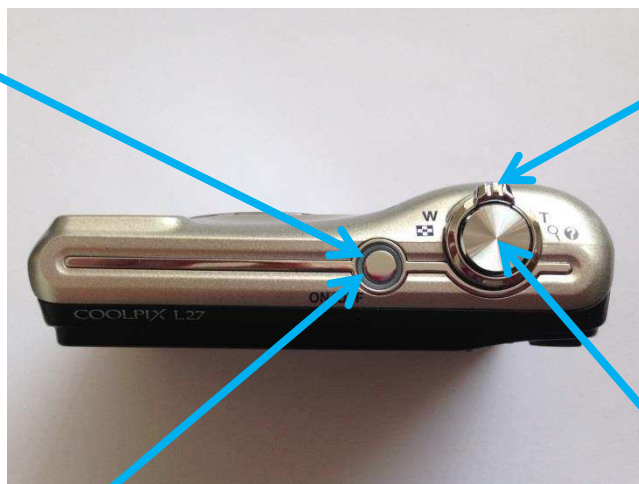
Email: gemma.wells.research@gmail.com

Appendix 8 - A Guide to Using the Camera



How to take a photograph

1. Press this button once to turn the camera on.



2. Push the small lever towards the **T** to zoom in.
Push the small lever towards the **W** to zoom out.

4. When the camera is on, press this button once to turn the camera off.

3. To take the photograph press this button once.

How to look at the photographs you have taken

4. Press this button to return to the screen that allows you to take photographs.



2. Press this side of the circle to move **back** through your photographs.

1. To view the photographs you have taken press this button

3. Press this side of the circle to move **forwards** through your photographs.

How to delete a photograph



3. Press the **OK** button to select the option. I would suggest only using the **current image** option.

2. Press this part of the circle to move down through the options.

1. When viewing the photographs you have taken, press this button for the delete options.

Appendix 9 - Excerpt from original transcript

Roberta Interview 2 (page 16)

Speaker 2: Prefer classical music.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Because that's what I've been brought up with.

Speaker 1: Yeah. It's what you're used to.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Oh, that's the television. Weekend sport. (laughs)

Speaker 1: I spotted it. So rugby? Are you a sports fan?

Speaker 2: Oh, I enjoy rugby, tennis, snooker, grand prix. Those four.

Speaker 1: That's quite a lot.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: And they're quite varied sports, too.

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah they are.

Speaker 2: Don't like football, I don't like cricket, don't like golf.

Speaker 1: Fair enough. You know what you like and you don't like. (laughter)

Speaker 2: But yes. I don't, do enjoy the sport ...

Speaker 1: So is that every weekend for you?

Speaker 2: Oh, during the day as well. I mean, I never used to watch television during the day, but now I'm less mobile, I find that there's very often tennis coming from some part of the world.

Speaker 1: Yeah, if you think about it.

Speaker 2: They have Barcelona this week, um ...

Speaker 1: Oh.

Speaker 2: They've got, um, the Crucible snooker on at the moment.

Appendix 10 - Excerpt from organised transcript

Roberta

She spoke of having blue tits nesting in the garden and having spotted a sparrow hawk hunting in her garden.

“If you sit and watch it’s amazing what you see”.

She says that the shape of a bird catches her eye and then she has a look to identify it.

Activity: Feeding and watching the birds in the garden

When Roberta was speaking about her garden in the winter she referred to feeding the birds

“Well, you have to fill up the birdie things don’t you? (laughter). And I’ve had birds in my garden this year that I’ve actually never seen before, ever”.

Roberta was pleased that she had been able to recognise them though used her book to check that she was correct. Roberta added that she sees some unusual birds in her garden and puts it, in part, down to the hedge that they like to land in. Roberta has her birdfeeders in a position which allows her to watch them from the lounge.

Activity: Watching sport on the television

Roberta says that this photograph is specifically showing her watching the sport (rugby) at the weekend on the television, however it becomes apparent in our discussion that this is not the only sport or time that she watches it. Roberta enjoys watching a variety of sports including, rugby, tennis, snooker and the grand prix and not just at the weekend

“Oh, during the day as well. I mean, I never used to watch television during the day, but now I’m less mobile, I find that there’s often tennis coming from some part of the world.....So I tend to sit and watch telly in the afternoon, which I never used to”.

She reflects on how perhaps 3 or 4 years ago she had a rule in that she would not turn the television on until the 6 o clock news was on but now

“...I’d think, you know that I’m not going to waste my day sitting in front of the television. But now movement is more difficult, I don’t do as much activity wise. I tend to sit down in the afternoon, and I read a book a bit today, I’ve done the newspapers, no more chores to do...let’s see what’s on television”.

She says that living alone allows her to watch programmes on the television that perhaps wouldn’t suit someone else. As well as watching the sport Roberta likes nature programmes, MasterChef, travel programmes, history programmes and a good play. Television takes her into a different world.

