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Out of time?

The experience of first-time
fatherhood after 40:
An interpretative phenomenological
analysis

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Thesis Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis reports on a study of the lived experience of men who became fathers for the first time in their 40s and 50s. It is therefore study of 'older fatherhood'. As interest in fatherhood has grown over the last 40-plus years there has been little attention paid to the increasing trend towards men becoming fathers at more advanced ages (in their 40s, 50s' and beyond) . There is limited evidence of what it is like to be an 'older father'. This contrasts with comparable parental experiences such as younger fatherhood and older motherhood, both of which have been extensively explored.

Employing interpretative phenomenological analysis, the experiences of ten men who became fathers for the first time in their 40s or 50s are examined. Semi-structured interviews with these older fathers generated a body of data which, when subjected to analysis, produced rich and evocative findings. The process of analysis focused on the meanings the men ascribed to the experience of older fatherhood. Close, interpretative engagement with the data ensured that participants' voices remained at the heart of both the analytic process and subsequent findings.

The men who participated in this study portrayed a positive, optimistic experience of fatherhood; each demonstrating that being an older father contributed to his individual paternal identity. However, they also showed that ambiguity and uncertainty lay at the heart of that experience. Participants encountered uncertain social attitudes towards older fatherhood and were concerned for its impact on their children's lives.

The findings and conclusions presented in this thesis complement, enhance and assist the interpretation of existing evidence concerning the lives of fathers, families and children and thus contribute to the broader field of fatherhood research.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father
William Frederick Chaloner

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1 Introduction

This study explores the lived experience of men who become fathers for the first time in their 40s and beyond.

The last 40 years have witnessed an increasing awareness of the social, legal and political importance of fatherhood, and the subject has been widely scrutinised, deliberated and evaluated:

...fathers seem to be everywhere at the moment in the UK – in the press, in political party pledges, in policies and in public places and spaces.

(Miller, 2011: 1)

The last four decades have also seen the boundaries and expectations of fatherhood change considerably as perceptions have shifted to accommodate a more involved, accessible model of fathering (Miller, 2011; Featherstone, 2009; Dermott, 2008; Doucet, 2006). As interest in fatherhood has expanded, fatherhood research has become an established area of interdisciplinary scholarship and the associated literature base is both extensive and diverse (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1).

There has been a growing interest in the ways in which men experience fatherhood in various paternal contexts. Consequently, academic attention has been drawn to the experiences of, for example, young fathers (Lau-Clayton, 2016); single-father families (Coles, 2015) and fathers in prison (Greif, 2014).

However, within the expanding body of fatherhood literature there is little evidence of how men experience fatherhood when it occurs at a later, non-normative age.

This study aims to respond to this lack of research activity by exploring men's lived experiences of older fatherhood. It will employ interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009) to examine how men who become fathers for the first time in their 40s and beyond make sense of that experience. By doing this, the study will complement, enhance and assist the interpretation of existing evidence concerning the lives of fathers, families and children, and thus contribute to the field of fatherhood research.

1.1 Thesis context

Recent years have witnessed a global increase, within developed countries, in the number of men in their 40s and 50s (and beyond) who become fathers, either for the first time or within second families (Brandt et al., 2019; Paavilainen et al., 2016; Lawson and Fletcher, 2014; Remer et al., 2010; Sartorius and Nieschlag, 2010).

Goriely and Wilkie (2012) report that the average paternal age at conception in England and Wales increased steadily from the mid-1970s. Explanations for this, which reflects a more general trend towards delaying first-time parenthood (Yläne, 2016; Mac Dougall et al., 2012) refer to a range of social, economic and demographic factors that influence reproductive choices. These include

increased life expectancy, effective contraception and the rising incidence of parental separation and divorce (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1).

There is therefore an ongoing increase in the number of 'older fathers' (Remer et al., 2010; Thacker, 2004). This phenomenon may also be referred to as 'late fatherhood' (Ylänne, 2016), 'delayed fatherhood' (Lawson and Fletcher, 2014) or 'advanced paternal age' (Bray et al., 2006). Within this thesis the term 'later paternity' is also used as an alternative to 'older fatherhood'. However, there is no consensus regarding the age at which any of these terms should be applied, meaning that the specific age at which a man may accurately be defined as an 'older father' is undetermined.

Attempts have been made to identify criteria for 'older fatherhood'. For example, Toriello and Meck (2008, p. 457) state that: 'A frequently used criterion [for advanced paternal age] is any man aged 40 years or older at the time of conception'. Whereas Nilsen et al. (2013, p. 2), with respect to first-time fatherhood, refer to: "'advanced' age as 35–39 years and 'very advanced' as ≥ 40 years'. Khandwala et al. (2017, p. 2115) state that many researchers suggest that a father over 40 'constitutes an 'older father'', and the most recent finding is that: 'most professional societies define APA [advanced paternal age] as greater than 40 years of age' (Brandt et al., 2019, p. 81). However, Brandt et al. (2019) also note that an optimal definition – which would assist the systematic evaluation of reproductive risk associated with paternal age (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1) – remains uncertain.

In 2017, nearly 98000 children were born in England and Wales to men aged over 40, which accounted for approximately 15% of all births that year (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2019). This represented an increase in the number of 'over-40' fathers from just over 79000 (13.5%) in 2005, and 59000 (10.5%) in 2000 (ONS, 2006; 2001). Therefore, between 2000 and 2017, the number of children born each year to men over 40 rose by approximately 65%, representing a 4.5% increase (as a proportion of all births) (Table 1.1).

Equally, in 2017, in England and Wales, 85% of births were to fathers *under* the age of 40 (ONS, 2019), which supports the applicability of the term 'older father' – relative to the majority of fathers – to men who become fathers in their 40s and beyond.

Table 1.1: Children born to men aged 40 or above between 2000 and 2017 in England and Wales

Year	Number of children born to men aged 40 or above	Percentage of all births that year
2000	59224 ¹	10.5
2005	79180 ²	13.5
2017	97448 ³	15.0

(Sources: ¹ONS, 2001; ²ONS, 2006; ³ONS, 2019).

Therefore, reflecting both this numerical evidence and the informed opinions referred to above, this study defines men who father in their 40s and beyond as 'older fathers' (see Chapter 4, Section 4.1.1). The term 'older fatherhood' refers to the concept, role and experience of fathering in that age range.

1.2 Rationale for the study

The increasing awareness of the importance of fatherhood plus the growing numbers of men who father beyond the age of 40 indicate a need to explore and understand the phenomenon of older fatherhood.

Although considerable academic attention has been paid to a broad range of fatherhood contexts and practices (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1), and notwithstanding research into the risk of adverse physiological outcomes for children of older fathers (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1), there remains a lack of research evidence to describe and comprehend the experience of later paternity. Such lack of inquiry is in contrast to the exploration of older motherhood, which has been widely researched (for example, Mills and Lavender, 2015, 2011; Perrier, 2013; Cooke et al., 2012; Shaw and Giles, 2009; van Katwijk and Peeters, 1998). It is also inconsistent with the level of attention given to paternal age through research into younger fatherhood (for example, Lau-Clayton, 2016; Neale and Davies, 2016; Shirani, 2015; Fatherhood Institute, 2013).

Older fatherhood gives rise to a number of questions that would benefit from academic inquiry. For example, how do older fathers' experiences accord with contemporary sociocultural expectations of fatherhood? Do older fathers perceive specific positive attributes linked to advanced paternal age? To what extent do concerns about ageing and mortality impact on their fathering experiences? How do older fathers perceive the impact that having an older

father may have on their children's lives? Such experiential questions intersect with broader issues regarding the social consequences of older fatherhood and social attitudes towards later paternity.

Furthermore, despite a lack of purposeful academic scrutiny, literature on related topics, such as the growing (global) tendency for couples to delay parenthood (Mill et al., 2016; Waldenström, 2016; Lavender et al., 2015; Cooke et al., 2012; Charlton, 2007) provides evidence of perceptions of older fatherhood that have not been investigated. For example, older fatherhood is claimed to confer advantages in terms of older men's enhanced emotional preparedness, maturity, patience and self-awareness (Mac Dougall et al., 2012). In contrast, it is argued that older fatherhood compromises conventional 'rules' about the timing of parenting, that is, it disrupts the normative lifespan, developmental and parenting script as, for example, when an older father is mistaken for his child's grandfather (Yläne, 2016). Furthermore, having a child at a later age has been denounced as a 'selfish' act (Sarler, 2011) due to perceptions of older men's failing physical abilities (Shirani, 2013) and limited lifespan, leaving them both physically less able and with less overall time for active involvement with their children (Mac Dougall et al., 2012).

1.2.1 The research questions

Each of these questions and claims demand investigation and underline the need to explore the experience of older fatherhood. This study therefore sought to respond to the following primary and subsidiary research questions (further

explanation for the formulation of these questions is provided in Chapter 3, Section 3.1.2).

The primary research question:

- How do older fathers describe the experience of later paternity?

Subsidiary questions:

- What are the practical, emotional and social consequences of older fatherhood?
- How is the experience of older fatherhood affected by social attitudes towards advanced paternal age?
- How do older fathers perceive the consequences of older fatherhood for their children?

1.2.2 Summary

In summary, the rationale for this study is that:

- a) Increasing awareness of the social, legal and political importance of fatherhood, in addition to sociocultural and socioeconomic changes,

have extended the boundaries and perceptions of fatherhood and fathering practices.

- b) There is a growing trend towards older fatherhood but little available evidence of the experiences of older fathers.
- c) The lack of available evidence concerning older fathers' experiences is at variance with contemporary fatherhood research that has produced a large body of evidence relating to a broad range of fathering roles and contexts.
- d) The exploration of older fathers' experiences would make a significant contribution to fatherhood research and complement, enhance and assist the interpretation of existing knowledge concerning the lives of fathers, families and children.

It is acknowledged that many of the growing number of older fathers are men who have previously fathered children and who have subsequently 're-fathered' within new family formations (Moore, 2013; Remer et al., 2010; Carnoy and Carnoy, 1995). However, in recognition that the experiences of such 'second-time-around' older fathers are likely to differ from those men with no prior fathering experience, this study will explore the experiences of first-time older fathers only.

1.3 Personal (autobiographical) context

The origins of this study lie within my experience of becoming a father in my 40s (and again in my early 50s). I therefore wish to make explicit my own position in relation to this investigation into older fatherhood and, in doing so, establish my position as an 'insider researcher':

Insider researchers are native to the setting and so have insights from the lived experience.

(Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p. 60)

The birth of my daughter when I was 48 caused me to contemplate the potential consequences of fathering beyond the typical paternal age and, more specifically, how it might impact on the lives of me, my wife and our daughter. I recall that, at that time, I considered the following questions:

1. Would I be considered 'too old' to be a new father and might this make me uncomfortable being seen in public with my daughter?
2. Might my daughter one day be embarrassed about my age or even resent being the child of an older father?

And, most fundamentally,

3. Had I imposed an avoidable risk of harm in relation to my daughter experiencing relatively early paternal loss?

These personal deliberations inspired me to discover more about the phenomenon of older fatherhood. I wished to know how the experience of older fatherhood differed from 'normative age' fatherhood and parenthood (Goldberg, 2014; Van Bavel and Nitsche, 2013). I was also interested in its social implications (for both an older father and his child) and how society in general views advanced paternal age.

Greene (2014) notes that:

As qualitative researchers, what stories we are told, how they are relayed to us, and the narratives that we form and share with others are inevitably influenced by our position and experiences as a researcher in relation to our participants.

(Greene, 2014, p. 1)

My personal experience underpinned the conception of this study. It assisted me in identifying the research aims and research questions (see Section 1.2.1 and Chapter 3, Sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3) and was influential in determining the methodological approach employed (see Chapter 3). However, I have maintained awareness of my subjective positioning in relation to the conduct of the study and believe that sharing an experiential base with the study participants (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) has benefitted my understanding of the topic. I have engaged in what Finlay and Gough (2003, p. 4) describe as 'methodological self-consciousness' in ensuring ongoing reflexivity (Burns et al., 2012; Kingdon, 2005) (see Chapter 4, Section 4.7).

1.4 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis consists of eleven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** situates the study and its overarching research questions in the context of the existing literature relating to older fatherhood. It establishes the need for an investigation into the experiences of older fathers.

Chapter 3 sets out the research aims, research questions and research paradigm and offers a detailed examination of the specific methodology employed in this study: interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

Chapter 4 explores the application of IPA to investigating the experience of older fatherhood; describing the processes of sampling, recruitment, data collection and data analysis. It addresses ethical considerations and outlines measures used to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter 5 introduces the subsequent four chapters within which the findings of the empirical study into older fathers' experiences are presented.

In **Chapter 6**, the first of the four findings chapters, the experience of older fatherhood is examined in relation to the impact fatherhood has on men's lives. The chapter explores older fathers' day-to-day involvement and emotional engagement in their paternal role and considers the approaches to fatherhood adopted by participants in this study.

The social context within which men experience older fatherhood provides the basis for **Chapter 7**. Within this chapter, men's accounts of the social world they encountered when fathering 'in public' and the meanings they attributed to that experience are explored. This chapter also addresses social attitudes towards older fatherhood.

Chapter 8 examines the interconnection between paternal age, physical activity and fatherhood. It addresses issues such as fathers' appearance and being mistaken for a grandfather. It also explores how older fathers perceive both the prospect and impact of physical decline in relation to their paternal functioning.

The final findings chapter, **Chapter 9**, considers older fathers' reflections on their paternal experience. The perceived advantages of later paternity are explored together with older fathers' contemplations on how they might have approached fatherhood as younger men. Participants' concerns for the impact that having an older father might have on their children's lives are considered – including the possibility of relatively early paternal mortality – as are some of the general pleasures and regrets they specifically ascribed to their later paternal experience.

Chapter 10 presents a discussion of the findings. It interprets and describes their significance in light of current knowledge and relevant theoretical debate, explaining the insights they offer into the experience of older fatherhood.

The final chapter, **Chapter 11**, presents the conclusions drawn from the thesis and explains their contribution to the field of older father research. This chapter includes an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the study plus suggestions for future research into older fatherhood.

2 Literature review

The purpose of this review is to situate the research study and overarching research questions in the context of the existing literature relating to older fatherhood.

The first parts of the review explore the subject of fatherhood. The emergence of fatherhood as a focus of research study is considered and the ways in which perceptions of fatherhood have altered in recent years and factors that have influenced those changes are explored. The attention paid to men as a focus of gender studies in the late 20th century led to greater attention being paid to their role as fathers, and this review examines the relationship between fatherhood and masculinity.

Having explored the broader, contextual fatherhood literature, the review then addresses the literature relating to the timing of fatherhood. This includes literature on the increasing trend towards delayed parenthood plus that which explores the concept of 'social age deadlines' for fatherhood. As noted in Chapter 1, the academic literature specifically devoted to older fatherhood is limited. However, a number of dedicated 'older fatherhood' texts have been published, and these are considered in terms of their usefulness to this study.

Following this, the review examines how older fatherhood is portrayed in the news media and the extent to which such representations provide insight into social attitudes towards later paternity.

The penultimate section of the literature review examines two theoretical concepts which, it is contended, play a significant role in exploring and understanding the experience of older fatherhood. These are theories of identity and social comparison theory.

Overall, this chapter indicates the need for further investigation into the experiences of older fathers and, in its final part I explain how the present study addresses the gaps in knowledge identified within this literature review. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

2.1 Fatherhood

Exploration of the family as a social institution has long been a part of Western intellectual tradition (LaRossa, 2005; Pooley et al., 2005; Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001, Ivan Nye, 1988). In the UK, following the creation of the British Welfare State and National Health Service (DeBell, 2015; Fraser, 2009), academic interest in family behaviour, parenthood and the attendant values, relationships, and feelings of men, women, and children increased significantly after the Second World War.

However, in the years following these significant social developments there was little attention paid to fatherhood as a separate role. Interest in fathers was largely restricted to their role as parents within family formations, with little acknowledgement of relationships, '...beyond the mother-father-infant triad' (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p. 47). It was not until the 1970s that an

appreciation of fatherhood as a subject worth studying in its own right stimulated the first significant wave of fatherhood research (Lamb 2010) and increased 'the academic visibility of fathers' (Dermott and Miller, 2015, p. 190).

In the latter part of the 20th century, a range of significant sociocultural, socioeconomic and demographic developments (Halsey and Webb, 2000) influenced both popular and scholarly evaluations of men and their role and identity as fathers (Wall and Arnold, 2007).

For example, the feminist movement in the 1970's promoted a view that the narrow perception of a father as 'financial provider' was both central to the problem of male privilege and responsible for men's lack of awareness and inability to articulate their needs for intimacy and emotional connectedness (Silverstein, 1996). A feminist emphasis on fathers' nurturing and emotionally connected role was also influential in increasing perceptions of fathers as actively involved – both practically and emotionally – parents (Doucet, 2013; Lamb, 2000).

The emerging interest in fatherhood may also be understood in relation to the attention paid to men as subjects of gender inquiry in the 1980's and 1990's (Strier, 2014), within which fatherhood was increasingly portrayed as a gendered and socially constructed concept (Lupton and Barclay, 1997).

Rising male unemployment, and women's greater participation in the paid labour force and expanded contribution to family income, first mainly as part-

time workers, then increasingly as full-time wage earners sharing the work-time burden in the two-parent family (Budds et al., 2013; Horrell and Humphries, 1995), led to fundamental shifts in family life (Dette-Hagenmeyer et al., 2014). A consequence of this was a reduction in the dominance of the 'traditional' father/provider role, which provided some men with an opportunity to reconstruct their fathering identity and spend more time with their children (Shirani et al., 2012).

These changes occurred against a backdrop of concurrent demographic adjustments such as falling marriage rates, growing rates of divorce and an ageing population (Berrington et al., 2015; Allan et al., 2001).

In parallel with, and as a consequence of these developments, a variety of emergent fatherhood roles and practices, including single parent fatherhood (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010), gay fatherhood (Golombok and Tasker, 2010) and non-biological (social) fatherhood (Chan et al., 2015; Thorn, 2013) began to augment the traditional domestic framework of a heterosexual biological father co-resident with his wife/partner and their dependent children (Cabrera et al., 2000). In addition to single-sex families (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010), the proportion of children residing with their biological fathers decreased and the number of children living with a single father (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010) or a step-father (Marsiglio, 2005) increased dramatically.

During this time, assisted reproductive technologies such as in-vitro fertilisation (Bavister, 2002) offered 'new' routes into fatherhood, for example parenthood by

male couples through commercial and altruistic surrogacy (Murphy, 2013). A consequence of these developments was the emergence and recognition of new family formations (Dempsey, 2013; Dempsey and Hewitt, 2012) within which the role of 'father' became increasingly less definite. Ives (2019) notes the inherent difficulty of trying to define contemporary fatherhood, claiming that there are both advantages and disadvantages to various categorisations – such as those based on biological connection to a child, social role, economic provision and day-to-day paternal responsibility – with none providing a particularly conclusive definition.

2.1.1 Changes in perceptions of fatherhood

The increasing diversity in fathering contexts and roles has increased the range of fathering narratives (Featherstone, 2009) and challenged the role norms and expectations of fatherhood (Crespi and Ruspini, 2015; Dick, 2011).

A popular notion of bygone fatherhood evokes an image of an emotionally distant, authoritarian 'father-figure' (Finn and Henwood, 2009). Such an image is apparent in the literature relating to the father's role in the 19th century (for example, Sanders, 2009) when, according to Moge (1957), it was accepted that social and family harmony depended upon the existence of paternal authority within the family structure. The dominant role identity of a father as financial provider (breadwinner) and moral authority figure within the family persisted through the 20th century and beyond (Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda, 2004) (see Section 2.3).

However, the literature demonstrates that, in the last 40 years, perceptions of fatherhood (in Westernised societies) and contemporary ideals of fathering practice have shifted in response to the social, economic and demographic factors outlined above and in response to changing ideas about gender roles and masculinity. Perceptions of fatherhood have altered to embrace a more actively involved, nurturing paternal role (Gillies, 2009; Wall and Arnold, 2007) with expectations of accessibility, participation and emotional engagement (Pleck, 2012; Genesoni and Tallandini, 2009; Williams, 2008).

Consequently, the literature portrays fatherhood as a multi-faceted concept with social, legal, cultural and personal implications (Gillies, 2009; Ives, 2007; Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000a).

In many Western societies, therefore, there is increasingly a contemporary notion of a father who is both sensitive to and actively involved in the nurturing of his children within a relationship (with his children's mother) founded on expectations of equal co-parenting and in acknowledgement of the cultural context in which his paternal role is accomplished (Strier, 2014).

This conceptual reconfiguration was for some time (particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s) referred to as 'new fatherhood':

The 'new fathers' of today are ideally more nurturing, develop closer emotional relationships with their children, and share the joys and work of caregiving with mothers.

(Wall and Arnold, 2007, p. 509)

The academic literature on fatherhood shows that these changes have been extensively explored (for example, Dermott and Miller, 2015; McLaughlin and Muldoon, 2014; Miller, 2011; Featherstone, 2009; Dermott, 2008; Lewis and Lamb, 2007; Wall and Arnold, 2007; Brannen and Nilsen, 2006; Hobson, 2002; Cabrera et al., 2000). However, the notion of 'new fatherhood' is no longer 'new' and the term is used less frequently, although the literature suggests that authors may still rely on it to encapsulate an involved, engaged paternal role (Busby and Weldon-Johns, 2019). However their function is labelled, contemporary fathers are increasingly required to negotiate complex and sometimes ambiguous expectations about the nature of the role (Kay, 2007).

Thus, a range of understandings of fatherhood – some evolving and some more 'traditional' – exist. It is acknowledged that fatherhood amounts to more than a purely practical role; it is a phenomenon around which there exist many discourses to which men may subscribe as a means of making sense of both their paternal function and place in society (Stevens, 2015; Miller, 2011; Dermott, 2008; Wall and Arnold, 2007). In their seminal work on the social construction of fatherhood, Lupton and Barclay (1997) note that fatherhood is a site of competing discourses and desires that can never be fully and neatly shaped into a single 'identity', and that the meaning of fatherhood is dependent on current discourses used to represent it. This view is reflected in contemporary approaches to fatherhood, and the range of 'fatherhood discourses' outlined by Lupton and Barclay more than 20 years ago remain relevant to exploring the experience of fatherhood today:

Fatherhood as a logical step, a 'natural' part of adult masculinity; fatherhood as an enterprise, something that needs to be worked at; fatherhood as a major responsibility; father as protector/provider; fatherhood as demanding, a source of stress and strain; 'good' fatherhood as close involvement with one's child; 'good' fatherhood as 'being there'; fatherhood as a source of fulfilment, joy.
(Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p. 143)

Despite evidence of shifting perceptions and the increasing number of types of fatherhood and fathering roles (Poole et al., 2013; Marsiglio, et al., 2000b) it is evident that for many men the need for biogenetic connection with their child predominates (Dempsey, 2013). The dominant fatherhood discourse therefore endorses biological fatherhood as a primary focus of attention. This is the case both culturally and in legal terms, where a child's right to know their biological origins is recognised in law (Fortin, 2009; Sample, 2007; *Re T (Paternity: Ordering Blood Tests)*, 2001).

As noted above, the emergence of fatherhood as a focus of academic attention was closely associated with the study of gender. However, Miller (2011) suggests that an emphasis on gender may be problematic if it serves to highlight and reinforce differences between men and women — for example, through focusing on 'fatherhood' and 'motherhood' categories and practices rather than 'parenting'. Furthermore, Deutsch (2007) has argued that a reconceptualisation of gender identities in the last 40 years has led to the reordering of gendered parental roles and relationships, leading one to question whether a traditional gendered division of parenting roles has ceased to exist as: '... the dividing line between mothering and fathering becomes blurred' Dermott (2008, pp. 92-93).

2.2 Fatherhood research

As the boundaries and perceptions of the father's role have extended, fatherhood has increasingly become a focus of academic interest, and fatherhood research is now an established area of interdisciplinary scholarship. Growing awareness of its social, legal and political importance has led to the development of a body of literature that is both extensive and diverse, and within which a broad range of paternal roles and contexts are explored.

Edwards and colleagues describe how, in research terms, fatherhood went from:

... being relatively ignored in the 1970s and 1980s, through being a 'hot topic' in the 1990s, and then emerging as a relatively established subspecialty of several disciplinary fields in the early years of the twenty-first century.
(Edwards et al., 2009, p. 6)

In 2007 it was estimated that in the UK and elsewhere, more than 700 papers on men's family roles were being published in academic journals each year from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds (Lewis and Lamb, 2007). The findings of a recent comprehensive review into the roles of fathers in families (Davies et al., 2017) show that the number and range of studies that examine UK fathers and/or fatherhood continues to expand. However, the review includes no evidence of research into older fatherhood or of the experiences of older fathers.

Early fatherhood studies focused on associations between what Paquette and colleagues (2013, p. 735) refer to as: 'a father's degree of masculinity' and the

sex roles adopted by his children, especially boys. Later studies were prompted by a growing interest in the impact of father involvement on child development (Lamb, 2000); exploring issues such as the effects of father absence or low levels of father-child interaction and their detrimental effects on children's cognitive development and behaviour (Mott, 1990; Stern et al., 1984; Svanum et al., 1982).

In recent years the research focus has shifted to explore fathers' positive contribution to child development in terms of social, emotional and cognitive development (Sarkadi et al., 2008; Marsiglio et al, 2000b) and the role of fathers within families (Cabrera et al., 2000), rather than the effects of their absence. Researchers have increasingly explored the notion of fathers as providers of both material *and* emotional support to their children (Christiansen and Palkovitz, 2001) and father involvement has been shown to have significant implications for men on their own path of adult development and for their wives and partners in the co-parenting relationship (Allen and Daly, 2007).

Until comparatively recently, much of the fatherhood literature adopted a somewhat instrumental perspective in that it focused on the father's impact on his children rather than the father himself (for example, Lamb, 2010). It also offered a highly normative perspective on fatherhood by advocating 'appropriate' behaviours and identifying those who fail to fit the 'involved ideal' (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). However, this focus appears to have shifted, placing greater attention on fathers themselves (Miller, 2011; Dermott, 2008; Wall and Arnold, 2007; Doucet, 2006). Researchers have begun to emphasise

the significance of social factors such as class (Gillies, 2009), ethnicity (Reynolds, 2009; Salway et al., 2009) and religion (Aune, 2010) to the understanding of fatherhood. Furthermore, as UK family policy has sought to prioritise fathering as a social issue (Gillies, 2009) the father's role in the context of various family relationships has also been subjected to academic scrutiny. For example, Brannen and Nilsen (2006) examined generational change – from grandfathers to fathers to sons – within families.

A variety of 'non-traditional' fathering roles have been explored. For example, adolescent fatherhood (Lee et al., 2012); non-biological (social) fatherhood (Chan et al., 2015; Thorn, 2013); single fatherhood (Coles, 2015); gay fatherhood (Golombok and Tasker, 2010); step-fatherhood (Marsiglio, 2005); fathers in prison (Greif, 2014; Murray and Farrington, 2005) and post-separation fathering (Philip, 2013). However, much of the experiential literature on fathering explores men's experiences of the transition to first-time fatherhood. An example of this is provided by Miller (2011) who addresses a range of contemporary fatherhood-related issues via an investigation into how men experience becoming fathers for the first time. This approach has been reflected in other studies that have viewed men's paternal experiences through the analytical lens of pregnancy, childbirth and transition (for example, Miller and Nash, 2017; Redshaw and Henderson, 2013; Chin et al., 2011a; Premberg et al., 2011; Genesoni and Tallandini, 2009; Henwood and Procter, 2003; Lupton and Barclay, 1997).

There is less research evidence of how fatherhood is experienced at later stages in both a child (and father's) life. This has led to calls to extend the fatherhood research focus beyond men's experiences of their children's birth and early life (Dermott and Miller, 2015) and for more culturally contextualised studies that explore issues beyond white, middle-class fatherhood (Strier, 2014).

2.3 Fatherhood and masculinity

Fatherhood researchers have suggested that fatherhood identities are framed by dominant models of masculinity (King, 2015; Pleck, 2010; Finn and Henwood, 2009; Marsiglio and Pleck, 2005; Hobson, 2002).

Conventional understandings of the father's role – as 'breadwinner', provider and protector to his family – are closely linked to the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Hunter et al., 2017), which is a central focus for masculinities research (Bartholomaeus and Tarrant, 2016). A hegemonic model of masculinity (Connell, 2005; Demetriou, 2001; Connell, 1987; Carrigan et al., 1985) was initially understood as a pattern of practice that accepted the dominant position of men and allowed that dominance to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). However, contemporary perceptions of fatherhood (as noted in Section 2.1.1) portray a role that does not align with these views. King (2015) explains how, in the middle part of the 20th century, a period when a strongly gendered division of labour remained intact, it became increasingly possible for men to embrace fatherhood and to become more involved family

members without challenging their masculinity. Subsequently, social changes that occurred in the second half of the 20th century, such as those outlined in Section 2.1, lessened gendered differentiation in terms of male and female roles within and outside the home (Featherstone, 2009). The emergence of such 'family-oriented masculinity' (Dermott and Miller, 2015, p. 189) indicated the advent of the more emotionally engaged, involved paternal role referred to above.

Outlining the origins of the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the 1980s, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note that even at the point of its initial formulation, it was anticipated that this model could co-exist or be displaced by newer forms of masculinity:

This was the element of optimism in an otherwise rather bleak theory. It was perhaps possible that a more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man might become hegemonic, as part of a process leading toward an abolition of gender hierarchies.

(Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 833)

Noting a shift, in recent years, away from a masculine identity linked with work to one created within a man's home life, Shirani and Henwood (2011, p. 17) suggest that this represents a new 'hegemonic ideal of the involved father'.

Connell (2005) subsequently expanded the concept of hegemonic masculinity to facilitate understanding of multiple masculinities, and of masculine identity as a more flexible, adaptable concept, concerned with the intersection of gender and social divisions such as social class and ethnicity (Dolan, 2014). Such

theoretical expansion reflects a belief that: 'masculinity is composed of many masculinities' (Beynon, 2002, p. 1) and that at certain times and in certain circumstances, some ways of 'being a man' are culturally extolled over others (Tarrant, 2013). This allows for greater diversity in the way in which fatherhood and masculinity are intertwined (Dermott and Miller, 2015).

An example of a newer form of masculinity is 'caring masculinities'. Elliott (2016) outlines this evolving concept, central to which is the rejection of domination that is integral to hegemonic masculinity. Elliott (2016, p. 252) offers: 'a feminist analysis of how masculine identities can be reworked into caring ones', explaining how positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality – 'values of care' traditionally associated with women – may be incorporated into masculine identities. Doucet (2006, p. 210) who explored the role of fathers in hands-on childcare states that a key insight that emerged from her study was that: '... fathers are reconfiguring fathering and masculinities'. This reflects the findings of Johansson and Klinth (2008) that men wish to work toward a more nuanced image of masculinity, one that stresses the multifaceted nature of fatherhood. However, Hunter et al (2017) argue that ideas surrounding a caring masculinity are better understood as a broadening of hegemonic masculinity, rather than a brand new form of masculinity.

Evolving conceptualisations of masculinity accord with the changing perceptions of fatherhood outlined above. That is, they enable an emotionally engaged, actively involved model of fatherhood to 'fit' with a recognisable masculine identity. However, it has been argued that contemporary notions of actively

engaged fatherhood and transformed masculinities are at odds with enduring ideas about men and masculinity (Shirani, 2011) and that recognition of the conceptual shift in perceptions of fatherhood and fatherhood behaviour is not absolute. Indeed, some fatherhood scholars have cautioned against accepting an overly simplistic change from one (traditional) type of father to another. Dermott and Miller (2015, p. 184), for example, suggest that there is: 'insufficient evidence to suggest that a truly significant transformation has occurred', indicating that contemporary, idealised expectations may not accord with fathers' actual conduct. One proposal put forward is that the involved, nurturing model of fatherhood is attributable more to the dominance of middle-class values in public arenas such as the media and among policy makers than to actual practice (Gillies, 2009). Furthermore, although the influence of gender and gender differences is discussed across the fatherhood literature (for example, Chesley, 2011; Bulanda, 2004; Eggebeen, 2002), it has been noted that heteronormativity remains a dominant theme and that many embedded 'gendered' practices around caring, parenthood and family life endure (Miller, 2011).

Such doubts are strengthened by reports that the essential characteristics of 'traditional' hegemonic working-class masculinity and of the work-focused, 'breadwinner model' of fatherhood persist (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012; Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). The suggestion being that many people still perceive the father's role primarily in financial terms wherein a 'good father' is a provider of a reasonable standard of living for his family (Dolan, 2011). Supporting this view is the fact that, although fathers might spend more time with their children than

previously, their involvement in caregiving remains a fraction of that undertaken by mothers (Wall and Arnold, 2007).

2.3.1 Ageing and masculine identity

The ways in which age, combined with fatherhood, affects masculine identity, is an important consideration for the study of older fathers' experiences. However, as with other aspects of older fatherhood, there has been a relative lack of attention paid to the impact later paternity has on a man's sense of masculinity. Indeed, there is a general lack of evidence of the relationship between masculinities and age (Bartholomeus and Tarrant, 2016; Calasanti, 2010). As Gibson and Kierans (2017, p. 533) note: 'the study of masculinities as men age remains in its infancy'.

However, the concept of 'ageing masculinity' has been explored by, among others, Shirani (2013) and Tarrant (2013). Shirani (2013) notes that some men experience growing older as a process of entering 'marginalised manhood' in relation to younger men and that this may represent a challenge to identity later in life. Tarrant (2013), using grandfathering as a focus for the intersection between masculinity and ageing, suggests that the lack of attention paid to older men and masculinity is due to the concept of hegemonic masculinity being associated with youthfulness.

Age-related changes, such as a loss of strength, control, and independence (Bennett, 2007), or anticipation of such changes, can lead to shifts in masculine

self-identities as men face uncertainty in relation to ageing (McDaniel, 2003). Mann et al. (2016) discuss the notion of 'shifting masculinities', which refers to the realignment of masculinities that occurs as men age and face challenges in maintaining connections to hegemonic masculinity, by which Mann and colleagues mean aspects of dominant masculinity such as physical toughness.

Further indication of how masculine identity is shaped by age is to be found within studies such as those of Bartholomaeus and Tarrant (2016) who examined gender, masculinities and age, and Wandel and Roos (2006) who, in their study of how middle-aged men talk about ageing and physical activity, found that men engaged in skilled manual work worried about decline in strength as a consequence of age and found themselves thinking more about health and disease. This literature contributes to understanding of how ageing affects masculine identity, but the evidence is partial, particularly in relation to how fatherhood intersects with age and masculinity.

2.4 The timing of fatherhood

The timing of fatherhood is a central area of interest to this study. An optimal age-range for fatherhood, that is the period of time within which it is most appropriate for men to become fathers (rather than the age-range within which they may accomplish biological fatherhood) is uncertain (Marsh and Ditung, 2014; Shirani, 2014).

Two discrete bodies of literature, between which there is considerable commonality, provide evidence of existing knowledge regarding the 'right time for fatherhood' (Shirani, 2014) and assist understanding of later paternity. The first concerns the growing trend towards 'delayed parenthood' (Mill et al, 2016) and the second relates to the appropriate 'social age' at which fatherhood should be accomplished (Goldberg (2014).

2.4.1 Delayed parenthood

An increase in the number of men in England and Wales becoming fathers in their 40s and beyond (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1) underscores a more general trend towards delayed parenting (Ylänne, 2016) and a steady rise (in the western world) in parental ages at the birth of a first child (Billari et al., 2007).

The reasons why men and women intentionally postpone parenthood are incompletely understood (Mills et al, 2015). However, some of the social and demographic changes referred to in Section 2.1 appear to have influenced this trend. Indeed, the rising incidence of parental separation and divorce, plus changes in partnership and re-partnership behaviour (Guzzo, 2014; Amato, 2010), have augmented the number of older fathers as many men become 'second-time-around' fathers; 're-fathering' within new families (Moore, 2013; Remer et al., 2010). These men therefore form a growing sub-group of older fathers:

There is no doubt that societal changes have led to both men and women beginning families later.

(Bray et al., 2006, p. 851)

Further explanations for delaying parenthood include socio-economic uncertainty, greater life expectancy, and an enhanced focus (for both men and women) on achieving educational and career goals (Ylänne, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2013; Cooke et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2011; Shirani, 2011).

The widespread use of oral contraception has been particularly influential (Watkins, 1998). Its introduction enabled women to have greater control over reproductive decisions (Budds et al., 2013; Benzies et al., 2006), although it has been claimed that the subsequent focus on women's reproductive decision-making led to the contribution that men make to decisions about having children being overlooked (Shirani, 2014).

Jamieson et al (2010) report that research focusing specifically on men in their 30s and 40s and their willingness to become fathers and their approaches to contraception have been overlooked in comparison to studies of younger men: 'This is despite the fact that this is the most important age group in terms of the current trend of delayed childbirth' (Jamieson et al, 2010, p. 467). In addition to the availability of effective contraception, developments in assisted reproductive technology (that have created 'new routes' to fatherhood – see Section 2.1) have enabled couples to negotiate reproductive decisions at a later age (Sartorius and Nieschlag, 2010).

Questions concerning the 'right time' for parenthood are increasingly confounded by the expanding range of paternal and maternal roles and contexts, as well as the shifting societal perceptions of both fatherhood and motherhood, plus changes in cultural understandings and expectations of age-stereotypes (Kornadt et al., 2015). It is reported that cultural ideas about ageing, the life course and reproductive choices have altered (Kokko et al., 2009; Friese et al., 2008) and that there is evidence of more latitude in the timing of parenthood and less social pressure – predominant in the 1950s and 1960s – towards having children at an early age (Goldberg, 2014).

Using data from a national probability sample of US households, Mirowsky (2002) examined the optimal age for childbearing (for both men and women) in relation to parents' physical health and the impact of this on reproductive decision-making. The findings indicate, perhaps unsurprisingly, that older parenthood had more negative physiological implications for women than for men.

Mac Dougall and colleagues (2012) undertook a qualitative study that explored the perceived advantages and disadvantages of delayed parenthood. Interviews with couples revealed their retrospective opinions on the optimal age for becoming a father or mother for the first time. The authors report that both men and women believed that childbearing later in life resulted in advantages for themselves and their families. These included enhanced emotional preparedness, committed co-parenting relationships and a positive overall family experience. But participants also identified some disadvantages, such as

lack of energy for parenting, less available lifetime to spend with children and anticipated stigma as older parents. One of the male participants in Mac Dougall et al's study expressed concern for the children of much older fathers:

If you're going to be dead whenever your kid is out of high school, that's probably too late. It's not a biological thing; I don't think it's great for the kid to have so much of their life without that parent.

(Mac Dougall et al., 2012, p. 1063)

The qualitative findings reported by Mac Dougall et al bring to life the issues relating to delayed parenthood. For example, with regard to being emotionally prepared for parenthood, one participant stated:

I know that I'm way more self-aware than I was 20 years ago. I feel like I'm in a better position to communicate better with my child and help them more in life and I understand how to be a supportive, encouraging parent.

(Mac Dougall et al., 2012, p. 1059).

And another observed:

To me, it's just a welcome gift as opposed to any kind of burden, and I think that comes with just the experience we've had and the fact that we're so old, we've had a chance to do the other stuff.

(Mac Dougall et al., 2012, p. 1060)

One of the difficulties faced by researchers of delayed parenthood is a lack of consensus about the age a man or woman should reach before parenthood is considered 'delayed'. This is similar to the difficulty faced by those seeking to define 'older fatherhood' (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1). Many of the studies of the timing of parenthood use only the mother's age as the basis for categorising couples into 'early', 'on-time', or 'delayed' parenthood groups (Goldberg, 2014)

and ages ranging from 25 to 40 have been identified as within the 'delayed' range (Garrison et al., 1997).