Appendix 11 – Identification of Units of Meaning

Theme	Alison	Anne	Hope	Lottie	Natalie	Olive	Ordelia	Taylor	Roberta	Rebecca	Yvonne
Living alone (past)	27, 12	2, 13, 14, 16	18		6	28	50		16		26
Not the same going out on your own								17			
Challenges of making friends	18		30, 31	8	8, 11		28				
Challenges faced earlier in life					8						
Relationship with neighbours (past)	9				11					17, 20, 28, 29, 18	
Nutrition	1				14						
Being a woman					3						
Value of friendships (past)				27	8, 12						
Considering own death				23, 24	9, 19, 20, 7, 43		13, 14		22	11, 12	
Loss of others			14		12	37					
Valuing children					14						
Experience with children					18						
Role divide in the family			33, 34		14, 17	31		31			26, 28
People not understanding feelings					21						
Needing to move on					22				16, 3		
Acknowledging the importance of engagement in activity					23						
Having no-one to talk to					23			15, 17,			

								18			
Not being invited out					23						
Decline in social contact					23						
Sharing experiences with others					24						
Still able			46		24, 32						
Creating own opportunities					31, 33, 5				16, 23		
Getting on with life	33		35		36		12				
Roles in the home			37, 38		40, 16, 27	5, 18, 28, 29, 30	24, 41, 42	10			
Prioritisation of childcare			17, 34, 37, 38, 39, 15	24	40, 47, 48, 58		25				
Valued for being older					43						
Caring role	28, 33, 36, 37, 10				66, 68, 70, 71, 72, 13, 27		6, 7, 25, 26, 30, 40, 41, 42	10, 23, 24	34, 39	39, 3, 4, 5, 6	
If you don't do you don't know what you can do					4						
Being content with life					13	32, 33, 34			40		
Not having grandchildren					20						
Not talking					25, 26						
Your time					27		45				

Not feeling your age	15	35			31					16
Missed out					44					
Bouncing back					44					
No children	19									
Making changes now they are alone	1, 23			3, 7, 8, 34				11		5
If I don't like something I do something about it		14								
Independent person		15, 16, 29					50, 51			
Being Self-sufficient		39								
Being positive						12		16, 33, 34		
Starting a new relationship later in life								19		
Picking up on the small things								4, 5, 6		
Differences in experiences between people			13, 14, 20					39, 4		26
Skills developed during the life course							50	36		
Decline in self confidence								31, 32		
Not a very social person								29		
Not wanting to be a burden								24		
Making changes for good of health	1					9, 23, 24, 31	37, 38			
Things to be grateful for								18	26	
Engagement with animals	1, 2, 6, 7, 5, 19, 25	1, 6, 7, 18, 19, 5	6				3, 12	2, 8, 19, 20	2, 5, 14, 38	21, 28

Exercise	2, 3, 31, 33, 15	18, 20, 21	1, 4, 8, 34	14		4, 19, 19	2, 4, 10	2, 8	2, 17	1, 3, 11, 14, 20, 28, 30, 31, 32	20
Doing what you want, when you want	2, 3, 22	16	26		7	7, 31	7, 23, 16, 49	5, 7, 20	6, 7	2	
Impact of health on engagement in activities	2, 13, 14, 15, 18, 23		28	5	1, 2	2, 4, 8, 19, 8, 39	48	2, 4, 14, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 24, 25, 26, 28, 10, 17, 23	3, 4, 6, 12, 23		2, 20
Appreciation of outdoor space	2	4			6	6		6, 16		10	1, 6
Having a project	3	33	17		1, 8	2, 7	1, 6	5, 14, 5	16	4	
Being busy	3, 10, 35	5, 21, 15, 28	9	6, 35, 4	6, 14, 73	2, 4, 19, 8, 9, 10	4, 7, 10, 27		21	3, 5, 6, 9, 14, 29, 11, 17	19, 26, 33
Engagement with family	3, 13	1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 18, 19, 21, 5	3, 6, 8, 25, 27, 23, 43	4, 20, 21, 22, 28, 29	5, 7, 25, 74, 22	5, 11, 8	4, 5, 22, 29, 30, 46, 47, 48	3, 21, 22, 23, 10, 15, 17	7, 30, 31, 38, 23, 24	5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 28, 29, 30, 27, 30, 39	3, 6, 7, 17, 19, 20, 22, 11, 14, 15, 41, 10, 15, 16, 17, 27, 31, 33

Valuing family		12, 19	16, 24, 25		16, 18, 19, 24, 60, 76	3, 35	12, 45	3	26	6, 26	
Keeping on top of current affairs	3	6, 27	2, 3	21, 46, 47			5	2, 3	1	4	22
Opinions about current affairs		13, 25, 28		43, 44, 45	21, 25				28, 29		39
Background noise in the home	3			6, 21, 4	4, 8, 36	1		1, 4, 24			1
Home - environment	1, 4, 16	3, 6, 18, 19	1, 3, 5, 7, 6, 8, 28, 26	5, 17, 22, 30, 31, 19, 20	3, 4	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 7, 8, 24, 26	4, 7, 12, 18, 8, 9, 34	1, 4, 5, 7, 22, 23, 24	4, 5, 6, 7, 18	1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 16, 26, 27, 28, 9, 10	2, 5, 17, 13, 17, 26
Home - feelings	4, 39	19	15, 16, 32	28, 30	6, 25, 38, 39	4, 7, 8, 15, 16, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27	4, 18, 9	16	7	2, 4, 10, 25, 26, 30, 31, 36	2, 18, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 42
Home – liking change							4				
Home – maintenance	44	21, 20, 24, 29, 39	22, 23, 25, 26, 24, 37		4, 25, 34, 35	20, 20	5, 50	18, 19		6, 26, 27, 29, 37, 38	11, 12, 33
Home – neighbourhood		18, 17	4, 23, 32, 9, 10			4, 25	9, 5, 6	13, 15, 11	20, 32, 33	4, 10, 16	42, 20