The majority of participants in Mac Dougall et al.'s (2012) study identified the optimal age for first-time parenting as five to ten years earlier than they had actually conceived, although the reasons given for this were mainly concerned with physical age and declining reproductive ability rather than social age.

2.4.2 Social age deadlines for fatherhood

The 'life cycle' and 'life course' literature (for example, Neugarten, 1969) suggests that the timing of fatherhood (as with other major self-directed life events) is strongly influenced by perceived social age deadlines that impose proscriptions against engaging in certain activities at too young or too old an age.

Consequently, social age deadlines, alongside biological ones (Van Bavel and Nitsche, 2013), may affect the timing of fatherhood (Pears et al., 2005) and these deadlines may be related, but not necessarily equal to biological reproductive limits. An illustration of this is found within Billari et al.'s (2011) report of findings from the European Social Survey, a bi-annual survey conducted using face-to-face interviews with representatives aged 15 and over from the 25 participating countries. One of the questions used in the survey was: 'After what age would you say a woman [or man] is generally too old to consider having any more children?' (Billari et al., 2011, p. 617). The findings

indicate that, across Europe, the perceived social age deadlines for fatherhood are considerably lower than biological deadlines:

Most (90.2%) of the respondents readily cited a paternal age deadline, with a mean of 47.3 years ... and 46.2% of the respondents indicated that men should not have children after age 45.

(Billari et al., 2011, p. 617)

In an exploration of variability in fathering ages, Goldberg (2014) applies the metaphor of a 'social clock' (Neugarten, 1979), a socially/culturally-specific, age-rated timetable for major life events (such as fatherhood) to categorise her findings. The social clock theory suggests that adjustments to these events are easier for those who experience them at socially normative life stages. In contrast, those who are 'out of step' with the social clock may experience difficulty adjusting to self-directed life events due, for instance, to perceived social stigma and reduced opportunities for support from others going through the same experience.

Therefore, the timing of fatherhood may be deemed 'appropriate' or 'off-time', in other words, too early or too late (Hogan and Astone, 1986). It seems reasonable to suggest that social age deadlines for fatherhood will expand upward as advances in assisted reproductive technologies and diminishing social pressure to reproduce at a young age encourage both men and women to become parents later. Furthermore, and perhaps most pertinent to the present study, longer life expectancies may reduce parents' concerns about not living long enough to raise children to adulthood.

2.5 Older fatherhood

Within the extensive and increasing range of fatherhood literature there is a paucity of research focusing on the personal and social aspects of older fatherhood and therefore little evidence of how men experience this phenomenon. Although, within the literature relating to fatherhood, terms such as 'late fatherhood' (Ylänne, 2016), 'delayed fatherhood' (Lawson and Fletcher, 2014) or 'advanced paternal age' (Bray et al., 2006) are employed in relation to men fathering children beyond the normative age (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1), these are mostly applied within reports on the potential health risks posed to children of older fathers (see Section 2.5.1). Within the sociological fatherhood literature it is rare to find the term 'older father' employed as a discrete category of fatherhood. It is most often used in a descriptive or comparative sense, as when the actions of young fathers are compared with fathers of more senior years, for example:

...older fathers spend less time engaged with children than younger fathers.
(Hofferth and Anderson, 2003, p. 229)

However, some dedicated older fatherhood literature does exist and this review now explores three books that, whilst largely anecdotal and therefore not fulfilling the classification of 'academic' literature, offer empirical evidence of older fathers' experiences and assist understanding of the broader aspects of the subject. Each is examined in the order in which the books were published.

The first book is entitled: *Father Over Forty: Becoming an Older Father* (Hamand, 1994). Within this clearly written, but largely anecdotal account, the author explores some of the historical and contextual aspects of what he refers to as 'later fatherhood' (another articulation of the phenomenon – see Chapter 1, Section 1.1). Of particular use to the present study is a chapter devoted to the experience of older fatherhood. This chapter contains several examples of first-hand understandings, including the following quote from a 53-year-old father of a seven-month-old boy:

I still have my fears and anxieties; I worry about money, about the responsibility. I worry that I'm too old – too old to play with him, to run with him, to do anything with him.

(Hamand, 1994, p. 25)

It is not clear how the author obtained the many quotes and insights into older fatherhood that he employs in his book, although he expresses thanks to '... the many people who wrote or spoke to me about their experience of older fatherhood' (Hamand, 1994, p. vi). There is therefore no evidence of a systematic approach to his work. However, the book provides an interesting introduction to older fatherhood and, 25 years since its publication, its contents remain relevant to an exploration of the topic.

The second book, which of the three 'older father' books demonstrates the most systematic approach to the subject, is: *Fathers of a Certain Age: The Joys and Problems of Middle-aged Fatherhood* (Carnoy and Carnoy, 1995). The aim of this book, co-written by a father and son was to investigate:

... a fast-growing group of men who are fathering in their late forties, fifties, and even sixties ... we wanted to know more about middle-aged fathering, how it differs from 'normal-aged' fathering.

(Carnoy and Carnoy, 1995, p. 15)

This aim is similar to the aims and research questions that the present study seeks to respond to (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2.1 and Chapter 3, Sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3) and Carnoy and Carnoy's book provides an informative resource for exploring contemporary older fathers' experiences.

The authors conducted interviews with older fathers (who they define as men in their late-40s and beyond), exploring some of the key influences on older fatherhood. They stress the informal nature of their work, stating that: 'We did not pretend to be scientific' (Carnoy and Carnoy, 1995, p. viii), and this is reflected in their use of subjective observations on marriage, relationships and public opinion, utilising phrases such as: 'Most people would probably agree ...'. Despite this, there is evidence of a systematic approach to their investigation, which involved the analysis and interpretation of interview data, the cross-checking of data (via interviews with the men's wives, partners and children), and the relating of their findings to existing knowledge.

An emphasis on 'second-time-around' fatherhood and its impact on fathers and their children from earlier relationships is evident throughout the book (one of the authors was, himself, a second-time-around father) and much less attention is paid to first-time older fathers. The authors note that an inherent difficulty in investigating older fatherhood through the evidence of the fathers themselves is that participants' earlier life experiences are recalled through the filter of later

experiences and interpretation. Another reason they claim that older fathers may not be a particularly good source for assessing the advantages and disadvantages of middle-aged parenting is that they have: '... a vested interest in feeling good about what they are doing' (Carnoy and Carnoy, 1995, p. 142). Both observations are relevant to the present study into older fathers' experiences.

Like Hamand (1994), Carnoy and Carnoy's book was also published approximately 25 years ago. The authors comment on the lack of existing (mid-1990s) research into older fatherhood, noting that despite it being, as they observed, a subject of intense interest to the media as well as the general public, they got very little help from what others had written. This was because: 'Almost no-one has looked at the social phenomenon of fathering after forty-five years old' (Carnoy and Carnoy, 1995, p. vii). It is notable that even after such a considerable period, this lack of evidence continues to frustrate research into older fatherhood.

The third book dedicated to older fatherhood is entitled: *Prime Time Dads: 45 Reasons to Embrace Midlife Fatherhood* (Filppu, 2013). This book is considerably less formal (and less informed) than the other two older fatherhood texts. It is wholly anecdotal, presenting the author's personal insights gained from becoming a first-time father at the age of 49. Some of the reasons the author gives for embracing midlife fatherhood effectively convey a sense of the book's style and content. These include: 'Don't retire to a rocker, keep on rockin'; 'Hang out with a younger crowd' and 'Coach your favorite sport(s)'

(Filppu, 2013). However, given the limited body of older fatherhood literature, this book is of some value in exposing issues relevant to the older father experience.

One further 'older father' publication is a chapter published in 2010 in a book on counselling fathers. Remer et al (2010) discuss issues involved in counselling older fathers but do not explore the phenomenon of older fatherhood itself. Like Carnoy and Carnoy (1995) these authors also acknowledge the limited data available in relation to older fatherhood, which meant that they:

... extrapolated from what is known about fathering and grandfathering, relevant theories addressing both the internal and social experiences of older men, and salient issues of aging to formulate suggestions for conceptualizing and treating older fathers.

(Remer et al., 2009, p. 277)

Consequently, apart from the burgeoning literature concerning the possible health risks of later paternity (see Section 2.5.1), the literature specifically devoted to older fatherhood and how men experience this paternal role is scarce.

2.5.1 Health risks associated with older fatherhood

The trend towards older fatherhood is a potentially significant public health issue, due to the reported negative impact of advanced paternal age on health outcomes for children of older fathers (Arslan et al., 2017; Vreeker et al., 2013; Frans et al., 2011). One of the most consistently applied cautions against older

parenthood in both popular and academic literature relates to the acknowledged health risks to children born to older *mothers* (Lavender et al., 2015; Budds et al., 2013). However, until fairly recently similar concerns had not been voiced regarding older fathers. This may have contributed to a view that men were impervious to the limits of a biological clock and could safely venture into fatherhood well into adulthood (Goldberg, 2014).

However, a range of epidemiological studies have reported an association between later paternal age and an increased risk for spontaneous congenital disorders and diseases such as an increased risk of schizophrenia (Frans et al, 2011; Krishnaswamy et al, 2011), congenital disorders (Goriely and Wilkie, 2012) and autism spectrum disorders (Gabis et al, 2010). This has prompted warnings to men that they should not delay fatherhood (Thacker, 2004; Fisch, 2009) and that men in their 30s should consider freezing their sperm if they plan to have children later in life (Cohen, 2012).

The considerable body of literature devoted to reporting the findings of these studies includes some observations on the phenomenon of older fatherhood. However, this is generally related to discussing the socioeconomic factors that may have led to the general increase in older fathers referred to in Chapter 1. There is no evidence, within the reports reviewed, of any attempt to explore the experience of being an older father.

2.6 Media representations of older fatherhood

In response to the lack of available scholarly literature relating to older fatherhood, a review of UK newspaper articles was undertaken. This represents a different category of literature from the academic material upon which the greater part of this review is based. However, for the purposes of this literature review, media representations offer a valuable 'window' into attitudes and culture that were relevant to older fatherhood during this study.

The popular and news media play an influential role (Happer and Philo, 2013), both informing and reflecting public understandings of a topic and conveying meanings that contribute towards its social construction (Gregory and Milner, 2011). The manner in which they frame a particular topic influences perceptions of 'normal' and 'reasonable' conduct (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). For example, Assarsson and Aarsand (2011) note that media settings provide opportunities for studying parental roles and experiences by focusing, for example, on how 'good parenting' is portrayed and negotiated.

Despite a lack of academic scrutiny, it is evident that reports of older fatherhood has a persistent fascination (Sartorius and Nieschlag, 2010), generating newspaper headlines such as '*First time dad ... at 94*' (Daily Mirror, 2010), and '*Nappies at 50: Older fathers and the male biological clock*' (The Times, 2016).

Most studies of how the media represent older parenthood have focused on later motherhood (for example, Mills et al., 2015; Campbell, 2011; Shaw and

Giles, 2009), although an exception to this is a study by Yläne (2016) who applied a media framing analysis to examine press coverage of both older fathers and mothers.

Yläne (2016) reports that the overall stance taken in the media: '...tends to frame older parenting as both demographically and morally undesirable, particularly in the tabloid press'. However, with regard to later paternity – on which, the author notes, reports tend to focus on 'celebrity' older fathers – Yläne identifies a frame of 'enjoyment' pertaining to many of the articles she reviewed quoting as an example, a report of the 'joys of being an older dad' (Yläne, 2016, p. 16). She also notes how 'late fatherhood' is represented as a growing trend and that older fathers are generally seen to have more time to spend with their children as a result of having an established secure financial status.

For the purposes of this review, a search of UK newspapers was undertaken in 2016 and repeated in 2019 via the online database *Nexis*, applying the search term: 'older fathers' and the inclusion criterion: 'UK national newspapers published between 2010 and 2016 (2019)'. The search yielded 725 results. A total of 119 articles were identified as potentially relevant to this review and, following hand-searching of the articles, 50 were found to be directly applicable.

Many of the articles excluded from this media review – due to a lack of social or cultural comment on later paternity – were reports of the possible health risks to the children of older fathers (see Section 2.5.1). However, many such reports

also included observations on the social phenomenon of later paternity and these were included in this review:

Keep an eye on your biological clock if you want to become a father.
(*The Daily Telegraph*, 20 October 2011)

Older fathers may endanger health of offspring: Study finds lifespan is shorter.
(*MailOnline*, 23 February 2018)

Although the subject matter of such reports is concerning – portraying older fatherhood as physiologically unsafe, and possibly reinforcing negative associations of older fatherhood with limited physical abilities and biological failure (Shirani, 2013) – they offer little evidence or commentary on the experience of older fatherhood itself.

Interestingly, one of the frames emerging from Ylänne's (2016) media analysis of how the press represent older parents focused on health risks and Ylänne found that media reports mostly focus on the health risks of older motherhood.

Two main themes convey the representation of older fatherhood in UK newspapers. The first portrays older fatherhood positively, depicting it as increasingly prevalent, normalised and having particular advantages for both father and child. The second suggests that men's declining physical abilities and concerns about paternal mortality overshadow the experience of older fatherhood.

2.6.1 Theme 1: A positive portrayal of older fatherhood

Newspaper reports depict older fathers as emotionally mature and confident, with wisdom acquired through life experience. An impression conveyed is that, compared with younger men, an older man is likely to have carefully considered his reproductive choices:

Older fathers are, at least much of the time, more emotionally aware. They are more likely to have wondered if they ever would become parents, more likely to have considered the possibility that it 'might not happen'. They are less likely to be self-absorbed and still finding themselves.

(The Guardian, 2 November 2011)

Many of the positive representations of older fatherhood highlight the qualities that older men bring to their fathering role. It is claimed that these afford older fathers specific advantages over younger fathers. Words such as 'calmer', 'wiser', 'patience' and 'wisdom' are frequently applied, often by fathers themselves. As the following quote from a 50-year-old first-time father of twins illustrates:

Even a decade ago I'm certain I would not have had the patience and would have headed straight to the pub. Now, I rock them and whisper 'It's OK, Daddy's here,' until they settle ... my relatively advanced years will help give me that pause between thought and action.

(MailOnline, 28 January 2014)

A further advantage claimed of older fatherhood is the greater time older men are perceived to have available to apply to their fathering role as their commitment to paid employment decreases. They are portrayed as being

beyond the active pursuit of careers and therefore more 'available' (to their children) than younger fathers:

My view is that I am a better father now, mainly because although I'm still working I am able to spend so much more time with Freddie than when I was young and ambitious and, let's admit it, a workaholic - like most twentysomethings trying to establish themselves in a job notable for long, antisocial hours.

(The Guardian, 8 June 2014)

Emphasising older fathers' emotional stability, combined with their perceived availability to their children, links later paternity to contemporary notions of emotionally expressive, involved, nurturing fatherhood (Gillies, 2009). A number of reports suggest that older fathers are more willing, than younger fathers, to participate in hands-on childcare. Explanations for this more involved approach include male hormonal changes that occur in later life:

Studies have found that older dads are three times more likely to share in daily child-rearing tasks than younger dads. They may be in more settled relationships, have learnt from previous mistakes - it has even been suggested that their lower levels of testosterone render them more nurturing.

(MailOnline, 16 June 2013)

Thus, one of the great ironies of being a man is that our gradual diminishing of virility is what fosters the qualities likely to turn us into good fathers.

(MailOnline, 28 January 2014)

2.6.2 Theme 2: Older fatherhood is overshadowed by physical decline

Many reports convey the impression that fatherhood is a physically demanding activity and that a chief concern for the potential older father should be whether he possesses – and, if so, is likely to retain – the physical capacity to undertake

the role. The second theme is therefore cautionary; indicating some of the potential drawbacks to older fatherhood and emphasising the prospect of declining physical ability and early mortality. The physical demands of fatherhood are frequently stressed in relation to the demands of childcare:

... the combination of three-hourly feeds, double nappy changes, squalls of infant bawling and trying to work five days a week saps every ounce of energy from creaking bone and jaded grey matter. So, yes, it's no surprise that the toil is showing on this 50-year-old body of mine. I've become noticeably greyer during the last eight months, my back often seizes up as I bend down from my 6ft 5in height to retrieve a scuttling baby from imminent danger and I can't remember the last time I didn't feel fatigued to the core.

(MailOnline, 28 January 2014)

A further cautionary note regarding an older father's physical decline was expressed through discussions of how children may perceive an 'ailing' older father:

... late-life dads run the risk of having their children's teenage years beset by watching their fathers incapacitated by illness, rounds of treatment and worry.

(Daily Mail, 15 January 2016)

The possibility that a child may 'miss-out' due to an older father's diminished physical capacity was illustrated in an interview with the actor Sir David Jason who became a father for the first time aged 61:

Sir David, who has a 12-year-old daughter Sophie, also opened up about the challenges of being an older father and revealed how a trip to Disneyland some years ago left him so exhausted after Sophie insisted he join her on a number of rides. The actor has admitted that as a result he is giving an upcoming trip to Disneyland Paris a miss, adding: 'She does miss out a little bit with a father of senior years. She does get the short end of the stick.'

(MailOnline, 19 December 2013)

The most prominent negative concern highlighted in newspaper reports relates to the possibility – or likelihood according to some accounts – that an older father will die early in his child's life. Across the sample, many references are made (either directly or by implication) to older fathers' mortality and the prospect of them not living long enough to raise their children:

I think for an older man to consider fatherhood, there needs to be a good chance he will see the child through to adulthood.

(MailOnline, 28 January 2014)

It is inferred that the experience of older fatherhood is overshadowed by the possibility of the father 'dying too soon', summed up by one 64 year-old father of a 10 year-old son as:

... the nagging certainty of time running out.

(The Times, 16 June 2012),

Embarking on fatherhood, with the knowledge that they are likely to die earlier in their child's life than a younger father, is a prominent point of reference within reports that portray older fathers as 'selfish' or 'irresponsible':

I'm sure there will be those who'll criticise me for being too old to be a first-time dad, who will claim I'm being selfish ... Others will say it's unfair to have a child when you know age is against you. But death doesn't always follow the rules of logic.

(MailOnline, 28 January 2014)

The main accusation levelled at folk who have children later in life is one of irresponsibility: of the likelihood that they will not be around when the child most needs them.

(The Sunday Telegraph, 15 May 2016)

These issues and their impact on reproductive decision-making were central to newspaper reporting in 2016 of the marriage break-up of ex-footballer Gary Lineker. Some commentators speculated on whether Lineker's age and possible reluctance to commit to fatherhood with his younger wife contributed to the breakdown of their relationship. If so, it was claimed, this reflected positively on the late middle-aged man who had made the 'right decision':

'YOU CAN'T BLAME LINEKER FOR NOT WANTING A BABY AT 55'

Lineker has been accused of being selfish. Is that really fair? He feels he is too old to become a father again, and surely there is merit in that. Consider that if the former England footballer has another baby in the next few years he would be more than 70 by the time the child was in the hormonal white heat of adolescence and most in need of parental support. His boys have already proved to be quite a handful could he really do fatherly justice to another one? He probably gets exhausted just thinking about it.

(Daily Mail, 15 January 2016)

The message, strongly conveyed in this report, is that potential older fathers should consider whether they possess, and are likely to retain, the physical capacity demanded of the role, and should give careful thought to the likelihood of their own mortality.

In 2016, musician Ronnie Wood became a father to twins at the age of 68. Inevitably, given his celebrity status, this event prompted considerable newspaper coverage. Generally, the reporting on Wood's experience was encouraging and included many light-hearted comments. However, doubts were expressed about the ability of such an older man to undertake the physical tasks of fatherhood:

I worry for him, truly I do. Forty years of rock'n'roll excess may not have killed him but being a father of two-year-old twins at the age of 70 might just accomplish what alcohol and drugs did not.

(MailOnline, 8 December 2015)

In summary, most of the articles in this survey indicate a positive, or at least neutral, portrayal of older fatherhood. Reports of 'celebrity' older fathers provide much of the optimistic and confirmatory representations of the role, notwithstanding some humorous and ageist undertones:

Rod's in at No 8; star to be dad again aged 66.