Home as a place of care giving					67					3	17, 18
Awareness of health implications	4		25	14, 16, 20, 21	4, 7	1, 20, 33		3	4		20
Making things for others	4, 34, 7		4, 17		1, 2, 5, 8, 22	2, 10, 11	1, 8, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23	3, 4, 5, 14, 15		30	
Routines	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 17, 33, 35, 36, 24	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 20, 21, 23	1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 20, 21, 34, 11	1, 3, 4, 7, 56, 6	5, 8, 18, 31, 52, 53	6, 9, 12, 22, 23, 24, 48	2, 3, 7, 19, 24, 16	1, 2, 15, 17, 23	1, 2, 10, 15	1, 5, 6, 7, 17, 20, 21, 22, 30, 25
Feeling low											31, 32, 33, 34
Plant care	2, 10	1, 11	2, 3, 12	21		6	3	6, 16	3, 12	6, 20, 21	1, 23, 32
Assistance to complete activities in the home	7, 11, 44, 45, 18	2, 11, 16, 21	6, 9, 23, 29	2, 7, 27	2, 4, 5, 24, 34, 35, 41	6, 15			12, 17, 23	6, 17, 20, 27, 37, 38	2
Finding people to help with activities		25		7	4, 41, 42			5, 18, 19	23, 31		
Intrigued as to what others are doing									14		
Use of appliances in the home		2, 3, 11, 16	3, 29	1, 2		1, 3, 5, 12		24	2, 3, 36, 37	2	
Financial considerations	3, 7, 16, 37, 38	2, 12, 24, 25, 29, 39, 41	6, 28, 29, 15, 14, 15	1, 7, 8	2, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 19, 30, 65, 11, 12	8, 10, 11, 12, 20, 12, 15, 17, 43, 41	8, 12, 13, 16, 26, 33, 19, 20	4, 20, 23, 24, 9, 22	8, 21, 22, 24, 26	7, 15, 16, 17, 27, 29, 10, 23, 24, 26, 31, 14	17, 13, 30, 11, 15

Activities started later in life	33, 8	2, 3	1, 5, 7, 8	3, 21, 34	22, 23	19	22	4, 6, 14	21, 18, 19	3	15, 16
Adapting activities to enable engagement	7, 15, 16, 23	3, 16	3, 6, 7, 29	8, 10	2, 3	1, 19	2, 12, 21	3, 14, 20, 23	1, 2, 3, 12, 17, 5	2, 20	7, 20, 15
Completing activities which are not enjoyed		3, 4, 5	6, 24, 46	1		2, 14		7			5
Learning	6, 7, 11	3, 6, 26	8, 9, 28, 20	4, 5, 17, 21, 41, 42	1, 21, 23, 24, 16, 30	19	1, 22, 23, 18	6, 7, 14, 5	1, 7, 14, 19, 21, 41, 5	4, 9, 17, 26, 28	15, 13
Activities previously completed by husband		3			2		5	6, 18		6, 17, 26	1, 4, 5, 11, 20, 22, 23, 11, 12, 27
Roles outside of the home and family		3, 32	9	2, 6			10	18, 19			
Influence of the weather on activities completed		2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 6	2, 5, 6, 12, 22, 23	13, 14, 15	18	3, 4, 18, 19	1, 10, 22, 23	1, 16, 21, 11, 12	12	1, 2, 3, 11, 20	6
Religion		4, 5, 13, 14, 20, 21			4, 17, 22, 25, 61, 72, 4, 25		19, 20, 13, 16, 18, 28, 29, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57	24, 25, 26	19		
Troublesome relationships	32	4			58, 59, 62, 32						

Living alone	27, 5, 12, 13	2, 5, 16, 19, 16, 29	4, 11, 18, 26	4	2, 3, 5, 48	11, 27, 32	4, 5, 7, 36	1, 2, 7, 24, 20, 16	3, 4, 6, 7	2, 6, 7, 29, 30	1, 4, 12, 19, 26
Looking to the future		5, 20, 41	9, 10, 5, 6, 36	4, 5, 6, 17	2, 19, 32, 69, 12, 43		12, 10, 35, 36, 12, 13		8, 21, 22, 22, 23, 24	4, 7, 8, 9, 17, 27, 28, 31, 10, 13	6, 13, 14, 18, 41, 42, 10, 11, 34
Assumptions about them (and other older people)		5	9	21	5, 6, 15, 17, 24, 29, 38, 39, 43				25, 34	32	
Previous employment	17, 41, 42	5, 20, 15, 20, 21, 23, 27, 31, 19	6, 21, 22	3, 12, 13, 14, 24, 26	25, 16, 41, 43, 57	4, 18, 6	3, 4, 5, 6, 25, 26, 43, 15	8, 9, 10	4, 20, 11, 12	10, 11, 12, 19, 20, 23, 26, 34	5, 16, 17, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 43, 34
Not the life that was chosen/ planned											34, 44
Current employment						8					
Being spontaneous		6	8	7			11				
Concurrent occupations			1, 2, 6	20	1, 3, 8, 12, 37	2, 4, 5, 7	21	5	3, 6	2, 4, 5	
Addictive activities			3, 4, 12			4, 33		1			
Awareness of limitations		24	8, 9, 10		34	5	5, 12	7	1, 2, 3, 7, 23, 31, 31	2, 6, 38	7

Timing of activities	1, 2, 10		1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 27	2, 5, 6	1, 2, 6	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 19, 20,	1, 2	1, 5, 18	1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 28	1, 5, 6, 16
Engaging in activities to stop engagement in undesired activities			4			7					
Activities always engaged in	4	4, 5	1, 4, 5, 23	1, 3, 5, 6, 20	1, 3, 4, 37	1, 2, 4, 28	2, 6, 21	1, 7, 11	1, 5, 22, 27, 28	5, 6, 32, 42, 43	2, 4, 7, 23
Engagement in activities which have variable meaning			5			1, 3		6			1
Keeping the mind active		20	5	3	6		23	1, 2	4, 5		
Social contact through activities	2, 9, 24	12, 32	5	3, 7, 27	5, 6, 31, 5	5, 6	1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 23, 17	1, 4, 6, 7, 8	1, 22	2, 3, 4, 8, 28	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 19, 20, 21
Fun			5	6			21		4, 5		
Activities no longer engaged in	45	11, 21, 22, 31	5, 26, 17, 23, 24, 33, 40	2, 8, 22	34	2, 42	5	21, 22, 25	5, 18, 19, 16, 18		
Engagement with technology	6, 10, 11, 13	26	6, 7, 23, 25	4, 13	2, 7, 12, 16, 18, 20	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 36	5, 46, 17, 18, 19	3, 4, 5, 5, 9	4, 5, 24, 6, 38, 39	7, 9, 10, 29, 27	3, 4, 6, 35, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 38
Not having plans			7	7	7	32				11	3,

Having plans											43
Loneliness	2, 27	13		7, 2, 3	6, 22, 37		24, 4, 2, 3, 5	21, 15, 16	3, 25, 27		31
Travelling	36, 37	1, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36, 40, 41	4, 13, 26, 29, 9, 39, 18, 42	4, 8, 22, 20, 21, 12, 13, 49, 50, 51	3, 5, 19, 21, 33, 38, 53, 68, 69, 12, 24	4, 11, 18, 7, 12, 15, 38, 39	3, 10, 11, 20, 21, 22, 9, 20, 47, 17	18, 19, 20, 14, 15, 21, 22	2, 18, 21, 22, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 30, 31, 8, 9	1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 20, 28, 29, 30, 34, 36, 13, 14	6, 7, 20, 15, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 22, 24
Meal preparation	1, 5, 6, 10	1	7, 8, 37, 26	1, 2, 19, 23	3, 9, 50, 6, 7	1, 3	22		6, 15	1, 2, 9	5, 12
Health		11, 20, 27, 28,	9, 46, 47, 7, 8, 35	1, 2, 5, 15, 16, 31, 32	4	8, 34, 54	10	21, 22	37, 39	1, 7	
Capturing memories				6, 20		15	7, 18	11, 14	20	1, 5, 9, 28, 5	2, 3, 5, 19
Being yourself						4	7, 28, 24				
Sleep	3, 4, 10, 36, 40, 23, 25		3, 4, 11, 12, 21, 23	2, 5, 21	7	7	6	2		10, 11, 14	1, 6, 14
Volunteering	3, 34, 6, 7, 8		42	2, 7, 34	8, 9, 11, 12	8	26, 32, 45, 46, 47, 48	6, 11, 16, 20, 26, 27	5, 21, 22, 34, 35, 36,	1, 3, 4, 14, 32, 42, 43	3, 6, 15, 19, 21, 26

									15		
Escapism				6		5, 7	2		1, 6		6
Relaxation	3		2, 14, 22	15	22	3	5, 23	1, 3	3	11	1, 6
Presence of others in the home	14, 15	7, 9, 19, 17	25, 26, 27, 23	3	3, 9, 16, 31, 50	5, 22	4, 6, 7, 9, 19, 9, 10, 22	2, 3, 8, 23, 20, 16	7, 8		7, 18, 19
Joy of retirement			12, 12				11, 24		17, 21		
Preparing for bad weather			12								
Supporting others		9, 18	12, 31, 40		5, 6, 7, 21, 22, 23, 24, 12, 49, 63, 8, 24, 25, 32		4, 24, 27, 46	6, 20	20, 34, 5, 30	4, 6, 8, 10, 28	3, 16, 17, 21, 19
Feeling needed											19
Relationship with neighbours	2, 4	18	12, 32, 33		34, 56, 72, 36, 37, 41	26, 20, 21, 22, 23		11		7, 17, 30	2
Career and family						6, 17, 30, 31	25				22, 26
Having to cope								19			
Isolation							5	20			

Supporting charities			17, 25					6	22		15, 21
Gifts from others		1	6, 24, 26, 27, 26, 39	21	2, 12, 18			11, 19, 33		7, 10	2, 21, 13, 15
Christmas - feelings		13	24	20, 22, 15	15, 16, 17	11, 39	19	20, 22	18		
Christmas - giving			24, 25	22	18	10, 19	19, 22	20			
Christmas - decorations		13	29	20	15, 16, 18	20	18, 19, 20	21, 22, 25	18, 19	26	
Christmas – change in routine				13, 18	9, 18, 21	18					
Christmas – social contact				19, 20, 22, 15	16	20, 39	22	20, 22		26, 30	
Christmas - traditions					17, 18		19, 20, 23	22, 25	18, 19	26	
Influence of time of the year		4, 6, 11	2	10, 17, 22	6, 9, 15, 35, 36	6, 14, 18, 52, 53	3, 9, 20, 21, 23	1, 7, 16, 18, 19, 21, 10		1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 14	6, 32
Time with others beyond the home			24, 25				10	11, 21	7	17	
Missing male company					21, 22						
Proving you still can					4, 15, 27						

Value of friendships			29	3, 4, 35	18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 62, 65, 66, 12, 25		11, 33		19	8, 17, 17, 18	
Poor Health	1, 3, 43, 13, 14	27	47		34, 13	15, 34	7, 23, 36, 38, 48, 10, 11, 12	20, 3		10, 35, 16, 17	20
Own funeral					17						
Influence of Ageing	43, 15	37	7, 8, 9, 5, 6, 22, 23		17, 7, 31		12, 23	22	21, 20, 31, 37, 7		
Personality of self					19, 21		39, 52	22	34		7, 8
Being a victim of crime/ personal safety	4, 32	26	32, 19		20, 38, 28, 29, 30, 36	26		24			2
Meeting new people					20, 21					18	
Differences between the experiences of men and women		4, 5, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 24, 25	25	3	6, 20, 24	19, 20, 29, 30	1, 24	10, 15, 31			
Self-growth					21, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32						