(The Sun, 10th August 2010)

Generally, reports portray older fathers as emotionally mature and more financially secure than younger fathers. Negative representations relate to men's physical capacities, including their potential to stay alive long enough to raise their children. The explicit censure of older fatherhood in newspaper coverage is rare and, when evident, it is targeted at the more high-profile older fathers.

Across newspaper representations of older fatherhood, there is a sense conveyed that men who father at a later age are particularly reflective in terms of how they perceive themselves within their paternal role – particularly when comparing themselves with younger fathers. These implied features of the older father experience suggest that exploring the concepts of identity and social comparison will assist understanding of the experience of later paternity.

2.7 Theories of identity

Theories of identity represent a field of theoretical debate concerning the meanings a person holds about the self in a particular social status (Thoits and Virshup, 1997). For example, 'social identity' relates to an individual's sense of themselves as part of a particular social group, which is a matter of external categorisation as much as internal self-identification (Jenkins, 2014). 'Age identity' refers to the subjective evaluation of a person's age, a process that is dependent upon personal and historical experiences (Kaufman and Elder, 2002).

There are a number of theoretical perspectives on identity (Kenny et al., 2011). From a social constructionist perspective, identity derives from reflection on one's social environment, relationships, interaction and language (Jackson and Hogg, 2010). Psychosocial researchers view identity as something formed by the coming together of an individual's biological and psychological capacities combined with their social environment (Waterman, 1999; Erikson, 1959). A symbolic interactionist perspective on identity regards the self as consisting of a coherent structure of identities such as man, father, son, friend, worker etc. (Habib, 2012; Stryker, 1987) which can be organised in a hierarchical manner (Stryker and Burke, 2000).

Stryker's (1987) approach to identity theory is underpinned by symbolic interactionist notions, which view identities as 'self-meanings' that develop in the context of understandings of the meanings of roles and counter roles (Stryker

and Burke, 2000). Expectations, meanings and understandings become internalised, leading to the formation of a particular identity within a range of different identities. For example, a man may have a number of distinct, but complementary identities, including those of 'father', 'husband', friend', 'brother' and 'son'. In accordance with this approach to identity formation, these identities are organised hierarchically in relation to the individual's commitment to each one, that is, in accordance with how central each one is to the man's sense of self (Rane and McBride, 2000). This hierarchy is also reflected in behaviour (Pasley et al., 2014) and therefore foretells how often individuals will act in accordance with a particular identity (Goldberg, 2015, Stryker, 1968).

In addition to perceiving identity in terms of such 'psychological centrality' (Stryker and Serpe, 1994), it has been argued that identities are organised in 'a hierarchy of salience' (Stryker, 1968, p. 560) meaning that an identity is invoked in a particular situation or across a variety of situations (Goldberg, 2015).

McLaughlin and Muldoon (2014) argue that each discrete identity has internalised role expectations. Therefore, on becoming a father, Rane and McBride (2000) suggest that a man restructures the hierarchy of his pre-existing identities, aligning his behavioural performances with the social and cultural expectations of fatherhood to incorporate a new, distinct 'paternal identity'.

Paternal identity comprises the internalised behavioural expectations a man associates with being a father – such as being a breadwinner or caregiver – together with the meanings he ascribes to that role. Maurer et al. (2003) state

that one would expect a father's behaviour to be consistent with the extent to which he has internalised those expectations:

For example, a man who internalizes the expectations of being a caregiver to his child into his identity as a father should in fact provide care to his child (thus matching his expectations to his actual behavior).

(Maurer et al. 2003, p. 118).

Paternal identity has been advanced as an organizing principle for understanding fatherhood and its impact on a man's life (Goldberg, 2014; Rane and McBride, 2000).

In their exploration of the literature relating men's transition to fatherhood, Genesoni and Tallandini (2009) observe that the transitional process to fatherhood – and the formation of a paternal identity – can be viewed as a consequence of transformations that occur simultaneously at three levels:

... readjustment to a new self-image, formation of a triadic family relationship, and adaptation to a new position in the social context.

(Genesoni and Tallandini, 2009, p. 315)

For older fathers, the process of readjusting to a new self-image is, perhaps, particularly significant in seeking to understand the formation of their paternal identity.

2.8 Social comparison theory

Examining the experience of older fatherhood necessitates consideration of how these men relate to other fathers, particularly those who have fathered within a normative age-range.

Social comparison theory explains the process by which individuals evaluate themselves relative to other people. Wood (1996) defines social comparison as:

Thinking about information about one or more other people in relation to the self ... looking for or identifying a similarity or a difference between the other and the self on some dimension.

(Wood, 1996, pp. 520-521)

Festinger (1954) first proposed this theory, which is founded on the belief that people have the need to evaluate their abilities and opinions to be able to act in the world (Suls and Wheeler, 2002). Festinger based the theory on nine hypotheses concerning the extent to which comparison is innate and how a range of social factors may strengthen or weaken the tendency to engage in the comparative process. The following three hypotheses are most fundamental and relevant to the study of older fatherhood:

Hypothesis I: There exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities.

Hypothesis II: To the extent that objective, non-social means are not available, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparison respectively with the opinions and abilities of others.

Hypothesis III: The tendency to compare oneself with some other specific person decreases as the difference between his opinion or ability and one's own increases.

(Festinger, 1954, pp. 117-118)

The theory is therefore based on the premise that human beings have an innate drive to evaluate their abilities and opinions and that people consciously compare themselves to similar others as a way of 'benchmarking' these attributes (Festinger, 1954). It proposes that in response to social comparison, the individual comparer will react in some way to the presence of similarity or difference and that this will be demonstrated by a change in self-evaluation, affect or behaviour (Gerber et al., 2018).

2.9 How this study addresses the knowledge gaps identified

This literature review has demonstrated the importance of fatherhood to the wider study of men, families and children. It has also highlighted areas where knowledge and understanding regarding older fatherhood are deficient.

It has shown that although the subject of fatherhood has been extensively explored, the resultant body of work offers little evidence of older fathers' experiences, including the identification of the positive and negative aspects of those experiences. Existing evidence is either anecdotal (for example, Filppu, 2013; Hamand, 1994) or its impact is limited by being included within literature devoted to separate, but related, issues (for example, Mac Dougall et al., 2012, Billari et al., 2007; 2011).

This study therefore responds to this omission by systematically exploring how men experience older fatherhood. Specifically, the study responds to the question: 'How do older fathers describe the experience of later paternity?' (see Chapter 3, section 3.1.2). It also addresses the practical, emotional and social consequences of older fatherhood; social attitudes towards advanced paternal age, and the ways in which older fathers perceive the consequences of older fatherhood for their children.

The literature reviewed in this chapter does not indicate that these issues have received previous academic attention. It is therefore anticipated that providing this evidence will contribute to existing knowledge and understanding of fatherhood and provide a foundation for future research into the phenomenon of later paternity.

Chapter summary

At its heart, this study is concerned with the practice of fatherhood and the experiences of men who become fathers beyond the normative paternal age. This literature review has sought to situate this investigation in relation to the existing body of knowledge regarding older fatherhood. It has shown that the subject has failed to attract academic or scholarly attention and has indicated gaps in existing knowledge which this study will seek to fill. The next chapter describes the methodological approach adopted to explore older fathers' experiences.

3 Methodology

The previous two chapters introduced the subject of older fatherhood and, by reviewing literature relating to the topic, explained its importance and the need for exploration of this relatively unexamined phenomenon. Having established the background to the study, this chapter examines the methodological approach employed to explore the experiences of men who become fathers beyond the age of 40.

Following the identification of the research aims and primary and subsidiary research questions, an overview of the philosophical basis for this inquiry – the research paradigm that guided its design and execution – provides theoretical justification for the selection of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a suitable methodology. Detailed summaries of phenomenological research and IPA assist in confirming this methodological choice.

The chapter, which provides a foundation for the description and exploration of research methods in Chapter 4, concludes with a brief summary of its key points and an outline of the focus for the subsequent chapter.

3.1 Forming the research aims and the research questions

As the Introduction and Literature Review chapters have shown, there is a lack of available evidence regarding the experience of older fatherhood.

Consequently, the question: *What is it like to be an older father?* remains, from an academic perspective, unanswered. The purpose of this study was to provide an informed response to this question by exploring the practical, emotional and social consequences for men who become fathers for the first time in their fifth decade and beyond.

3.1.1 The research aims

The aims of the study were:

- a) To explore the perceptions and experiences of fatherhood of men who become fathers for the first time beyond the age of 40.
- b) To contribute to fatherhood research and existing knowledge concerning the lives of fathers, families and children.

3.1.2 The research questions

The research question is the linchpin of the research process and provides a point of orientation for an investigation and its methodology (Bryman, 2016).

Research questions in studies employing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (see Section 3.5.1) focus on people's understanding of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Examples of such questions include: 'What is the meaning of diabetes to patients who have the condition?'; 'What is it like to experience a heart attack?', and 'How do carers make sense of looking after

their loved one?' (Smith, 2011a, p. 9).

This study sought to answer the following primary research question:

- How do older fathers describe the experience of later paternity?

The primary research question generated the following subsidiary questions:

- What are the practical, emotional and social consequences of older fatherhood?
- How is the experience of older fatherhood affected by social attitudes towards advanced paternal age?
- How do older fathers perceive the consequences of older fatherhood for their children?

3.2 The research paradigm

Seeking an appropriate theoretical orientation for exploring older fathers' experiences involved reflection on the assumptions underpinning this study.

The need to ensure academic rigour and research validity (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6) meant acknowledging how I, as a researcher, understand the nature of the social world under investigation (ontology), and how I perceive the

scope, structure and validity of knowledge (epistemology). The reason for acknowledging the importance of these perspectives is that these ontological and epistemological beliefs represent: 'the lens through which a researcher looks at the world' (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 26). They therefore provided a philosophical foundation for this study, influencing both its design and execution (Bryman, 2008; Hansen-Ketchum and Myrick, 2008; Goldman, 2003; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Together with the methodology and methods employed, these beliefs formed an underlying set of assumptions – the 'research paradigm' – that underpinned and guided the research process (Creswell, 2014; Scotland, 2012; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Guba, 1990).

3.2.1 A phenomenological ontology

This study was guided by a phenomenological understanding of the social world. Phenomenology is the philosophical study *of* human experience and of how things *are* experienced. It aims to illuminate the range and context of experience and articulate the essential meanings phenomena hold for individuals experiencing them (Smith, 2016; Moran and Mooney, 2002; Sokolowski, 2000; Van der Zalm and Bergum, 2000; Hammond et al., 1991; Giorgi, 1985). Underpinning the philosophy of phenomenology is the view that 'reality' consists of objects and events (phenomena) as they are perceived or understood in the human consciousness, rather than being objects that are independent of human consciousness (Smith, 2016; Sokolowski, 2000):

Key to understanding the social world is understanding the role consciousness plays in the constitution of social objects.

(Chelstrom, 2013, p. 8)

3.2.2 A social constructionist epistemology

With regard to its epistemological foundations, this study adopted a social constructionist perspective that views both the social world and human experience as jointly constructed via interaction and language. In this sense, social constructionism may also be considered an ontological position (Bryman, 2008), and the link between phenomenology and a constructionist perspective is explained in Section 3.3.

From a constructionist viewpoint, what is 'real', 'true' or 'moral' is a matter of social agreement; such concepts are human constructions born within culture and history and dependent on social relationships, which nurture vocabularies, assumptions and theories about the world (Gergen, 2015). Consequently, knowledge expressed through social collaboration is never detached from context or cultural influences (Strier, 2014; Houston, 2001) and people construct their interpretations of the social world against what Schwandt (2000, p. 197) describes as: '... a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language and so forth'.

3.3 Determining a research strategy

The research paradigm situated the 'reality' of older fatherhood as a

phenomenon perceived and experienced by the individual, as well as something that was socially manufactured (jointly constructed) through interaction, relationships and language (Gergen, 2015). In light of this, this study sought to *explore* and *explain* the experience of older fatherhood rather than to discover *facts* about it, and to *interpret* the meanings older fathers ascribed to their paternal experience, rather than to *describe* them.

The inherent flexibility and exploratory nature of a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Willig and Stainton-Rodgers, 2017; Bryman, 2016) offered an effective means of achieving these methodological goals.

Qualitative methods are applicable to research questions that require explanation or understanding of social phenomena and their contexts (Ritchie et al., 2014). Founded on the assumption that sense-making or meaning-making are equally as meaningful as physical realities in relation to human research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), a qualitative approach focuses on language and words in the collection and analysis of data, and is concerned with understanding the meanings people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social worlds (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Bryman, 2016). This reflects a broadly interpretivist ontological position from which an understanding of the social world is acquired through the perspective of its inhabitants (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2014).

Qualitative research is an umbrella term for a range of research practices and

methodological approaches (Leavy, 2014), each of which are shaped by different beliefs and guidelines for methodological rigour (Ritchie et al., 2014). These include ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), discourse analysis (Gee and Handford, 2012) and case studies (Yin, 2008). However, in accordance with the ontological assumptions underpinning this study and in recognition of the value to fatherhood research of men's biographical experiences (Gordon et al., 2013; Longworth and Kingdon, 2011; Premberg et al., 2011; Cashin et al., 2008), I decided that phenomenology (Vagle, 2018; Smith, 2016; Sokolowski, 2000), which focuses on the lived experience of individuals' worlds (Finlay, 2009), would be the most suitable qualitative methodological basis from which to explore older fathers' experiences.

A phenomenological methodology was also consistent with the constructionist perspective that guided this study. There are two explanations for this, both of which link to a social constructionist perspective on how knowledge is co-produced or created (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Firstly, it was anticipated that a range of social, cultural and personal contexts, processes and meanings would influence the experience of older fatherhood and, secondly, it was recognised that an interpretative response to participants' narratives would be needed in order to reveal, explain and understand the meanings men ascribe to such experience. Gergen (2015), who notes the value of a social constructionist perspective to phenomenology, is explicit in making the link between social constructionism and interpretation, stating that: 'For the constructionist, the aim of research is to interpret, construct' (Gergen, 2015, p. 66).

The next section offers an overview of the discipline and method of phenomenological research.

3.4 Phenomenological research

A phenomenological approach to research originated in the early 20th century in the work of philosophers Edmund Husserl (Husserl, 2012), Martin Heidegger (Heidegger, 2010), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) and others, including Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre, 2003).

Phenomenological research seeks to understand social reality by capturing individuals' subjective experiences of that reality, and by investigating – and articulating – the internal meanings individuals' ascribe to those experiences (Gray, 2014; Van der Zalm and Bergum, 2000).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the founder of phenomenology, conceived it as a set of philosophical questions and an approach towards them (Smith, 2016; Smith, 2013; Husserl, 2001). Husserl believed that experience, as perceived by human consciousness, had value and should therefore be an object of scientific study. More specifically, he recognised that the generally unnoticed, taken for granted aspects of consciousness were components of lived experience (Lopez and Willis, 2004).

Central to Husserl's belief in the importance of this form of lived experience was the concept of 'intentionality'. By this, Husserl implied that consciousness is

always intentional and that 'consciousness is always consciousness-of-something' (Husserl, 1999, p. 33). This is referred to as 'the intentionality of consciousness' (Gurwitsch, 1982). If, for example, there is a directness of consciousness towards an object, that experience has meaning (Christensen et al., 2017). As Chelstrom (2013, p. 8) observes: 'There could be no social world if there were no beings with consciousness to constitute it and experience it'.

In order to provide insight into the experiences of conscious objects and to understand the meanings they ascribe to their social world, Husserl sought a scientific¹ means of examining the phenomenon of consciousness (Giorgi et al., 2017). He pursued a method that was distinct from the natural sciences, recognising that the subject matter of phenomenological research – human persons, relationships and experience – has different characteristics from the object of the natural sciences – things and processes (Giorgi, 2012). The Husserlian method of phenomenological inquiry therefore involves describing phenomena in the way they manifest themselves to the consciousness of the individual (Christensen et al., 2017).

The foundation for Husserl's understanding of the experiential components of human life was what he called the 'natural attitude' (Husserl, 2001; Luft, 1998). From this perspective, experience occurs within the world with which the individual engages, and consists of experiential happenings or occurrences of which he or she tends not to be consciously aware. That is, people do not think

¹ The word 'scientific' is loosely applied to phenomenology, which has both philosophical and empirical foundations (Aspers, 2009).

of each experience or interaction, they simply *do* them or *are* them (Todres and Holloway, 2004). They assume that the world is as they perceive it and that others experience it in the same way (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Luft, 1998). The natural attitude therefore represents individuals' ordinary way of being in the world; their 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*) or 'world of lived experience' (Carr, 1970, p. 331).

Husserl believed that pursuing the experiential content of consciousness required finding the essence of experience by going back 'to the things themselves' [*Zu den sachen selbst*] (Husserl, 2012). By this, Husserl meant that the phenomenological researcher must set aside all relevant personal knowledge, preconceptions and biases regarding a phenomenon in order to be: 'fully present to it' (Giorgi, 1997, p. 240). Assuming this attitude of the 'transcendental phenomenological reduction' (Giorgi et al., 2017, p. 178) requires that the researcher 'bracket' or 'suspend', to the best of their ability, any prevailing knowledge and understandings in order to allow phenomena to 'speak for themselves', unadulterated by any presuppositions and judgements. This enables the researcher to focus on what the research participant actually presents to them (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008). The phrase 'back to things themselves' has been described as: 'Husserl's rallying call ... which expresses the phenomenological intention to describe how the world is formed and experienced through consciousness' (Eatough and Smith, 2017, p. 195).

3.4.1 Descriptive phenomenology

For Husserl, the critical question concerned what we know about people and about their experiences. Consequently, Husserl developed a descriptive approach to phenomenology where everyday conscious experiences were described while any preconceived opinions were set aside or 'bracketed' (see Section 3.4) (Reiners, 2012).

Descriptive (eidetic) phenomenology assumes that there is an essential form to a particular phenomenon or experience and that this can be summarised from individuals' narratives (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007). The associated research questions tend to focus on providing a 'thick description' of the experience (Smith et al., 2009), and the researcher's role is to allow things to show themselves, with the 'things' in question being understood as phenomena. Consequently, the researcher: 'concentrates on the given as a phenomenon and everything that is said about the phenomenon is based upon what is given' (Giorgi, 2012, pp. 4-5).

From this Husserlian perspective, what is important is not only the particular phenomenon experienced from an individual's singular vantage point, it is also what that experience implies for the understanding of the phenomenon itself. For example, an older father may be mistaken for his child's grandfather (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1.1) and, from a descriptive phenomenological perspective, the relevance of that experience to understanding older fatherhood relates to what that individual event implies for the experience of older

fatherhood overall. That is, it is about what older fathers' experiences have in common; the constant structure that makes older fatherhood older fatherhood rather than, for example, younger fatherhood, or older motherhood.

3.4.2 Interpretative (hermeneutic) phenomenology

Phenomenological research has evolved from a purely descriptive, Husserlian, phenomenology to incorporate the explanation of language and experience by way of interpretative (hermeneutic) phenomenology (Crowther et al., 2017; Matua and Van Der Wal, 2015, Lavery, 2003).

Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, challenged some of Husserl's assumptions about how phenomenology could guide meaningful inquiry and emphasised the interpretative nature of meaning-making in phenomenological analysis:

With Heidegger begins everything that we mean by contemporary or postmodern hermeneutics.

(Caputo, 2018, p. 25).

Heidegger contended that people's access to lived time and engagement with the world is through interpretation (Heidegger, 2010). Therefore, the focus of hermeneutic inquiry is not human subjectivity – what research participants consciously *know* – it is what the individual's narratives imply about what he or she *experiences* every day (Lopez and Willis, 2004).

Hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation and identification of the underlying meaning embedded in individuals' accounts. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach focuses on the meanings that individuals ascribe to their 'being-in-the world' – which Heidegger (2010) termed 'Dasein' – and how those meanings influence the choices they make (Lopez and Willis, 2004). Hermeneutics goes beyond the description of core concepts to look for the meanings (that are not always apparent to participants) embedded in them, it seeks to 'burrow deeply into the hidden springs from which our world has sprung' (Caputo, 2018, p. 37):

Hermeneutic phenomenology is an ongoing, creative, intuitive, dialectical approach that challenges pre-determined rules and research procedures, thus freeing us from dichotomous "right" and "wrong" ways of doing things.
(Crowther et al., 2017, p. 827)

3.5 The choice of phenomenological approach

A phenomenological methodology, therefore, offered a suitable means of exploring and understanding men's experience of older fatherhood. However, reflecting the research paradigm and underlying beliefs that guided this study (see Section 3.2), the nature of the social world represented by older fatherhood was viewed as dynamic, complex and inhabited by individuals for whom it (later paternity) had both explicit and implicit meanings.

I anticipated that such meanings would not be immediately accessible and that exploring them would require an interpretative approach. That is, rather than describing what older fathers 'know' about the phenomenon of older fatherhood,

I recognised that exploring what men's narratives implicitly revealed about their older father experience would offer greater insight into the phenomenon. Consequently, an interpretative phenomenological approach, which would facilitate explanation of the meanings older fathers ascribed to their experiences, allowed for a suitably in-depth analytical investigation.

The specific phenomenological approach employed in this study was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

3.5.1 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a specific hermeneutic form of phenomenology, which offers a systematic approach to exploring the lived experience of individuals' personal and social worlds (Eatough and Smith, 2017; Smith, 2017; Smith and Osborn, 2015; Smith et al., 2009; Brocki and Wearden, 2006). It combines a commitment to understanding experience with a belief that there is no clear and unmediated window into people's lifeworlds:

IPA recognises that there is not a direct route to experience and that research is really about trying to be 'experience close' rather than 'experience far'.
(Smith, 2011a, pp. 9-10)

Access is dependent on individuals' personal, descriptive accounts of how they behave towards or think about an object or event (Arroll and Senior, 2008). IPA therefore emphasises the subjective experience of the individual (Smith and Osborn, 2007), and understanding this experience demands interpretative

engagement with the individual's account, thereby binding IPA to a hermeneutic perspective (Smith, 2011a).

IPA is particularly suitable for exploring individuals' understandings, perceptions and views in relation to specific phenomena and for examining issues relating to identity and the self (Smith and Osborn, 2007). It encourages awareness of the contextual and cultural background to data generation (Reid et al., 2005) and draws on participants' everyday experiences as a way to understand the meanings they attach to their lived realities of, for example, older fatherhood.

IPA's primary interest is in sense-making and the meanings an individual applies to a particular phenomenon, rather than the structure of the phenomenon itself (Eatough and Smith, 2017). Consequently, the meanings experiences hold for research participants are the main currency for an IPA study (Smith and Osborne, 2015; Smith and Eatough, 2007) and IPA recognises a 'chain of connection' (Smith, 2011a, p. 10) between experience, talk about that experience and sense-making.

Within IPA interpretations the researcher engages in what Smith et al. (2009, p.3) refer to as a 'double hermeneutic'. Smith (2004) summarises this interpretative process as follows:

The participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world.

(Smith, 2004, p. 40)

This means that interpretation made by the participant precedes interpretation by the researcher. In this sense, the IPA researcher conducts a dual interpretative role. He or she employs the same mental skills and capacities as the participant, whilst at the same time employing those skills: 'more self-consciously and systematically' (Smith et al., 2009, p.3). Smith and Eatough (2007, p. 36) refer to this process as: 'second order sense-making of someone else's experience' by having access to an individual's experience only through that individual's account of it. Within the interpretative process, the researcher moves between levels of interpretation, adopting a hermeneutics of empathy (seeing things from the participant's perspective) and a more critical stance, a hermeneutics of suspicion (Gadamer, 1985), which entails not accepting the participant's account at face value (Aresti et al., 2010; Smith 1996).

In addition to its interpretative focus, the importance IPA places on the active role of the researcher (Smith and Eatough, 2007) confirmed it as the preferred methodological approach for this study. As an older father, I acknowledged that insights from my own lived experience located me as an insider researcher (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). I did not wish to disregard my role in the research process or set aside my pre-existing knowledge and presuppositions (see Section 3.4), thereby suspending the background of understandings that formed the origins of the study. IPA acknowledges that the researcher's own knowledge and understandings are implicated in the research process, and recognises the inherent difficulty (for the researcher) of setting these aside. It therefore resists the concept of 'bracketing' advocated by descriptive phenomenologists (see Section 3.4). Indeed, such

separation of pre-existing knowledge is inconsistent with a hermeneutic approach, and Heidegger's (2010) concept of 'Dasein' emphasises the impossibility of complete objectivity. Therefore, in a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, instead of putting aside preconceptions (as Husserl advocated) it is important to be aware of them and, in fact, to make them explicit (Lopez and Willis, 2004).

Consequently, an IPA study is a dynamic process in which the researcher takes an active role (Smith and Eatough, 2007). Access to participants' personal worlds is dependent on the researcher's own knowledge and understandings, which are required in order to make sense of these worlds through the process of interpretative activity (Smith and Osborn, 2015; Smith, 1996). The role of the researcher is vital to the effectiveness of IPA and the interaction between participants' narratives and the researcher's interpretative framework is central to the analytic process (Dixon et al., 2010). The final analysis becomes what Osborn and Smith (2006, p. 218) refer to as a 'co-construction' between researcher and participant.

3.5.2 A commitment to idiographic inquiry

IPA is committed to understanding phenomena from the perspective of particular individuals in particular contexts (Finlay, 2011) and requires the detailed examination of a particular case as an entity in its own right before moving on to more general claims. It is therefore committed to idiographic inquiry (Smith et al., 2009; Smith and Osborn, 2007). It focuses on meanings at

a personal level (Hamill et al., 2010), generating rich and detailed descriptions of how individuals experience the phenomena under investigation and emphasising the importance of the individual as a unit of analysis (Eatough and Smith, 2006):

[IPA] ... wants to know in detail what the experience for this person is like, what sense this particular person is making of what is happening to them. This is what we mean when we say IPA is idiographic.

(Smith et al., 2009, p. 3)

Rather than merely exploring the structure of a phenomenon, IPA's primary interest is the individual's experience of that phenomenon; it seeks to: 'grasp the texture and qualities of an experience as it is lived by an experiencing subject' (Eatough and Smith, 2017, p.194). Consequently, in an IPA study, the individual participant is viewed as: 'an experiencing, meaning making, embodied and discursive agent' (Reid et al., 2005, p. 20) whose narratives reflect their perceptions of their social world, their experience of it and the sense they make of it (Pitt et al., 2007). For this reason, IPA emphasises the use of detailed extracts from participants' narratives to elucidate the findings and facilitate detailed analysis (Finlay, 2011; Smith and Osborn, 2007) (see Chapters 6 to 9). The use of relatively small, purposively selected samples (see Chapter 4, Section 4.1) also reflects IPA's idiographic approach and its commitment to understanding experience from an individual perspective.

3.5.3 Background to IPA

Developed in the mid-1990s by health psychologist Jonathan Smith (Smith et

al., 2009), IPA is a relatively recent addition to the range of qualitative research approaches. However, its theoretical origins are deep-rooted and, as described above, they lie within phenomenology (Smith, 2016; Sokolowski, 2000) and within hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation (Caputo, 2018).

IPA also draws upon symbolic interactionism, a sociological theory concerned with the construction of meaning within individuals' personal and social worlds (Shinebourne and Smith, 2009; Smith and Osborn, 2007; Denzin, 1992). This perspective assumes that meaning is constructed, and modified through interpretation, by way of social interaction. Individuals therefore understand their world by formulating their own biography in a way that makes sense to them and then act on the basis of the meanings that things have for them (Shinebourne, 2011, Blumer, 1992). Symbolic interactionism suggests that the meanings people ascribe to events are only accessible through a process of interpretation (Hamill et al., 2010; Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008), hence its influence on IPA.

The first recorded IPA publication was Jonathan Smith's position piece which defined IPA for health psychology (Smith, 1996) and, as a methodological approach, it has been gaining in momentum and popularity over the past 20-plus years (Eatough and Smith, 2017; Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

As interest in and the application of IPA has flourished, the IPA literature base has increased exponentially. The majority of IPA research has been in the field of health psychology (Brocki and Wearden, 2006) with illness experience

forming the largest individual subject area (for example, Meaney et al., 2017; Holland et al., 2016; Kirkham et al., 2015; Arroll and Senior, 2008). However, IPA has increasingly been employed in other research areas, such as nursing (Carradice et al., 2002), educational psychology (Bailey, 2011), homelessness (Holt et al., 2012), reproductive decision-making (Touroni and Coyle, 2002) and teenage fatherhood (Sheldrake, 2010). In addition to a range of different research reports, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, public reports and postgraduate theses, the IPA literature encompasses reviews of IPA studies (for example, Smith, 2011a; Brocki and Wearden, 2006), explorations of the theoretical basis for IPA (for example, Shinebourne, 2011) and methodological discussion articles (for example, Alase, 2017; Jeong and Othman, 2016).

The theory and practice of IPA are less clearly defined than other qualitative research approaches. This reflects both its relatively recent development and the fact that IPA is not a prescriptive methodology (Smith et al., 2009). Although there is a basic process to IPA, moving from the descriptive to the interpretative (Brocki and Wearden, 2006) (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5), it is intended to be a methodological framework that can be adapted by researchers in accordance with their own personal way of working (Smith and Osborn, 2007). This suggests that one IPA research study might differ considerably from another in how the principles of IPA, as described for example by Smith and Osborn (2015), Shinebourne (2011), Smith et al. (2009), Larkin et al. (2006), Reid et al. (2005) and Smith (1996) are applied.

Chapter summary

This chapter has described the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings to the study. It has provided justification for the choice of IPA to investigate the experience of older fatherhood and provided a detailed theoretical and practical background to this methodology. This chapter has therefore established the basis for an empirical investigation into older fathers' experiences. The next chapter sets out the methods employed to do this, indicating how these were informed by the methodology.

4 Methods

This chapter examines, in detail, the application of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a means of exploring the experiences of older fathers. It describes the development of a purposive sampling strategy, guided by an established IPA approach and how this facilitated the recruitment of a homogenous sample of older father participants. Following this, a description of the process of data collection outlines the organisational approach used to plan and conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with these participants. The procedures of IPA, from the application of initial, exploratory comments to the production of super-ordinate themes are then described using illustrative examples to highlight the stages of analysis.

This chapter also addresses ethical considerations and describes measures to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the findings of the study, including my own reflexive engagement with the research. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of its key points and an outline of the focus of the subsequent chapter.

4.1 Sampling

To explore men's experiences of first-time fatherhood beyond the age of 40 a sampling strategy was employed to enable the identification, and subsequent recruitment, of individuals who could provide evidence of this phenomenon (Robinson, 2014).

IPA requires a broadly homogenous sample (Etikan et al., 2016) consisting of participants who share similar traits or specific characteristics; what Smith and Osborn (2007, p. 56) describe as: '... a closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant'.

Therefore, reflecting the approach to sampling previously employed in IPA research (for example, Kirkham et al., 2015; King et al., 2014; Aresti et al., 2010; Kellett et al., 2010; Osborn and Smith, 2006), a purposive sampling strategy was employed. Purposive sampling provides a non-random way of ensuring representation of particular types of participants (Robinson, 2014), and offers a means of establishing an effective connection between the research aim(s), research question(s) and sampling.

It is the recommended sampling approach for IPA (Smith et al., 2009). IPA's idiographic focus requires comprehensive representation of each participant's individual account (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2), and IPA studies therefore benefit from small, purposively selected, samples (Shinebourne, 2011).

However, a small sample size does not imply a limited perspective on the topic being examined as, given adequate contextualisation, it permits a depth of analysis that might be constrained with a larger sample (Pringle et al., 2011):

... it is more problematic to try to meet IPA's commitments with a sample which is 'too large', than with one that is 'too small'.

(Smith et al., 2009, p. 51)

I therefore sought to recruit a sample of between 10 and 15 participants. The

adequacy of the sample size was determined by the sampling procedures advocated for IPA (Smith et al., 2009; Brocki and Wearden, 2006), and in anticipation of achieving 'data saturation'. This term is more commonly associated with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), but it is also relevant to other qualitative approaches (Saunders et al., 2018) and was applicable to this study as a result of both the homogeneity of the sample and the relatively narrow focus of the research topic (Guest et al., 2006).

In seeking to develop a deeper and richer understanding of participants' experiences, I did not seek to recruit a representative sample of older fathers in terms of population, or to reflect the full diversity of older father types and contexts. This is because IPA emphasises theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalisability (King et al., 2014; Pringle et al., 2011). Participants in an IPA study are therefore selected in order to allow access to a particular perspective on the phenomenon being studied. As Smith et al. (2009, p. 49) note, participants are selected in order to: 'represent a perspective rather than a population'. It was also acknowledged that representativeness in qualitative research is not always necessary when attempting to understand the complexities of particular phenomena:

In qualitative investigations, researchers are not so much interested in how representative their participants are of the larger population. The concern is more about concepts and looking for incidents that shed light on them.
(Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 156)

Accordingly, participants were recruited because they satisfied specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Section 4.1.1), which ensured they had comparable

paternal experience, rather than as a result of representativeness, probability, convenience, or self-selection (Daniel, 2012).

A purposive, non-representative sampling approach raised the possibility that the sample could have consisted of participants of a predominantly similar ethnic origin and/or socioeconomic background (such as white, middle-class men). However, this does not imply the privileging of one group over another or disregard for the concept of diversity. The approach to sampling was guided by the view that the principal aim of IPA is to provide a detailed and nuanced analysis of participants' lived experience, exploring variability, comparisons and contrasts. In focusing on the individual, and demonstrating its commitment to idiographic inquiry, IPA also emphasises the detailed examination of similarity and difference between individual participants' accounts:

...a well-wrought IPA study will show both convergence and divergence, patterning but also individual nuance, as the write-up points to what the participants share at the same time as illustrating their individuality.

(Smith et al., 2009, p. 166)

4.1.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The focus of the study was on the experiences of men who became fathers for the first time beyond the age of 40. However, recruitment of *any* father who fulfilled this description would have failed to satisfy the need for a broadly homogenous sample. For example, both a 75-year-old father of a 35-year-old son; and a 55-year-old father of a five year old daughter each fulfil the criterion for a 'first-time-father-over-40'. But the 30 year difference in their fathering

experience, which implies being subjected to dissimilar sociocultural contexts and influences, in addition to having children of such contrasting ages, would confound comparisons between the two men. Therefore, to facilitate purposive sampling of older fathers with comparable, recent paternal experience, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<p>Men aged 40 or over at the time of their first child's birth</p> <p>A participant's eldest child will have resided with the participant from birth</p> <p>A participant's eldest child will be aged 15 or under</p>	<p>Fathering experience – for example, step-fatherhood – prior to the birth of their first child</p>

As discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.1), for the purposes of this study men who father in their 40s and beyond are defined as 'older fathers'. Forty was therefore the minimum age criterion for participation.

The purpose of recruiting first-time fathers – men who fathered their first child when aged 40 or over – was to further strengthen the similarity of the sample. It also avoided the recruitment of men who had fathered children in a previous relationship and subsequently re-fathered (aged 40 and over) in new family formations (Remer et al., 2010). Although such 'second-time-around' fathers form a significant and growing proportion of the older father population, I concluded that the potential contrast between their experiences and those of

first-time older fathers would undermine the homogeneity of the sample.

Stipulating an upper age limit of 15 for a participant's eldest child and requiring residence with that child from birth ensured that participants would have comparable fathering experience of similar-age children, in terms of both duration (from birth) and frequency of contact (co-residency). I recognised that the experiences of non-resident older fathers could provide important source material for a broader study of older fatherhood, but the potential disparity of their paternal experiences with those of men who had lived with their child since birth would have further conflicted with the desire to recruit a homogeneous sample.

The exclusion criterion reflected the need to focus on the experiences of first-time older fathers. Participants would therefore not have experience of fatherhood, including biological fatherhood, step-fatherhood or adoptive fatherhood, prior to the age of 40. They would also not reside (in a paternal relationship) with other (non-biological) children older than their own first-born child (such as a partner's child from a previous relationship) unless the older child(ren) began residing with the participant subsequent to the birth of his first child.

4.2 Ethical considerations

Before data collection commenced, The Open University's Human Research Ethics Committee gave favourable opinion to the study (Appendix A). Prior to

giving approval, the Committee sought assurances regarding the security of research data and the need to ensure provision for backups of the data so there was no risk of a total data loss during the project. The Committee also required minor grammatical amendments to the 'Participant Information Sheet' (Appendix B).

Safeguards, such as ensuring participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study, their role and right to withdraw at any stage up to the point at which the findings of the study were published, were applied to minimise risk to participants' psychological well-being, physical health, personal values or dignity (ESRC, 2015; BPS, 2009). In acknowledgement of the potential power-imbalance between interviewer and participant, I sought to establish an attentive and amicable relationship from the point at which potential participants first contacted me (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009).

4.2.1 Consent

Participation in the study was voluntary. A 'Participant Information Sheet' (Appendix B) was given to all prospective participants and they were encouraged to contact me or my research supervisors to ask questions, seek clarification or obtain further information if required before deciding whether or not to take part. Prior to each research interview, the participant signed a Consent Form (Appendix C) and their written consent was retained for the duration of the study.

4.2.2 Confidentiality

All participants were informed that all personal information would be treated in confidence and that all data would be anonymised and not made available to anyone who was not directly involved in the study. They were also advised that all completed consent forms would be stored in a locked filing cabinet and that the results of the study, including the publication of direct quotes from participants, would not be made available in a form that identifies them.

In accordance with the requirements of the (Great Britain) Data Protection Act (2018) raw and processed electronic data were encrypted and stored on a computer, which was password protected, and uploaded to The Open University's central storage service for research data. All data will be stored and accessible to myself only, for a period of ten years after the study has ended, at which point data will be destroyed.

4.3 Recruitment

Recruitment took place over a five-month period (January to May 2017). A range of approaches was employed, including placing 'call for participants' advertisements within local GP surgeries and libraries (Appendix D). In addition, advertisements were placed online through the websites of Mumsnet (www.mumsnet.com), DAD.info (www.dad.info), the Fatherhood Institute (www.fatherhoodinstitute.org), and The Open University's Staff Intranet. To facilitate recruitment, an online presence was established on Twitter

(@OlderDads) and a dedicated website (www.olderfathers.wordpress.com) was established. In addition, I made personal contact with a number of individuals professionally involved with fathers, fatherhood and families to request their assistance with recruitment.

The recruitment process was initially quite slow and the early lack of response to advertisements was frustrating. The most productive strategy, in terms of attracting expressions of interest, proved to be 'word of mouth'. For example, a number of men responded to the 'call for participants' when informed about the study by friends, family members or colleagues who had seen it on The Open University's Staff Intranet.

All expressions of interest were followed up by e-mail and/or telephone to discuss the study and, if appropriate, to arrange a convenient date, time and location for an interview. In total, ten men were recruited to the study. All were white and British, and the ages at which each man became a father for the first time ranged from 40 to 57 (Table 4.2).

Eight participants were married and all were the biological father to their children. Seven of the men had one child only and three were fathers to two children. Their children's ages ranged from nine months to 12 years. Eight of the men were in full-time employment, one worked part-time, and one was self-employed (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Participant details

Pseudonym	Age at time of interview	Age at birth of first child	Background
Mike	53	47	Married, 11 years (wife, 42). One child (boy, 5). Employed (part-time)
Trevor	55	44	Married, 20 years (wife, 53). One child (girl, 11). Employed (full-time)
Dave	52	47	Married, 8 years (wife, 44). Two children (girls, 5 and 4). Employed (full-time)
Joe	46	40	Married, 3 years (wife, 45). Two children (boys, 5 and 9 months). Employed (full-time)
Kevin	63	57	Married, 10 years (wife, 45). One child (girl, 6). Self-employed
Harry	54	44	Married, 10 years (wife, 44). One child (girl, 10). Employed (full-time)
Ian	58	52	Married, 8 years (wife, 48). One child (boy, 6). Employed (full-time)
Keith	45	44	Married, 2 years (wife, 32). One child (girl, 2). Employed (full-time)
Jim	44	43	Partnership, 5 years (partner, 32). One child (girl, 1). Employed (full-time)
Pete	61	47	Partnership, 15 years (partner, 49). Two children (girl, 14, boy 12). Employed (full-time)

4.4 Data collection

Data collection involved individual, face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the ten participants. An interview schedule was developed and the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Each participant took part

in one interview, and each interview lasted for approximately one hour.