Reflecting on achievements in activities					22				33, 37, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 17, 18		
Differences between generations			35, 36, 14, 15, 16, 17	29	5, 6, 23, 24, 25, 26, 44, 45, 9, 14, 35	28, 41, 42		16	6, 18		
Learning from other generations	17				23, 44, 64, 39, 40				33, 34		
Not having opinion valued					25						
Being creative		32					1, 3, 4, 8, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22	4, 13, 14, 25	15	26	4
Shopping		19, 32	4, 8	7, 15	6	3		20	2, 17, 22		5, 21
Keeping in touch with people						19		11, 18	19, 20		
Happy with own company						20		18	20, 29, 32		
Reducing engagement in activities									21		
Decline in abilities			10, 28	14		2, 4	12, 13		1, 3, 5, 6, 21, 23		
Caring for the environment	5								2, 22, 17, 18	26	
Not being perfect at activities			25, 27	3			1, 21, 22, 22	4			
Happy at home on your own	23	5, 16,	7, 13			27, 40,	23, 24	16			

		19				41				
Awareness of activities available							24, 2, 5			
Feeling fortunate			48, 49	14	4		24			17
Having purpose		11	35	13, 48				5		18, 19
Choice		6, 12, 39	6, 7, 28	2	7		7, 26, 49	5, 25	1	5, 6, 25
Feeling restricted		6, 18, 19						2		7
Opinion of society today		18, 19								
As things were		19	20, 18	5, 9		35 39, 53	6, 17, 24	9, 31		8 27, 28, 10, 18, 24
Motivation	2		7	14, 15	3, 4, 26		7			34 5, 19, 20, 22, 25, 33
Needing to problem solve								11, 19	40, 5, 6	
Dealing with the death of a loved one	17, 27, 31, 9, 10, 12, 13	5, 16				21, 28		7	16, 20, 34, 25	9, 7, 9, 11 4, 7, 15, 18, 19, 18, 19, 5
Rewarding experiences										15
Engagement with people beyond the home					63	36	47			15
Influence of husband		1		4		29				1, 2 4, 5, 16, 20
Transition into retirement			5, 7	27			2, 45			3, 10, 33 16, 17
Determination										17, 18

Trying to maintain normality											18
Hard times					20, 21, 22						18
Something for you											19
Physical contact											22
Maintaining connections with husband	3									1, 27, 36, 10, 11	2, 3, 5, 22
Replacing activities			8						5	14	
Support from others	2, 31, 34, 37, 43			8	66, 70, 4, 12, 16, 25, 41	7	41, 42	22		3, 6, 15, 29, 8, 9, 18	5, 6, 14, 33
Enjoy each day					45				38	17	
Less likely to take risks		24			7		5		2	20	
Getting out	2, 3, 23	5, 21, 40, 41		6, 7, 16	5, 7, 34		3	7, 8	4	3, 11, 20	32
Process rather than product	4						7				
Feelings of frustration	19, 23							24, 25, 31	3		
Categories of activities									6		
Hiding away								5			
Life is too short					45		12				
Talking to self				9							
Changes in appearance				32, 33							
Physically capable				35, 2							
Having something to do				4							

Access to resources for activities				4						
Not liking travelling alone				12, 13						
Not having the opportunity			20						9, 10	
Can have a go at anything			24							
Have to do everything yourself			25, 20							
Similarities between generations			12							
Trying new things			5							
Taking your time			13							
Pacing yourself			23							
Not being elderly			43, 44				6, 7, 8			
Career change						6	25, 26			
Happiest now							36			
Truly me							36			
Sharing information about organisations							3			
Acceptance							23			
Thankful for health						33				
Frustrated by others						55				
Making a contribution						54				

Appendix 12 – All Units of Meaning

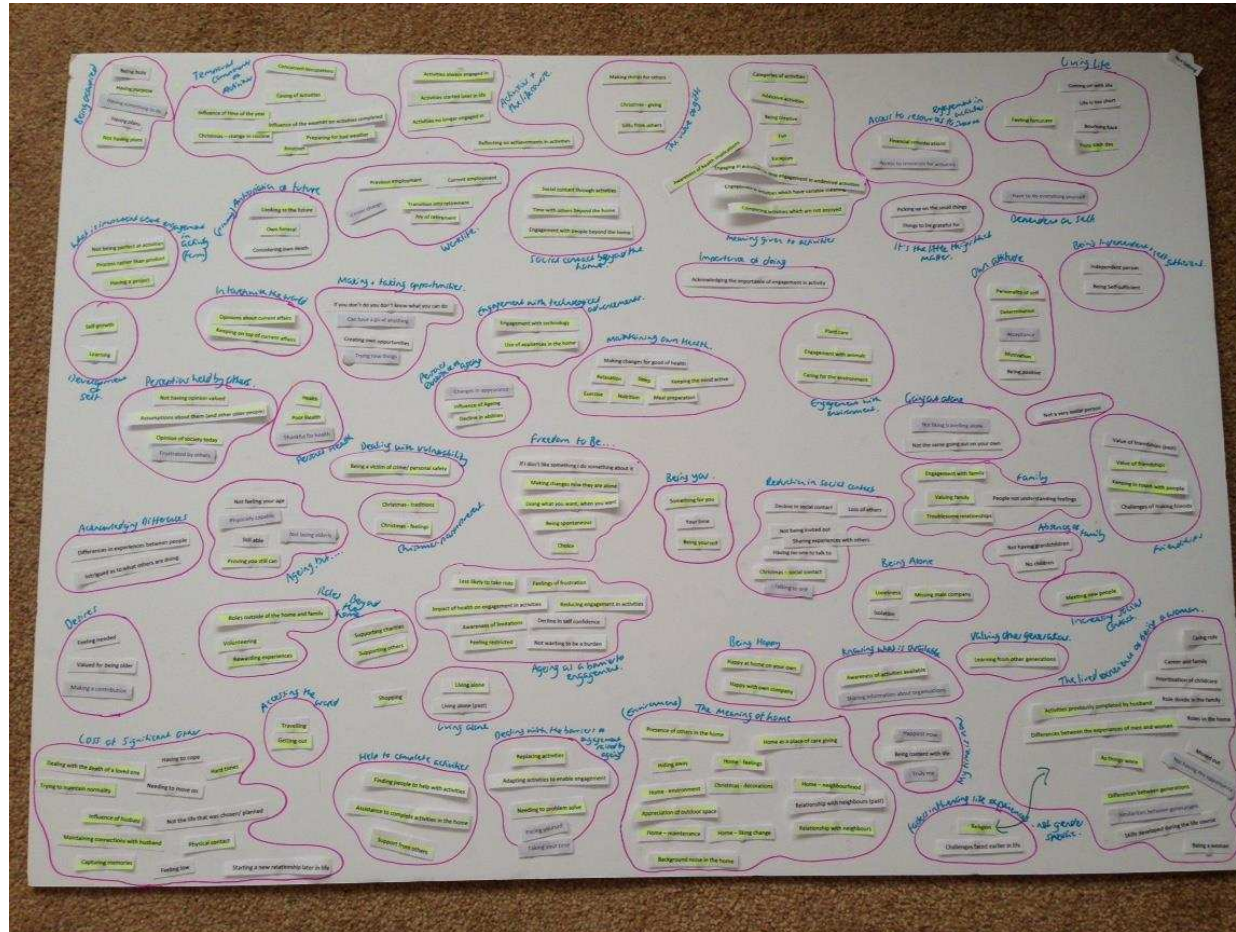
Living alone (past)	If you don't do you don't know what you can do
Not the same going out on your own	
Challenges of making friends	
Challenges faced earlier in life	Being content with life
Relationship with neighbours (past)	Not having grandchildren
Nutrition	Not talking
Being a woman	Your time
Value of friendships (past)	Not feeling your age
Considering own death	Missed out
Loss of others	Bouncing back
Valuing children	No children
Experience with children	Making changes now they are alone
Role divide in the family	If I don't like something I do something about it
People not understanding feelings	Independent person
Needing to move on	Being Self-sufficient
Acknowledging the importance of engagement in activity	Being positive
Having no-one to talk to	Starting a new relationship later in life
Not being invited out	Picking up on the small things
Decline in social contact	Differences in experiences between people
Sharing experiences with others	Skills developed during the life course
Still able	Decline in self confidence
Creating own opportunities	Not a very social person
Getting on with life	Not wanting to be a burden
Roles in the home	Making changes for good of health
Prioritisation of childcare	Things to be grateful for
Valued for being older	Engagement with animals
Caring role	Exercise
	Doing what you want, when you want

Impact of health on engagement in activities	Roles outside of the home and family
Appreciation of outdoor space	Influence of the weather on activities completed
Having a project	Religion
Being busy	Troublesome relationships
Engagement with family	Living alone
Valuing family	Looking to the future
Keeping on top of current affairs	Assumptions about them (and other older people)
Opinions about current affairs	Previous employment
Background noise in the home	Not the life that was chosen/ planned
Home - environment	Current employment
Home - feelings	Being spontaneous
Home – liking change	Concurrent occupations
Home – maintenance	Addictive activities
Home – neighbourhood	Awareness of limitations
Home as a place of care giving	Timing of activities
Awareness of health implications	Engaging in activities to stop engagement in undesired activities
Making things for others	Activities always engaged in
Routines	Engagement in activities which have variable meaning
Feeling low	Keeping the mind active
Plant care	Social contact through activities
Assistance to complete activities in the home	Fun
Finding people to help with activities	Activities no longer engaged in
Intrigued as to what others are doing	Engagement with technology
Use of appliances in the home	Not having plans
Financial considerations	Having plans
Activities started later in life	Loneliness
Adapting activities to enable engagement	Travelling
Completing activities which are not enjoyed	
Learning	
Activities previously completed by husband	

Meal preparation	Poor Health
Health	Own funeral
Capturing memories	Influence of Ageing
Being yourself	Personality of self
Sleep	Being a victim of crime/ personal safety
Volunteering	Meeting new people
Escapism	Differences between the experiences of men and women
Relaxation	Self-growth
Presence of others in the home	Reflecting on achievements in activities
Joy of retirement	Differences between generations
Preparing for bad weather	Learning from other generations
Supporting others	Not having opinion valued
Feeling needed	Being creative
Relationship with neighbours	Shopping
Career and family	Keeping in touch with people
Having to cope	Happy with own company
Isolation	Reducing engagement in activities
Supporting charities	Decline in abilities
Gifts from others	Caring for the environment
Christmas - feelings	Not being perfect at activities
Christmas - giving	Happy at home on your own
Christmas - decorations	Awareness of activities available
Christmas – change in routine	Feeling fortunate
Christmas – social contact	Having purpose
Christmas - traditions	Choice
Influence of time of the year	Feeling restricted
Time with others beyond the home	Opinion of society today
Missing male company	As things were
Proving you still can	Motivation
Value of friendships	