Interviews took place either in the participant's place of work (n=5), their home (n=3), the University (n=1) or a restaurant (n=1). In accordance with information included in the 'call for participants' (Appendix D), the interviewees selected the interview location.

4.4.1 Interviewing

The basic premise of IPA is that individuals seek to make sense of their experience and that they attempt to reach this understanding by interpreting their lives as they occur (Aresti et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2009) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1). Furthermore, in the assumption that language mediates lived experience (Willig, 2017), and that evidence of individuals' understanding of their world and life situation is contained within their narratives (Kahn, 2000), the aim of the participant interviews was to gain access to these interpretations.

Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to: '... obtain descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena' (Kvale, 2007, p. 59). Considered the exemplary method of data collection for an IPA study (Eatough and Smith, 2017; Brocki and Wearden, 2006), they facilitate the detailed investigation of personal perspectives of complex and potentially sensitive issues and allow the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue in which initial questions may be modified in accordance with participants' responses, allowing the researcher to probe interesting areas that arise (Smith and Osborn, 2008).

An interview schedule provided a framework for the interviews. The purpose of the schedule, which comprised open-ended questions, prompts and probes, was to encourage participants to discuss their paternal experiences as freely as possible, whilst allowing me flexibility to probe and explore interesting areas that emerged (Rassool and Nel, 2012, Pugh and Vetere, 2009). It was intended as a guide to the discussion rather than a prescriptive means of eliciting participants' responses (Appendix E).

Through a process of reflection on the aims of the study, exploration of the literature, and discussions with supervisors and others, seven key topic areas were identified that were converted into interview themes (Table 4.3).

In developing the specific questions to guide the interview, the selection of question types offered by Smith et al. (2009) was particularly helpful in ensuring that the interview schedule provided an effective foundation (Table 4.4).

Table 4.3: Interview themes

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Pre-fatherhood2. Fatherhood3. The experience of being an older father4. External influences5. Social relationships6. Personal consequences of older fatherhood7. Perceived consequences for children |
|---|

Table 4.4: Types of questions

Question type	Example of an interview question or additional probe (see Table 4.6)
Descriptive	– Could you briefly tell me about yourself and your family?
Narrative	– Can you tell me about how you came to be an 'older father'?
Structural	– Could you describe a typical day for you as a father?
Contrast	– How does your experience compare with a younger father's?
Evaluative	– What are the best/worst things about being an 'older father'?
Circular	– What do you think your child thinks about having an 'older father'?
Comparative	– How would you approach fathering differently if you were younger?

(Adapted from Smith et al., 2009, p. 60)

IPA research questions are exploratory, open-ended and focused on meanings and processes rather than outcomes (Finlay, 2011). For example, rather than asking a participant: 'What is it like to be an older father?', an IPA researcher would seek the participant's description of, perhaps, a typical day as an older father – question type: 'Structural' (Table 4.4) – encouraging him to describe his interactions and contact with others in order to encourage interpretation of the lived experience and to place it in the context of daily practices and socialisation (Smith et al., 2009). Evaluation of and reflection on the interview themes, question types and the interview structure employed within other IPA studies (for example, Hamill et al., 2010; Osborn and Smith, 2006) assisted in formulating 11 related interview questions (Appendix E).

In addition, a structure for phenomenological interviewing adapted from Bevan (2014) assisted in the organisation of the interviews (Table 4.5). Bevan's (2014) organisational structure comprises three structural domains. The first two domains incorporate the type of interview question indicated in Table 4.4, and the third domain focuses on clarification, encouraging the interviewer to vary the questioning approach and structure of the questions. This interview structure enables the interview to move between sequences that are primarily narrative or descriptive, and those that encourage the participant to be more analytic or evaluative, which reflects the interview procedure recommended for use in an IPA study (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 4.5: Structure for phenomenological interviewing

Structural interview domain	Method	Example of a question
Contextualisation	Descriptive/Narrative questioning	Can you tell me about how you came to be a father?
Apprehending the phenomenon	Descriptive/Structural questions	How involved are you in the day-to-day care of your child/children?
Clarifying the phenomenon	Imaginative variation: Varying of structure and questions	How aware of being an 'older father' are you when out with your child/children?

(Adapted from Bevan, 2014)

Relevant prompts plus short open questions (probes) were included within the interview schedule to encourage participants to explain and explore their responses (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Interview prompts and probes

Prompts	Probes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What do you mean by '... '?- Tell me what you were thinking?- How did you feel?- You mentioned earlier that ... can you tell me more about this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What, for you, defines a 'good' or a 'bad' father?- What were your thoughts regarding 'older fathers' prior to your child's birth?

It was anticipated that the schedule would facilitate an adaptable dialogue between me and the individual participants. I hoped that by questioning, probing, seeking clarification and summarising, I would encourage the men to reflect on and explore their experience of older fatherhood.

To prepare for the interviews, two informal pilot interviews, conducted with friends who were both older fathers, assisted the testing out and development of an effective interviewing style and enabled the evaluation of the interview schedule. It was important to assess whether the planned organisational structure, questions and prompts would encourage participants to reflect on, explore and offer meaningful descriptions of their fathering experience. Practical issues, such as the use of the audio recording equipment were also tested. As a result of the pilot interviews, I gained confidence in the interview process and awareness of the skills involved, including listening, deciding which responses should be followed-up, and remembering points to revisit. Following the pilot interviews, minor modifications to the interview schedule made the questions and prompts more focused.

4.4.2 The interview process

Prior to each interview I contacted participants, by e-mail, telephone or both, to discuss the study aims and respond to any questions regarding the study and their participation. I sought to promote trust and confidence in the interview process by emphasising the confidential nature of the interview and assuring participants of the anonymisation of any resultant quotes used in my thesis or elsewhere. Each participant was thanked for agreeing to take part in the study.

Employing Bevan's (2014) organisational structure, in the first contextual domain (see Section 4.4.1) I initially sought to establish effective communication with the participant and to ease him into the conversation by starting with a general, contextual inquiry about himself and his family background. This enabled the participant to recount a fairly descriptive episode of experience. The interview then progressed to more focused structural questions; asking, for example, the participant to describe a typical day as a father. In the third domain, elements of the participant's experience or the experience as a whole were used to explore the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). This involved less structured questioning, encouraging the participant to reflect more closely on his experiences to enable a richer, more insightful sense of the meanings he ascribed to being an older father. Participants were encouraged to place their lived experience in the context of their daily practices and socialisation. Table 4.7 provides an extract from the transcript of the interview with Dave (Appendix F). It shows how, by the use of open and closed interview questions, he was encouraged to articulate his experience of being out 'in public' with his young

children and encountering a misunderstanding of his relationship to them.

Table 4.7: Extract from an interview transcript

Chris:	How do you feel, being out with your daughters in a public place? Are you in any way conscious of being an older father?
Dave:	It irks me a little bit when people assume I'm their grandad rather than their dad, but I can accept that it's an easy mistake to make.
Chris:	When has that happened?
Dave:	It happened a fair bit when I was on the extended paternity leave with them, when I was out and about pushing the pram and ... it happened sometimes in shops or if you're seeing people you don't know in the park and you're pushing them on the swings or ...
Chris:	How does it actually present itself, the 'grandad error'?
Dave:	Oh, it's people ... will come and say oh, you know 'your granddaughter's very pretty' or people will say that 'your grandchildren seem very happy' or sometimes there'll even be a compliment and say that they seem very polite, but it comes up as people's assumption that they're grandchildren.
Chris:	And is that a bother to you?
Dave:	I mean not always, more often than that they still assume that I'm their dad or sometimes you'll see a little bit of a quizzical look come over their faces ... kind of 'I'm not sure ... which way am I gonna go?!'
Chris:	And is it concerning for you personally, to be mistaken?
Dave:	A little bit, it's not a big issue cos I can understand why people do it, it's a natural mistake to make, I still find it slightly irksome, it's not a big issue.

All the interview locations (see Section 4.4) proved satisfactory in terms of meeting my requirements for an effective interview setting. Each was comfortable, private, and environmental disturbance was minimal. On one occasion, during an interview at a participant's place of work, a fire alarm sounded six minutes after the start. Although this necessitated a ten minute

pause in the interview, it did not disrupt the general flow of the conversation. Background noise in the restaurant interview setting was evident but not intrusive. Ensuring researcher safety when conducting interviews in a participant's home involved informing the University Faculty's Deanery Assistant of arrangements for the interview and notifying that individual once the interview was completed.

To prepare the data for analysis I transcribed each interview and, to facilitate participant anonymity, attributed a pseudonym to each of the fathers (see Table 4.2). Appendix F provides an example of a complete interview transcription.

In recognition that an audio recording cannot capture either the emotional context of an interview or its non-verbal components (Poland, 1995), I ensured that each transcription was a faithful reproduction of the aural recording.

Although time-consuming, transcribing the interviews was of considerable value to me in terms of retaining contact with the data – indeed, transcription brought me closer to the data; increasing my familiarity with participants' accounts – and I was able to begin identifying initial exploratory responses to the data during this process (see Section 4.5.1). Transcription therefore formed part of the initial process of data analysis (Kowal and O'Connell, 2014).

4.5 Data analysis

The approach to IPA analysis described by Smith et al. (2009) and Smith and Osborn (2008) guided the analytic process within which the following strategies

were employed:

- The in-depth analysis of each individual transcript, which involved line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings expressed by participants.
- The identification of emergent themes within the transcripts, identifying convergence, divergence and commonality across the themes.
- The development of a structure that demonstrated the relationship between themes, and identifying thematic clusters in accordance with the conceptual nature of the themes; giving each a descriptive title.
- Organisation of the material in a way that allowed for analysed data to be tracked back through the process from the transcriptions to the final thematic structure.
- The use of supervision to test and develop the coherence and plausibility of the interpretation and findings.

The verbatim transcripts of the ten interviews served as the raw data for the study (Smith and Osborn, 2007) and these were analysed by means of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Eatough and Smith, 2017). Transcription of both my own and the participants' words imposed a change of medium – from verbal to written – on the interview data. However, in the

analytic process, I employed both media as I frequently returned to the audio recordings in order to hear again a participant's account in the specific context of the interview scenario.

Producing an interpretative account of older fathers' experiences required balancing an initial 'phenomenological, insider' position, in which participants' accounts were listened to, documented and ordered in an attempt to prioritise their world view (Reid et al., 2005), with an 'interpretative outsider' position from which I sought to make sense of what older fatherhood meant for these men.

From an interpretative outsider perspective, the researcher tries to make sense of the data through his or her own interpretations and theoretical ideas, grounding these interpretations with verbatim quotes from the interviews (Clarke, 2009). This involved my attempting to: '... understand what it is like to stand in the shoes' of participants (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014, p.8) whilst acknowledging that such understanding is never fully achievable.

Such interaction between participants' narratives and the researcher's interpretative framework is central to IPA (Dixon et al., 2010) and, as described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.1), the inter-subjective nature of the analysis involved engagement in a 'double hermeneutic' process in which I sought to: '... make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world' (Smith, 2004, p. 40).

I regarded data analysis as a dynamic, intuitive and creative process (Basit,

2003) and I conducted all analytic stages manually so as to enhance my familiarity with the quality and richness of participant data and to maximise my sensitivity to the meanings participants ascribed to their older father experience.

As explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.2), IPA is committed to idiographic inquiry, therefore, before more general claims were made it was necessary to examine each case in detail (Smith and Osborn, 2007). This required the comprehensive representation of each participant by way of detailed analysis of individual cases, before searching for patterns across the cohort (Smith, 2011a). Consequently, analysis progressed from the reading and interpreting of individual cases to the identification of common themes emerging from participants' accounts and, eventually, to the identification of super-ordinate themes, while retaining a focus on individual perceptions and experiences (Kam and Midgley, 2006).

The following three sub-sections describe, in detail, the process of data analysis.

4.5.1 Initial, exploratory coding

I began the analytic process by listening again to the audio recording of the first interview and then reading and re-reading the associated transcript, noting aspects of the participant's account that seemed relevant or interesting (Rassool and Nel, 2012). Each reading facilitated deeper engagement with the data, allowing greater receptiveness to what the participant had said (Eatough

and Smith, 2006).

My initial reading and re-reading led to the commencement of first-order, descriptive coding of the transcript (Larkin et al., 2006). This involved highlighting key words, phrases and idiosyncratic figures of speech (Dixon et al., 2010), making initial, exploratory comments and recording these in a right-hand margin of the printed transcript. These initial, exploratory comments were of three types: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual (Gower et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2009) (Table 4.8).

Descriptive comments focused on describing the content of what the participant had said, *linguistic* comments explored the participant's specific use of language, and *conceptual* comments focused on engaging with the transcript at a more interrogative and conceptual level.

These comments reflected my immediate responses to the participant's words and represented an initial attempt to describe the things that mattered to him and to explain the meanings he ascribed to his older father experience.

Table 4.8 offers an example of this initial analytic process applied to one participant's account. Prior to becoming a father, Joe had been informed that it was unlikely that he and his wife would be able to conceive naturally due to his low sperm count.

Table 4.8: An example of initial, exploratory comments

<p style="text-align: center;">Original transcript (Participant: Joe)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Initial exploratory comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Descriptive comments (normal text) - <i>Linguistic comments</i> (italics) - <u>Conceptual comments</u> (underlined)
<p>Yeah, so ... with my wife who, we weren't married at the time, being told we had to go through IVF ... because of me basically, and then it was ... that's when I started the ... felt the clock ticking. Then I'll be honest, again being at a certain age, it wasn't 'disaster, disaster, disaster', it was like well we talked about adoption, we also talked about 'well this is gonna be our life, just me and you' type thing so erm ... and that was ... that was a very much two way, you know, as much as I feel like I would be er ... in hindsight now I wouldn't be a complete person without my children, see what I mean? But at the time I was thinking 'ok, well we'll just, we'll get the right type of jobs where we can spend a lot of time travelling, seeing the world and maybe just, you know, we'll do that'</p>	<p>He and his wife were told that they would need to go through IVF to have a child</p> <p>He describes how he <i>felt the clock ticking</i> – indicating the pressure he felt to reproduce – although at the time, he felt that it would not have been a <i>disaster</i> if he had not achieved fatherhood</p> <p><u>Had he resigned himself – following his diagnosis – to not being a father?</u></p> <p>He is glad that he has had children – <i>I wouldn't be a complete person without my children</i></p>

I sought to develop a hermeneutic account of the participant's experience of older fatherhood by identifying and describing what Smith et al. (2009, p. 46) refer to as: 'The key 'objects of concern' in the participant's world, and the 'experiential claims' made by the participant'. For example, the prospect of Joe and his wife being childless had been an evident area of concern for him, and their experience of assisted reproduction had been an important experiential feature of their route to parenthood. These are the key features of first-order descriptive coding in IPA (Larkin et al., 2006). It was important that my initial

comments should have a clear phenomenological focus (for example, noting how Joe described the pressure he felt to reproduce, whilst feeling it would not have been a 'disaster' if he had not achieved fatherhood). At the same time I sought to remain close to what appeared to be the participant's explicit meaning, such as Joe's evident desire to become a father: 'I wouldn't be a complete person without my children'.

Initial, exploratory coding enhanced familiarity with the data and enabled me to acquire a collection of: '... potentially important, yet still provisional notes' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91). This expanded data set provided the basis for the next stage of analysis; the identification of emergent themes.

4.5.2 Identifying emergent themes

The process of identifying emergent themes that were 'at one higher level of abstraction' (Osborn and Smith, 2006, p. 218) to the initial, exploratory comments, involved re-reading the first transcript; seeking patterns of commonality and difference in both the text of the transcript and the initial comments. In a left-hand margin, these patterns were transformed into more specific themes; concise statements and phrases that captured the essence of the participant's experiences.

Table 4.9 illustrates this in relation to the extract from Joe's transcript included in Table 4.8 (above).

Table 4.9: The development of emergent themes

Emergent themes	Original transcript (Participant: Joe)	Initial exploratory comments
<p>Reproductive decision-making</p> <p>Route to older fatherhood</p> <p>Enjoying fatherhood</p>	<p>Yeah, so ... with my wife who, we weren't married at the time, being told we had to go through IVF ... because of me basically, and then it was ... that's when I started the ... felt the clock ticking. Then I'll be honest, again being at a certain age, it wasn't 'disaster, disaster, disaster', it was like well we talked about adoption, we also talked about 'well this is gonna be our life, just me and you' type thing so erm ... and that was ... that was a very much two way, you know, as much as I feel like I would be er ... in hindsight now I wouldn't be a complete person without my children, see what I mean? But at the time I was thinking 'ok, well we'll just, we'll get the right type of jobs where we can spend a lot of time travelling, seeing the world and maybe just, you know, we'll do that'</p>	<p>He and his wife were told that they would need to go through IVF to have a child</p> <p>He describes how he <i>felt the clock ticking</i> – indicating the pressure he felt to reproduce – although at the time, he felt that it would not have been a <i>disaster</i> if he had not achieved fatherhood</p> <p><u>Had he resigned himself – following his diagnosis – to not being a father?</u></p> <p>He is glad that he has had children – <i>I wouldn't be a complete person without my children</i></p>

This stage of the analytic process required closer interpretative engagement with the data (Smith, 1996). In seeking to capture the meanings the participant

ascribed to his older father experience, a more 'theoretically sensitive' approach (Eatough and Smith, 2006, p. 487) was adopted as I considered how the issues could be conceptualised, whilst ensuring the connection between the participant's words and the interpretations was not lost.

Aware that interpretative activity does not seek to reveal one 'true' meaning (Lopez and Willis, 2004), I ensured that the meanings captured by this process were logical, plausible and reflected participants' worlds. Consequently, identifying emergent themes was a reciprocal process of description, interpretation and reasoning (Smith et al., 2009).

An example of an emergent theme, which I labelled: *Fathering in public*, and the interpretative process involved in identifying that theme is provided by analysis of a comment made by one of the participants in relation to a particular type of social encounter he experienced as an older father. Dave described how as a lone father in public (when he was on paternity leave) he had sometimes been mistaken for his child's grandfather (see Section 4.4.2, Table 4.7).

Understanding this experience, in order to provide what Smith (2009, p. 17) refers to as an 'undistorted description of the way things appear' to the participant, required consideration of a number of factors. In addition to interpreting Dave's experience in terms of the description he provided and how he felt about such mistakes occurring, it was important that the phenomenological explanation embraced a broader perspective of Dave's paternal identity, his perceptions of fatherhood (and of older fatherhood), his

role as a father in those specific circumstances and other relevant characteristics of his overall paternal experience. It also required consideration of social attitudes and normative expectations of paternal appearance.

This idiographic approach to data analysis was subsequently complemented by a similar in-depth exploration of other participants' narratives in relation to being in public with their children. This led to the identification of a 'recurrent' emergent theme (see Section 4.5.3) *Fathering in public*, demonstrating how IPA emphasises both similarity and difference between participants' accounts (not all participants had experienced being mistaken for their child's grandfather – see Chapter 8, Section 8.1.1).

These first two stages of analysis were repeated for the remaining nine transcripts, and a total of 127 emergent themes were identified across all the cases (Appendix G).