Needing to problem solve	Have to do everything yourself
Dealing with the death of a loved one	Similarities between generations
Rewarding experiences	Trying new things
Engagement with people beyond the home	Taking your time
Influence of husband	Pacing yourself
Transition into retirement	Not being elderly
Determination	Career change
Trying to maintain normality	Happiest now
Hard times	Truly me
Something for you	Sharing information about organisations
Physical contact	Acceptance
Maintaining connections with husband	Thankful for health
Replacing activities	Frustrated by others
Support from others	Making a contribution
Enjoy each day	
Less likely to take risks	
Getting out	
Process rather than product	
Feelings of frustration	
Categories of activities	
Hiding away	
Life is too short	
Talking to self	
Changes in appearance	
Physically capable	
Having something to do	
Access to resources for activities	
Not liking travelling alone	
Not having the opportunity	
Can have a go at anything	

Appendix 13 – Units of Meaning grouped into Themes



Appendix 14 – Table of Appointments

	1st Interview and provided camera/ memory card	Collected camera/ memory card	2nd Interview	Provided camera/ memory card	Collected camera/ memory card	3rd Interview	4th Interview
Ordelia	24 th March 2015	30 th March 2015	9 th April 2015	27 th November 2015	11 th December 2015	30 th December 2015	24 th February 2016
Olive	26 th March 2015	2 nd April 2015?	15 th April 2015	1 st December 2015	8 th December 2015	22 nd December 2015	16 th February 2016
Natalie	30 th March 2015	10 th April 2015	14 th April 2015	14 th December 2015	21 st December 2015	29 th December 2015	18 th February 2016
Roberta	9 th April 2015	21 st April 2015	24 th April 2015	13 th December 2015	21 st December 2015	28 th December 2015	21 st February 2016
Yvonne	16 th April 2015	5 th May 2015	7 th May 2015	8 th January 2016	21 st January 2016	25 th January 2016	22 nd February 2016
Hope	6 th May 2015	20 th May 2015	5 th June 2015	30 th November 2015	10 th December 2015	15 th December 2015	2 nd February 2016
Alison	6 th May 2015	20 th May 2015	10 th June 2015	4 th January 2016	18 th January 2016	25 th January 2016	17 th February 2016
Anne	13 th May 2015	26 th May 2015	2 nd June 2015	22 nd December 2015	4 th January 2016	8 th January 2016	19 th February 2016

Rebecca	18 th May 2015	1 st June 2015	5 th June 2015	31 st December 2015	15 th January 2016	19 th January 2016	18 th March 2016
Taylor	1 st June 2015	12 th June 2015	22 nd June 2015	30 th November 2015	10 th December 2015	15 th December 2015	2 nd February 2016
Lottie	26 th May 2015	2 nd June 2015	9 th June 2015	15 th December 2015	29 th December 2015	5 th January 2016	23 rd February 2016

Appendix 15 - Length of Interviews in Minutes

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4
Natalie	77	71	66	53
Ordelia	63	82	50	32
Roberta	40	44	38	45
Anne	45	48	41	40
Hope	49	72	59	66
Taylor	33	60	61	45
Alison	46	29	16	37
Yvonne	51	55	86	59
Lottie	46	50	28	38
Olive	51	72	27	84
Rebecca	58	71	50	42

Appendix 16 - Number of Photographs Taken

	Number of Photographs - Phase 1	Number of Photographs - Phase 2	Total Number of Photographs (phases 1 and 2)
Natalie	25	14	39
Ordelia	14	13	27
Roberta	32	18	50
Anne	16	7	23
Hope	25	22	47
Taylor	21	15	36
Alison	16	7	23
Yvonne	17	13	30
Lottie	14	10	24
Olive	25	7	32
Rebecca	25	8	33

Appendix 17 – Table of Activities

ALISON	ANN	HOPE	LOTTIE	NATALIE	OLIVE	ORDELIA
Preparing vegetables	Cooking tea	Breakfast	Cooking Fruitcakes	Knitting	Dinner – a microwave meal	Card making
Dinner	Strawberry plants	Table tennis	Cooking	Watching television	Playing music	Reading
Dog	Feeding the birds	Watching films	Eye drops	Baking a cake	Watching television	Sudoku
Breakfast	Visit from son and grandson	Jigsaw puzzles	Early morning cup of tea	Gardening	Drawing	Front/ side of the fridge
Making coffee	Cleaning out the dishwasher	Cuttings from plants	Treasurer of the local bridge club	Eating dinner	Knitting	Dancing (beyond the home)
Cutting the grass	Getting ready for bowls	Radio Times	Breakfast	Cleaning	Researching family history	Gardening
Clearing up the garden	Watering plants	Plants	Cleaner	Ironing	Use of fridge freezer	Indoor gardening
Keeping Fish	Cutting the grass	Upstairs room	Playing bridge with friends	Driving	Laundry	Coffee, radio and watching the birds
Sitting in the garden	Flowers for mother's day	Tea in the morning	Changing the bed	Dismantling an old chair	Telephone and keys	Photography
Being busy beyond the home	Airing washing	Puzzle book/ code breakers	Washing hair	Playing vinyl	Smoking	Calendar and study information
Reading the newspaper	Raffle	Homemade marmalade	Playing solitaire on the iPad	Taking medication	Wearing dressing gown	Taking a bath
Watching the television	Washing the kitchen floor	Shopping in the boot of the car	Reading	Laundry	Sunlight coming through the window	Using a mobile telephone
Reflections on where she lives	Sitting in the garden	Knitting a tea cosy	Morning vitamins	A break in the morning	Settee in lounge area	Watching the television