4.5.3 Thematic clusters and super-ordinate themes

The next stage of analysis involved further data reduction by establishing the overall representation of themes emerging from across participants' accounts (Aresti et al., 2010). To achieve this, the recurrence of emergent themes was calculated (Smith et al., 2009). A theme was categorised as 'recurrent' when it emerged in more than half of the transcripts (>5). The purpose of this was to emphasise an idiographic perspective, but at the same time counterbalance that with a more generic account across the cohort (Dickson et al., 2007). This

process identified 69 recurrent themes (Appendix H). A further 58 themes emerged in half or fewer of the transcripts (<6) and these were categorised as 'non-recurrent' (Appendix I). However, the majority of non-recurrent themes reflected, in part at least, aspects of recurrent themes and it was therefore possible to retain their emphasis within the analytic process. Where a non-recurrent theme did not even partly reflect a recurrent theme it was excluded as not relevant to the study. Only two non-recurrent themes – *Digital, social media* and *Becoming a burden* – were regarded as exceptional in this way and therefore not incorporated into the analytic process.

Next, a thematic structure was produced, drawing together the recurrent themes in order to establish connections between them and identify patterns of commonality across the entire data set, clustering them appropriately.

Nine thematic clusters were established and a descriptive label or 'higher-order theme title' (Eatough and Smith, 2006, p. 487) was applied to each one to convey the conceptual nature of its constituent sub-themes (Aresti et al., 2010) (Appendix J). The clusters represented the most salient meanings within the participants' narratives. Table 4.10 provides an example of one thematic cluster.

Links between each thematic cluster and individual transcripts assisted in maintaining connection between the themes, clusters and participants' words (an example of this linking in relation to one thematic cluster: 'Transition to fatherhood' is provided in Appendix K).

In keeping with the iterative nature of IPA, I frequently returned to the transcripts to ensure the coherence and explanatory power of the themes and thematic clusters (Pugh and Vetere, 2009) and to verify that the link between themes, clusters and what the participants had actually said was maintained (Rassool and Nel, 2012). There was scope for the addition, removal or re-conceptualisation of themes during this stage (Aresti et al., 2010; Shinebourne and Smith, 2009).

Table 4.10: An example of a thematic cluster

Recurrent emergent themes	Thematic cluster
Appearance Comparison with other (younger) fathers 'Grandfather' misunderstanding Health and fitness Physical capacity Physical participation Prospective concerns – health and fitness	Physical fatherhood

To facilitate the subsequent narrative and interpretative account of the research findings, the thematic clusters were then subjected to further analysis. This involved moving back and forward between the analytic stages to eventually identify four broad super-ordinate themes, each of which was connected to the range of thematic clusters and emergent themes in the data set as a whole (Table 4.11) (Appendix L). Supervision meetings were used to test and develop the coherence and plausibility of the analysis, and the transcripts were frequently returned to in order to verify the final interpretations of participants'

accounts.

Table 4.11: An example of a super-ordinate theme

Recurrent emergent themes	Thematic clusters	Super-ordinate theme
Benefits of age Benefits of experience Enjoying fatherhood Financial advantages Imagining younger fatherhood Older, older fathers Time available for fatherhood	The advantages of older fatherhood	Reflecting on older fatherhood
Age goals Aspirations Children's perceptions Consequences for children Paternal mortality Prospective concerns – when child is older Prospective grandfatherhood Regret	Consequences of older fatherhood	

The analysed data were therefore organised in a way that showed connectivity through the processes of data collection and analysis; from participant's responses to the super-ordinate themes, preserving the integrity of what each participant had said. The resultant framework, consisting of the emergent themes, thematic clusters and super-ordinate themes (Appendix L) formed the basis of the findings chapters (see Chapters 6 to 9).

Fundamental to the processes of data collection and data analysis was the need to establish trust and confidence in the subsequent findings. The next part of the chapter describes how this was achieved.

4.6 Academic rigour and research validity

A range of practical and conceptual measures were employed to confirm the legitimacy of data collection and analysis and to ensure the overall dependability of the study's findings. There is no prescribed framework for assessing validity and quality in IPA (Smith et al., 2009) therefore criteria applied to evaluating these requirements in qualitative research were employed.

The need for academic rigour in qualitative research is well-established (Baillie, 2015; Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985) ask the following question:

How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?
(Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290)

'Validity', a term used in relation to both qualitative and quantitative research, provides the lens through which the precision, credibility and transferability of qualitative findings may be evaluated (Lewis et al., 2014; Golafshani, 2003). The concept of 'trustworthiness' (Marshall and Rossman, 2016) is frequently used to represent rigour and validity in qualitative research, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a model of trustworthiness comprising four aspects. These

are as follows:

- a) Credibility
- b) Transferability
- c) Dependability
- d) Confirmability

The following sub-sections explore these measures, explaining how each was approached in the study.

4.6.1 Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative research study determines its acceptability to others (Bryman, 2016). Evaluating such social acceptability or 'truth value' (Noble and Smith, 2015) is inevitably dependent upon the approach to social reality adopted within a research study. From a social constructionist perspective, the credibility of a study's findings is a reflection of social consensus (Gergen, 2015), and this view guided my attempts to substantiate the credibility of the findings; ensuring that they could be perceived as both acceptable and truthful by others.

To achieve this, and to assist the reader to evaluate the credibility of the study, I employed recognised research methods and a transparent and systematic approach to data analysis. For example, the audit trail of the analytic processes, described in Sections 4.5.1 to 4.5.3, demonstrates connection between themes

and participants' narratives. Quotations from the interview transcripts used in the findings (see Chapters 6 to 9) serve to ground the themes and show that the arguments presented in the subsequent discussion (Chapter 10) are internally consistent and supported by the data, thereby providing the reader with an opportunity to evaluate their credibility (Pugh and Vetere, 2009). Additionally, references to supporting literature that explain and confirm the findings, the voluntariness of participation and the ongoing scrutiny of the project by experienced research supervisors aid evaluation of the of the study's credibility.

4.6.2 Transferability

As the study involved a relatively small number of participants, the generalisability of its findings may be questioned (Coast et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Pringle et al. (2011, p. 22) point to the 'inevitable tension in IPA studies' that is created by having a narrow, homogenous sample. However, they also state that this can be overcome if the limitations relating to participants are acknowledged and clarified.

Smith et al. (2009, p. 4) advised IPA researchers to think in terms of theoretical transferability of findings: '... where the reader of the report is able to access the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge', rather than empirical generalisability (see Section 4.1). The reflective approach I employed helped me to consider such limitations. The detailed account of the research process described in this chapter and acknowledgement of its limitations (see Chapter 11, Section 11.3), will enable others who may wish to

apply all or part of the findings to make judgments about the degree of 'fit' or similarity to their own situations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

4.6.3 Dependability and Confirmability

Ensuring the dependability of qualitative research findings is reliant on the factors cited in support of the study's credibility. In addition, an 'auditing approach' (Bryman, 2016) was adopted, ensuring that complete records, detailing activities such as recruitment, data collection and analysis, were maintained at all stages of the research process.

Confirmability – the degree to which the results of a qualitative study may be confirmed or corroborated by others (Schwandt, 2014) – requires that the credibility of a study's findings be determined (see Section 4.6.1). To counter any suggestions of bias in the selection of participants or analysis of data, details of design and implementation were clearly and rationally presented, demonstrating connections between the original data and the conclusions.

As discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.1), it is recognised that pure objectivity is not possible within a hermeneutic inquiry. Furthermore, IPA requires acknowledgement of how the researcher's own knowledge and presuppositions influence the research process. Therefore, the need for reflexivity was attended to throughout the study.

4.7 Reflexivity

In conducting this research, I sought to be clear about, and maintain awareness of, my own position as a researcher in relation to the topic, the participants and the data. This involved identifying the research paradigm that guided the design and execution of the study (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2) and acknowledging my position as an 'insider researcher' in relation to the subject of older fatherhood (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). It also meant accepting that both my epistemological perspective – the way in which I perceive the scope, structure and validity of knowledge (Goldman, 2003) – and my own personal story, values, knowledge, presuppositions and experiences had implications for the conduct of the study. I wished to ensure that the findings resulted solely from the experiences of participants and that I had a mechanism for acknowledging my own influence – my motivations, characteristics and preferences (Shenton, 2004) – on the research. I was therefore reflexive to my own biases and mindful of how my subjectivity impacted on the research process; regarding myself, the research methods and data as 'reflexively interdependent' (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). Reflexivity was therefore an essential component of both the legitimisation of the study and the trustworthiness of its findings.

Kingdon (2005, p. 622) describes reflexivity as: '... the ongoing process of self-awareness adopted by researchers in an attempt to demonstrate the trustworthiness of their findings'. Finlay and Gough (2003, p. ix) note that:

Reflexivity requires critical self-reflection of the ways in which researchers' social background, assumptions, positioning and behavior impact on the research process. It demands acknowledgement of how researchers (co-) construct their research findings.

As described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.1), IPA acknowledges the inherent difficulty of setting aside personal knowledge and presuppositions and regards the research inquiry as a dynamic process in which the researcher takes an active role (Smith and Eatough, 2007). However, this does not diminish the requirement for reflexivity within an IPA study. Indeed, it highlights the need for rigorous examination of the dynamic role of the researcher (Brocki and Wearden, 2006).

Furthermore, Chinn (2007) distinguishes between 'epistemological reflexivity' and 'personal reflexivity'. Epistemological reflexivity involves examining one's personal assumptions about what is known and admitted as knowledge. It therefore requires the researcher to reflect upon the implications that assumptions about the world and about knowledge have on the research and its findings (Dowling, 2006). Personal reflexivity requires the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and motivations contribute to their work.

4.7.1 How reflexivity was achieved

Reflexivity was achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, by acknowledging my assumptions about the world and how I perceive the scope, structure and validity of knowledge (as noted in Section 4.7), I demonstrated epistemological

reflexivity as defined by Chinn (2007). Epistemological reflexivity was also reflected in the choice of IPA as a methodological approach. IPA's recognition of the importance of the researcher's prior knowledge and assumptions to the research process (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1) and of the active role that the researcher takes in the process (Smith and Eatough, 2007) encouraged continual reflection on the epistemological nature of the data obtained and analysed. Therefore, rather than suspend my preconceptions concerning older fatherhood, I approached the data in an attitude of reflexive awareness (Haynes, 2012).

During data analysis, the social constructionist epistemological perspective that formed an essential part of the research paradigm was shown in the close attention paid to the language participants used in relation to their experiences as older fathers, particularly with regard to cultural and contextual influences. It was also evident in the interpretation of participants' responses, reflecting the view that interpretation of data is, itself, a reflexive exercise through which 'meanings are made rather than found' (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p. 414).

Secondly, I engaged in personal reflexivity (Caetano, 2015) in awareness that my presence, personality and background contributed to data collection and analysis and, furthermore, that unconscious motivations could impact on my interviewing performance, interpretations and analysis of data. I acknowledged that as a researcher I was not able to study the phenomenon of older fatherhood from a 'normatively neutral standpoint' (Brinkmann, 2007, p. 134) as my relationship to the topic linked to all aspects of the study, including its initial

inception, execution and presentation within this thesis. This could feasibly have led to the extrapolation of data not present in participants' accounts but based solely upon (or significantly influenced by) my own perceptions and experience. However, I sought to ensure that, as far as possible, any unconscious inclinations to make the data fit a particular perspective did not influence the interpretations and that analysis was driven solely by the data. Ongoing scrutiny by research supervisors assisted in this process, confirming that clear, impartial connections between the original data and the conclusions were evident.

Reflexive listening and writing have been described as tools to help the researcher situate him/herself and be aware of how their personal history can influence the research process, thereby yielding more 'accurate' and more 'valid' research (Pillow, 2003). For example, both during and following the interviews and within the process of data analysis, participants' accounts would lead me to reflect on my own experiences as an older father. Specific examples of this were as follows:

- a) When one of the participants described how, as part of their reproductive decision-making, he and his wife had calculated the ages they would be when their yet-to-be conceived child reached certain milestones in his/her life, stating: 'We kept re-doing the calculations ... how old are we gonna be...?' (see Chapter 6, Section 6.1), this invoked in me a particularly strong recollection of the type of conversations my wife and I had prior to the birth of our first child. I was aware of my emotional response to the participant's words and, during data

analysis, I reflected on how I had reacted during the interview and utilised my response to assist my interpretation of the participant's experience.

- b) During transcription, I found the points at which participants discussed their ability to apply themselves to the physically participatory aspects of fatherhood and expressed concern for the impact that declining physical abilities might have on their father-child relationships (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2) to be particularly resonant. Consequently, my reflexive response and recognition of the circumstances they described assisted my understanding and engagement with the data.

This 'reflexive interaction' (Rubinstein, 2002) between participants' narratives and my own personal interpretative framework increased my awareness and understanding of my position as a researcher and of the process by which the final analysis became a 'co-construction' between myself and the participants (Osborn and Smith, 2006) (see also Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1).

In practical terms, I employed several strategies aimed at demonstrating personal reflexivity, in order to provide what Dowling (2006, p. 10) refers to as 'reflexivity aimed at sustaining objectivity':

- a) To assist transparency, I provided autobiographical details to enable the reader to understand my personal background in relation to the study (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3).

b) Following each interview I documented my immediate thoughts on my experience and responses to the interview in a reflective diary (Ortlipp, 2008). For example, as noted in Section 4.2, I acknowledged the potential power imbalance between myself and the interviewees and this was highlighted within some of my unstructured notes. On three occasions, I noted how I felt that the interviews had 'gone well' in terms of how I had managed the encounter in relation to my personal influence, and reflected positively on my ability to facilitate the participant's engagement in the interview. However, I also documented one occasion when this was not the case, noting that I had: '*... dominated ... did not allow X time to answer questions ...*'. These notes provided insight into my role in the interviews and enabled me to reflect on the process I was requiring participants to engage in.

My reflective diary was also helpful in my interpretation of participants' accounts, particularly during initial exploratory coding (see Section 4.5.1), as it allowed me to maintain contact with the realities of the research setting and enhanced my ability to self-reflect on my role. I had regular discussions with my research supervisors about the conduct of the interviews and with regard to my role in relation to the participants and data.

c) Analysis required a considerable amount of written engagement with the data. This included transcribing the interviews and formulating my initial, exploratory comments (see Section 4.5.1). Doucet (2006, p. 47) notes

how, in the process of interviewing and coming to know participants' stories, 'we confront the difficulty of determining where our own stories end and theirs begin'. Hence during data analysis, I recorded brief written memos that captured my responses to the data. The memos detailed my supplementary thoughts on what I was reading as I worked through each transcript, and assisted in separating my own perceptions and experiences from those of the participants. They included instances where I recognised correspondence between participants' experiences and my own; writing, for example: '*Me too!*' and '*I know!*' in response to a participant recalling a particular experience or emotional reaction. The memos served both to capture my responses to the data and assisted me to maintain a balanced, objective overview and avoid inequitable emphasis on individual themes (Smith et al., 2009). They also aided my speculative interpretations of participants' accounts.

Chapter summary

This chapter has explained the processes of data collection and analysis. Including illustrative examples from interview transcripts and data analysis has demonstrated IPA 'in practice' and how its application enabled the identification of key findings from interview data. Measures taken to ensure academic rigour and the validity of findings were described, and I have indicated how reflexivity was central to the research process.

Data analysis produced a wealth of findings that were both interesting and important in understanding the experience of older fatherhood. The next part of this thesis is devoted to the detailed presentation of these findings.

5 Introduction to the findings

The next four chapters present detailed accounts of the personal lived experience of men who became fathers for the first time in their fifth or sixth decade. By explicating the lifeworld of older fathers, they provide a convincing portrayal of its breadth and complexity and allow a deeper understanding of how men make sense of and give meaning to that experience.

Analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews with ten 'older father' participants produced rich and evocative findings. These chapters offer a narrative account of these findings, presenting the results of analytic interpretation, supported by verbatim extracts, that reveals both convergence and divergence between participants' accounts.

In order to establish an overall representation of the main themes emerging from the interviews, each chapter represents one of four super-ordinate themes derived through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the data. This analytic process enabled the detailed complexities of participants' accounts to be organised within a structure that facilitated both exploration and elucidation of the lived experience of older fatherhood. Each super-ordinate theme represented a combination of 'thematic clusters' that incorporated a wider range of themes emerging from the data set as a whole (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5.3 and Appendix L).

The findings reveal how a range of social, cultural and personal contexts and processes influenced participants' perceptions and experiences of older fatherhood. Demonstrating the fundamental process of IPA – moving from the descriptive to the interpretative (Brocki and Wearden, 2006) – they provide insight into the men's day-to-day lives, including their engagement in fathering, their social interactions, thoughts about ageing, and concerns for their children. They show how participants sought to evaluate the personal impact of older fatherhood and to convey what being an older father meant to them.

To maintain consistency with IPA's idiographic focus, verbatim extracts are used where they capture the essence, or offer the most insightful or powerful account of a given theme (Dickson et al., 2010). This does not suggest the acceptance of participant's words as 'fact' or 'reality' in relation to the experience of older fatherhood; instead the extracts are included as representations of the meanings the men ascribed to that experience (Finlay, 2011). Reflecting advice offered by Eatough and Smith (2006, p. 488) that: 'Enough data should be presented for the reader to assess the fit between the participant's accounts and the researcher's understanding of them', the inclusion of participants' words will assist the evaluation of the pertinence of the interpretations, whilst ensuring the centrality of their voices within the findings (Shinebourne and Smith, 2009, p. 155).

The first 'findings' chapter: *Being an older father* (Chapter 6) explores participants' transition to older fatherhood and the impact it had on the men's lives. It explores their practical involvement and emotional engagement in

fatherhood and how the men discussed the style of fathering they had adopted and made comparisons with the approaches of other parents.

The second 'findings' chapter: *Older fatherhood: A social perspective* (Chapter 7) explores how participants experienced older fatherhood beyond their domestic settings. The men described being paternally 'out-of-step' and discussed the difficulties they encountered forming relationships with younger fathers. They indicated that, as older fathers, they negotiated uncertain social attitudes towards later paternity and perceived that attitudes towards older fathers and older mothers differed.

The third 'findings' chapter: *Ageing and physical activity* (Chapter 8) explores the experience of ageing and its impact on participants' paternal experiences. It examines the 'grandfather error' (when a participant was mistaken for his child's grandfather) and how participants described the prospect of physical decline in relation to their fathering abilities. This chapter also explores the importance of physical activity to participants' perceptions of successful fatherhood.

The fourth, and final, 'findings' chapter: *Reflections on older fatherhood* (Chapter 9) explores participants' views on the advantages of older fatherhood and how they imagined they might have adapted (less successfully) to fatherhood at a younger age. Participants' views on the suitability of men much older than themselves becoming fathers are considered and the perceived impact of older fatherhood on children's lives is examined, including how participants contemplated the possibility of relatively early paternal mortality.

The chapter concludes with an overview of how participants expressed the pleasures and regrets of older fatherhood.

5.1 Notes on the presentation of the findings

In accordance with the accepted approach to presenting the results of an IPA study (Eatough and Smith, 2006), the findings privilege participants' own accounts of their experience and are therefore presented without reference to the existing literature (Smith et al., 2009).

To ensure participant anonymity all the men were assigned a pseudonym prior to data analysis (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2). All participant quotes are attributed – through pseudonym and age – to the individual from whom they originated (a man's age is not included where it would lead to excessive repetition within individual paragraphs or sections). Direct quotes embedded within a paragraph are enclosed by single quotation marks. However, where a quote is included as a free-standing, indented block of text, quotation marks are not used.

To ensure narrative coherence, any editorial omissions are indicated by an ellipsis (...) and repeated words and utterances such as 'er' and 'erm' and notes regarding non-verbal communication (such as 'laughs') have been excluded unless specifically relevant to the presentation and interpretation of the data. Identifiable place names and other names referred to by participants are substituted by XXX.

6 Being an older father

This chapter explores participants' experiences of becoming an older father and how they undertook their paternal role. It is based on one of four super-ordinate themes: *Doing fatherhood*, which was identified through interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5). This theme brought together three thematic clusters: *Transition to fatherhood*; *Paternal involvement* and *Paternal approach*, plus emergent themes such as: *Becoming a father*, *Day-to-day fathering* and *Values and beliefs* (Appendix L). Each of these clusters and themes, either separately or in combination, captured the essence of participants' experiences of older fatherhood and, more specifically, the meanings they ascribed to their everyday fathering role.