Baking	Reading	Collection of miniature stuff	Going to the bridge drive	Engagement with the church	Watching television	Listening to the radio
Routines	Living alone	Bridge table	Television	Support from others	Showering	Activities across the life course
Preparing dinner	Loss of husband	Cushion embroidery	Radio	Loneliness	Bed	Routines
Dinner	Shopping	Ironing	Writing a diary	Defining home	Outdoor space	Defining the self
Listening to the radio	Chores	Shed	Routines	Routines	Plants in the garden	Valuing photographs
Dog	Work	Gardening	Library	Using the computer/tablet	Making tea	Making Christmas cards
Cleaning the windows	Being active	Bird watching	Bowls	Awareness of own abilities	Central heating	Book group
Dog eating his dinner	Watching television	Computer	Driving	Knitting	Reading	Walking group
Kitchen and a bit of the window	Radio	Time alone	Showering	Baking	Using the computer	Coat and walking boots
Tablet	Morning routine	Cooking	Keeping accounts	Radio	Education	Going to Washington
	Photographs in the home	Granddaughters visiting	Eye drops and antibiotics	Christmas	Routines	Outside of the fridge
	Dogs	Reader's Digest	Early morning cup of tea	Looking forward to 2016	Knitting	Candles
	After visit from granddaughters	Learning	iPad	Meeting a man online	Laundry	Making decorations for Christmas
	Gardening	Quality of life	Reading	Artwork	Bed	Christmas tree

	Theatre trip	Cooking tomatoes	Taking pills	Mentoring	Routines	Getting the Christmas cake ready
	Holidays	Porridge	Watching television	Taking courses for volunteering roles	Winter boots	Christmas house
	Christmas cards	Knowing your neighbours	Routines	Volunteering role with home start	Wearing coat, scarf and gloves	Knitting
	Living alone	Knitting squares	Drinking wine	Volunteering at refugee centre	Christmas cards	Making gingerbread houses
	Looking after son's dog	Cleaning the windows	Christmas decoration	Discussion about the study	Home maintenance	Presents ready for family
	Attending pantomime	Having a cup of Bovril	Preparing for Christmas			Making soup
	Granddaughter writing	Wrapping gifts for Christmas	Christmas presents			Attending an art class
	Sewing and knitting	Birthday card	Gifts for others			Bridge
		Postage stamps	Christmas Day			Going out in the winter
		Cake	New Year's			
		Pin cushion in a teacup	Travelling			
		Toolbox	Using the conservatory			
		Sewing machine				
		Gifts received				

		Trefoil Guild magazine				
		Books				
		Secret Santa from previous year				
		Glasses				
		Drawer beside armchair				
		Parsley				
		Going away for Christmas				
		Keeping instructions				

REBECCA	ROBERTA	TAYLOR	YVONNE
A photograph of memories	Making tea	Jigsaw puzzles	Watching television
Breakfast	Having a shower	Reading the newspaper	Gardening
Slow cooker	Getting dressed	Looking after her daughter's dog	Chopping down a plant/ tree
Lunch bag	Having breakfast	Crossword	Using the telephone
Volunteering at Sissinghurst	Looking after someone's dog	Sudoku	Computer and printer
Walking boots	Shopping	Family history	Being alone
Local windmill	Recycling	Baking	Dolls house
Items beside the armchair	Household chores: hoovering, polishing, ironing, laundry, washing up dishes	Watching tele with the subtitles	Chopping vegetables
Knitting	Mowing the grass	Playing games on a tablet	Painting a garden bench

Photograph of oldest daughter and grandson	Sunbathing	Computer	Reading books
Birthday cards	Playing games on the computer	Sewing cards	Suitcase (travel)
Gardening	Doing The Times jumbo crossword	Knitting	Filing bills
Gardening tools	Feeding and watching the birds in the garden	Having a cup of tea	Sewing
Bouquet of flowers	Watching sport on the television	Sitting in the summer house	Hoovering
Using the computer	Cooking a meal	Reading	Being on your own
Packed suitcase	Categorising activities	Gardening	Volunteering for a charity for bereaved children
Travelling	Reflections on living alone	Finger spelling and hearing dogs information	Volunteering for a children's hospice
Sun shining from the front onto the landing in the morning	Desire to learn	Preparation of equipment for hearing aid clinic	Volunteering in general
Watching the Chelsea Flower Show on television	Reflections on the environment	Learning to lip read	Weight watchers
Evening meal	Reflections on having others in the home	Collections	Aqua Classes at local leisure centre
Teddy bears	Considering the future	Household activities: changing a mattress, spring cleaning, ironing and hoovering	Volunteering for Motor Neurone Disease Association
Dress	Garden in winter	Going out	Shopping
Bed	Feeding and watching the birds in the garden	Being at home alone	Volunteering for the RVS at the local hospital
Going out when not busy	Cooking a casserole	Being given a copy of a school photograph	Having feet done
Volunteering at NT property	Jacket and ruck sack	Making Christmas cards	Newspaper
Driving in the dark	Getting the Christmas decorations ready to put up	Knitting	The lottery
View from the back of the house	Christmas tree at night	Tidying up the garden	Dustbins

Gardening	Nativity scene	Writing Christmas cards	Hanging basket
Feeding the birds	Christmas card writing	Organising the Christmas meal for the Trefoil Guild	
Christmas decorations	Picture of a garage	Trefoil meetings	
Plans to redecorate	Fundraising (outside of the home)	Feeding the birds	
Christmas things	Washing hung outside	Present wrapping	
Line dancing	Car and front garden	Christmas decorations	
Travel documents		Picture of the sitting room	
Christmas cake		Washing up	
		Shredding	
		Listening to music	
		Advent calendar	
Key Activities which were photographed Activities which were discussed but not photographed			