The chapter begins with an exploration of participants' transition to fatherhood, and how considerations of paternal age were a feature of their preconceptual, pre-natal and post-natal experience. It is possible to sense the emergence of a recognisable 'older father' identity as the men describe meeting other prospective parents and recall the surprised reaction of friends and family to the news of impending fatherhood. The chapter then explores the impact of fatherhood on participants' relatively independent, child-free lifestyles, showing that, for some, it prompted an increased sense of social awareness and responsibility.

Participants described being actively involved fathers, in a 'hands-on' sense, whilst also revealing their emotional connection to their paternal role. The style

of fatherhood to which the men subscribed and how they compared their approach to that of other parents is examined. The chapter concludes with a brief summary and outlines the focus for the second 'findings' chapter.

6.1 The transition to fatherhood

'I'd just assumed that you weren't going to have children'

At the start of their interview, each participant responded to a general, contextual inquiry about themselves and their family, and explained the circumstances that had led them to become first-time fathers in their 40s or 50s. Across the cohort, there was no commonly-shared explanation for becoming an older father, and none of the men suggested that later paternity had formed part of a long-term life plan. Each described a route to older fatherhood shaped by a range of ordinary life-events and circumstances, as indicated by the following extracts:

You know, various other things got in the way.

(Ian, 58)

Well I just hadn't had that many stable, long-term relationships to be quite honest ... it just didn't happen.

(Pete, 61)

The straightforward answer is well; there wasn't an opportunity prior to that. I mean I'd had partners and girlfriends and things but I'd never been married. No I'd never met the 'right gal', never settled down

(Keith, 45)

Prior to their relationship with the mother of their eldest child, most of the participants had experienced previous long-term relationships. Trevor (55) for example, had been married twice prior to his current marriage, and Joe (46) had been: '... in a ten year relationship previously'. When asked why he had not had children within that relationship, he replied: 'I think what I was telling myself ... that I wasn't ready'.

Jim felt that his own parents' separation when he was a child had a negative impact on his view of parenthood: 'I think always in the back of my mind I didn't see it as a harmonious thing'. However, he had gained a more positive outlook after meeting his current partner, and by observing his friends' parenting:

It was one of those things where you sort of see other people or just talk about it, you meet all of their children, you see their children growing up and then you meet somebody who does want children and you suddenly start going 'well, it doesn't sound a terrible thing to do' so ...

(Jim, 44)

Although none of the men suggested that reproductive difficulties had prevented them from becoming a father earlier in life, three described how they and their wife or partner had used assisted reproductive technology to achieve pregnancy:

So we went through IVF in order to have her.

(Kevin, 63)

In the end we reverted to IVF.

(Trevor, 55)

They said well, your only option's IVF.

(Joe, 46)

However, these men did not indicate the source of their fertility problems or if paternal age had been a contributory feature.

It was apparent that when they had contemplated fatherhood, participants had considered their age to be a factor. They were aware of the prospect of being older fathers and were concerned about how this might impact on their fathering role, but none had felt they were too old to become a father:

To some extent it [age] was a consideration but with the view that actually it shouldn't be catastrophic, there shouldn't be no particular reason not to be an older dad.

(Dave, 52)

However, a degree of caution was evident in some participants' recollections of how they had contemplated the possibility of fatherhood: 'I probably raised the conversation to say: 'if we are going to, can we do it sooner rather than later?'' (Jim, 44). Others described how estimating the age they would be when their child reached certain milestones had been a consideration. Ian, for example, echoing Dave's words ('it was a consideration') explained how he and his wife had calculated the ages they would be at various stages in their future child's life:

Well obviously it [age] was a consideration but it wasn't going to put us off. We kept re-doing the calculations about, you know, 'How old are we gonna be when our child gets to 18 and gets to this age and gets to this age?', and those ages kept getting later and later and later, but we were thinking, 'Well it's still manageable, you know, we won't be completely over the hill'. We never really

got to the point where we thought 'Oh, hang on, no this is now gonna be unfeasible'.

(Ian, 58)

Ian was 52 when his son was born, and his wife was ten years younger. He described how they had experienced reproductive difficulties:

I mean we had been ... I always find the expression 'trying for a child' rather comical I'm afraid (laughs), but we had been trying and ... and I think partly because of her age ... she'd had a couple of miscarriages ...

(Ian, 58)

Ian did not suggest an age that he or his wife would have had to reach for parenthood to have been, in his words, 'unfeasible', nor did he explain – at this early point in his interview – why, or in what way, he felt parenthood at a later age might not have been viable. However, comments he later made about the suitability of men considerably older than himself becoming fathers (see Chapter 9, Section 9.3) shed light on his views about the acceptability of much older fatherhood.

Notwithstanding age-related concerns, participants did not suggest that they had been averse to the prospect of fatherhood. Joe for example, described how he had always been keen to become a father and had not needed persuasion to start a family:

I've always wanted children, it's not something that, you know, 'Look at me, I've changed my tune' and that I've been convinced to have children, it's far from it. I've always enjoyed the idea of at some point becoming a father.

(Joe, 46)

However, one participant said he had approached paternity with some caution. In the following extract Kevin explains his primary motivation for having a child and reveals his initial reservations about fatherhood:

I just wanna make my wife happy to be honest! You know, and I didn't know how good I was gonna be as a father, and you get used to living a certain way, for a long time so I wasn't confident about being really good at it. I didn't know how easy it was gonna be, how difficult it was gonna be, but my wife was keen and I wanted to make her happy and I thought 'Well, I'll go with it ... I like a project!' (laughs).

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin suggested – possibly light-heartedly – that his wife's wish to have a child had been his primary motivation for becoming a father. This altruistic incentive, combined with his uncertainty about his potential paternal abilities ('... how good I was gonna be') and recognition of at least one possible consequence of later paternity – one of his pre-fatherhood concerns had been: 'I'm sure there'll be people think I'm her bloody grandfather' – portray a man who, in the early phase at least, seemed uncommitted to fatherhood.

However, Kevin was 57 when his daughter was born, having previously accepted he was not going to be a father: 'I just assumed I guess that it would never happen'. Therefore, in addition to his concern for whether he would be 'really good at it', it is reasonable to assume that his reservations also reflected his concern for the life-changing impact fatherhood would have for him, and his suspicion that undergoing first-time fatherhood in his late 50s would be substantively different from experiencing it as a younger man. Nonetheless, having decided (or perhaps, given his comments, 'agreed') to become a father,

Kevin had wished to be an effective one and he later substantiated his remark:

'I like a project!', when describing his preparations for fatherhood:

If I get into something, then whatever it is, I research everything, you know, and find out the ways of doing things ... buy the books, go online, I find out as much as I can to prepare myself so I can do the best possible job at whatever it is, you know?

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin's purposeful preparation for fatherhood showed how one participant began to incorporate a sense of paternal identity into his existing self-image (the establishment of a paternal identity linked to older fatherhood is discussed in Chapter 10, Section 10.4). Kevin was aware that fatherhood would require new skills and understandings and therefore sought information in order, as he said, to: 'find out the ways of doing things'.

Other participants' comments also suggested that they had started to form a separate paternal identity during the pre- and post-natal periods. This time of transition was therefore important to them, both in terms of adjusting to the prospect of becoming a father and in establishing a new self-image shaped by fatherhood. For some of the men, awareness of older fatherhood as something out of the ordinary increased when they informed friends and family members of their wife or partner's pregnancy. In the following extract, Mike recalls how people responded to his announcement that he was going to be a father:

Well I think there were initially comments from my mother who whilst she hadn't made any comments before then suddenly ... sort of erupted with sort of 'Oh, my goodness, thank goodness for that, I thought that would never happen'. So that was kind of like ... I suppose it was interesting because ... it sounds strange, but I'd not been aware ... it sounds like I was incredibly blind or naïve

or something, but I'd not been aware of not having fulfilled any familial duties previously, but suddenly it was like 'Oh, at last' and then I suppose there was one or two similar comments from other people and ... in the social network there were friends who sort of seemed erm shocked and surprised, but in a ... positively, but 'Wow, that's amazing!', 'Oh, gosh!', you know 'I never thought that was going to happen' and 'Good for you ... that's a real surprise'.

(Mike, 53)

Mike had evidently not felt any pressure to fulfil 'familial duties' in relation to fatherhood and had therefore been surprised at his mother's response.

However, her reaction plus those of others indicated to him that prospective fatherhood in his mid to late-40s was unexpected. It seemed that Mike's self-identification as an older father began at this point. Other participants recalled similar reactions that revealed other people's assumptions about their childless state:

There was a lot of relief ... 'Oh, you must be so relieved' and 'Oh, it's about time, isn't it?' or, 'Oh, we thought, you weren't ... it was never gonna happen'.

(Joe, 46)

Generally, people, friends and family were pleased ... there were a few comments along the lines of 'Oh you know I didn't think it was gonna happen'.

(Dave, 52)

Common to each of these accounts is the response of 'I thought it would never happen'. Prospective fatherhood for these men was evidently not expected and it seems reasonable to infer that the surprised reaction of friends and family contributed to participants' sense of 'social difference'; of having done something unexpected that set them apart from men of a similar age. Mike referred to the 'caveat' that accompanied people's congratulations:

It wasn't just 'Oh, that's nice news', there was always a caveat to it ... 'I'd just assumed that you weren't going to have children'.

(Mike, 53)

Some of the men recalled how, during the prenatal period, meeting other expectant fathers heightened their awareness of themselves as prospective older fathers. Mike, for example, became increasingly aware of the age difference between himself and other soon-to-be parents:

It was initially just a recognition that people we were meeting were not in the same position age-wise. The average age of parents-to-be that we were meeting, for example through NCT [National Childbirth Trust] groups, were obviously much younger. I did start to think 'Well, you know, I realise that I'm older than other people'. And it didn't worry me at that point but just sort of, 'Oh yeah, that's interesting, that's different'.

(Mike, 53)

Therefore, participants' accounts of the transition to fatherhood, including their preconceptual decision-making, suggested that an awareness of older fatherhood and attributing meanings to that experience began at an early stage. They talked further about the transformative effects of fatherhood as they described its impact on their previously child-free lives.

6.2 The impact of fatherhood

'Suddenly this thing happened and changed my life entirely'

Participants recounted their practical and emotional response to becoming a father as they recalled the pleasure and pride, plus the anxiety and challenges, they encountered in their new role. Pete, for example, commented on how his

behaviour changed following the birth of his first child, and how he attributed some of the changes to him being an older father:

I could see myself in a different way ... and because it was later in life it changed me very significantly, because I was already quite set in my ways, it set me off on a different direction. I was 47 and suddenly this thing happened and changed my life entirely. The three months after my daughter was born I gave up smoking, which I'd been ... I'd been a smoker all my life so it was like I was able to transform myself because this thing had happened. So ... the actual becoming a father was an enormous change in my life in a way that it might not have been for a younger man ... or maybe it is, I don't know, maybe it is for everyone.

(Pete, 61)

Pete contemplated whether the impact of fatherhood would have been the same: 'for a younger man'. His comments suggest that fatherhood at 47 had a profound effect ('I was able to transform myself...'), although his uncertainty about the extent to which age played a part in this transformation highlights a difficulty he, and other participants, experienced when evaluating their paternal experiences against those of their younger paternal peers.

Like Pete, other participants described the impact of fatherhood on long-standing perspectives. The average age at the birth of a participant's first child was 46.5 years (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3) and adapting to fatherhood had entailed considerable adjustment for men who, apart from commitments to jobs and relationships, had apparently experienced relatively independent pre-fatherhood lifestyles. Mike (53) observed that he had: '... carried on being a sort of 30 something well into my late 40s cos I didn't have the responsibilities' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1). Similarly, Kevin remarked that before he became

a father he was: ' ... probably quite set in my ways'. Elaborating on this, he explained how he felt fatherhood had changed him:

I think I've changed a bit since I become a father, when you're on your own it's quite a selfish existence really to be honest, you're just ... looking at making yourself happy, doing things you like, so all of that is quite different now, I mean you've got someone else to think of first and foremost ... things that used to be important aren't so important anymore, you know, like having a fancy car or whatever it is, it's so irrelevant really.

(Kevin, 63)

When describing the impact of fatherhood, some participants also talked about how it had given them a renewed sense of purpose. In the following extract, Keith offers an alternative perspective to the view that fatherhood imposes restrictions on a man's lifestyle. He felt that his previous child-free middle-age had, in fact, been limiting and compared this to the more vigorous and positive approach to life he had experienced since becoming a father:

You get to a point in your life where you think 'My best days are behind me' (laughs). Doors start closing rather than opening and you feel that the world starts closing in on you a little bit. But having a child just springs it all open again and you think 'Well actually we can' ... you get that youth and joy and energy every day in your life. I don't think anyone thinks of their own child as being normal, but maybe it feels just that bit more special when you're an older dad.

(Keith, 45)

Other fathers endorsed the positive impact of later paternity and echoed Keith's comments regarding its transformative, energising effects:

I reckon being an older dad stops you from having a mid-life crisis. Your life is so completely different to what it was before. I think most people find as they get older, time seems to pass quicker, that you know, it's January one year, blink of an eye it's January the next year. When you become a father ...

certainly an older father ... that slows down again because you're having so many different new experiences all the time.

(Dave, 52)

For some of the fathers, the 'new experiences' that Dave referred to included becoming more involved in their local community, having become more sensitive to socio-political decisions that now affected both themselves and their children. In the following extract, in which Keith articulates this emerging sense of social responsibility, his use of the term 'stakeholder' effectively captures his concern for the society in which his daughter will grow up and his desire for greater social engagement:

I've always been quite political but now it seems even more vital to me. It's the consequences for my daughter that really sort of makes me worry 'Are we making the right choices? Is this the right way for the country to be going? Is this the kind of society I want her to grow up in?' And on a sort of micro level you want to make a difference locally. I can't change Brexit or whatever else, but I can pick up the litter in my street, I can join the local residents' association, I can put myself forward to be on the board of governors at the school. So suddenly you feel that, you really want to make a difference; that you're a stakeholder, whereas previously I thought 'Well, whatever, I'll be fine, I'll sort myself out'

(Keith, 45)

Becoming a father therefore had a considerable impact on these men. Although the transformative effects of fatherhood may be familiar to fathers of all ages, the men in this study perceived these to be greater – or in some ways different to those of younger fathers – due to them having fathered at a later age. The idea of having been 'set in my ways' prior to fatherhood was referred to, or implied, by most participants and fatherhood's impact was more pronounced as a result of this. It was particularly noticeable that two of the participants pointed to the energising effects of fatherhood: 'you get that youth and joy and energy

every day in your life' (Keith); 'it stops you having a mid-life crisis' (Dave).

Establishing a paternal identity, informed by both paternal understandings and social awareness, were clearly evident in their accounts as they described how they had relinquished a previously 'selfish existence' (Kevin) to take on the responsibilities of fatherhood. As Keith observed: 'maybe it feels just that bit more special when you're an older dad'.

Having examined the impact of fatherhood, the next part of this chapter explores participants' accounts of their involvement in day-to-day fathering.

6.3 Practical involvement

'So I'm very hands-on, very involved'

All the men portrayed an active, involved fathering role. The average age of their children was just over six years (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3) and therefore childcare was a key component of most participants' day-to-day domestic routine. Each showed a strong connection, both practically and emotionally, to their children's everyday lives. For example, both Keith (45) and Ian (58) described themselves as: 'Very hands-on ... very involved'. Keith explained how he had been so since the birth of his daughter:

I was there at the birth, I helped at the birth, I cut the cord, I was in the birthing pool with my wife, the whole thing. I suppose because she's our first child and I'm a bit older she's a little bit spoiled ... not materially but, you know, we give her a lot of time, we give her a lot of attention. I'm quite playful with her, I like to spend time playing with her and having fun and running around.

(Keith, 45)

Each participant indicated his individual commitment to the responsibilities of childcare; describing involvement in a range of activities, including meal preparation, getting children ready in the morning, taking them to and from school, engaging in play, helping with homework, and putting children to bed at night. The following extract from Dave's interview offers a detailed account of his regular childcare commitments:

So, weekdays I'll get them up and ... somewhere through getting them their breakfast my wife will normally go off to work. Finish breakfast, get their teeth cleaned, get them washed, dressed. Drive them to school; get them into the 'fore school club. I head off to work. Finish work, come back collect them at about five o'clock from the after school club. They get to watch television while I get their food. They have some free play time, then it's bath, stories, bed ... I like to have them asleep by eight o'clock and my wife will get home anywhere between half-past six and half-past seven. So you've probably gathered from that I'm the main parent. Weekends, I get them up ... the morning routine's much the same as for a school day but more relaxed. I take them to ballet and tap, or if we're not doing that we'll go out to town ... by and large there'll be birthday parties ... there'll be something to do. As you can see, it won't come out on the tape, there's a lot of toys round the house, so we spend quite a long period on a Saturday and Sunday in play. At some stage of the weekend we'll normally go out and have a meal out. The younger one loves nature so we go out in the garden or to the local park, and they'll play on the swings and slides ... as we head round to the better weather, we'll be getting bikes out of the garage ...

(Dave, 52)

As this extract shows, Dave portrayed a very 'hands-on' fathering role and his involvement in his daughters' day-to-day lives was considerable. Both Dave and his wife worked full-time and he explained that, as he worked closer to home, they had agreed that he should assume the greater share of day-to-day childcare duties. He neatly encapsulated this division of responsibilities in his remark: 'I'm the main parent'. It was clear that Dave acknowledged the pragmatic consequences of full-time employment for both himself and his wife, and that he regretted their extensive reliance on childcare: 'I think the poor girls

spend too much time in out-of-school-hours care rather than with their mum and dad'. However, he reconciled his regret with the possibility that he may be able to take early retirement in the not-too-distant future, which would allow him more time to spend with his daughters:

Rather than have all the before school club and after school clubs and holiday clubs, they'll actually have a stay-at-home parent. I'm thinking early retirement is there as a possibility and that would be very useful for my girls as they head into their latter part of their childhood.

(Dave, 52)

The prospect of taking early retirement and the perceived benefits this would offer to Dave and his family were an indication of a potential advantage of older fatherhood in relation to a father of young children having the opportunity to reduce his working hours, or stop work completely, in order to devote more time to his fathering role.

Other participants' accounts echoed Dave's portrayal of substantial domestic involvement. For example:

It tends to be me who gets him up in the morning, gets his teeth brushed and ready for school. Some schooldays I'll walk him to school and some I collect him as well ... a lot of his sort of non-school time he spends either with me or with us as a family. So I'm very hands-on, very involved. Then supper, then it's usually me who gives him a bath, brushes his teeth again (laughs) and listens to him read before he goes to bed.

(Ian, 58)

In the morning, I get him up ... make his breakfast, get him ready for school ... and then come the afternoon, most days I go get him from school, get him home, get him sorted out from school, get the tea ...

(Mike, 53)

I'll make her breakfast, I'll polish her shoes, I'll put her snack box together for school and then sometimes I take her to school; sometimes her mum takes her. If I pick her up from school I'll sometimes go in a supermarket with her ... and then we'll go home ... so I make her tea when we get home.

(Kevin, 63)

One participant felt that some of his friends had been surprised at the extent to which he had applied himself to his paternal role:

A lot of my friends who have children often remark on the fact that I'm much more engaged with my daughter and her friends, doing things on an active basis, than they would have expected ... that because I was an older professional I would not have time for that, or wouldn't see it as interesting or engaging myself, but I love it.

(Trevor, 55)

Trevor's comment suggests a reason why his friends may have been surprised at his commitment to his paternal role. His use of the term 'older professional' to describe how he thought his friends viewed him implies that they (and possibly Trevor himself) regarded the combination of advanced age and a professional role as incompatible with involved fatherhood. Contrary to such perceptions, Trevor felt that being older increased his sense of paternal engagement and, moreover, that his daughter benefitted from this:

I think she gains in those areas where I have more interest and more engagement with what she's doing and the things she's interested in than a younger father might.

(Trevor, 55)

In addition to their involvement in the day-to-day responsibilities of childcare, participants talked about sharing a variety of one-to-one activities with their children. These ranged from reading together: 'I'm still fortunate enough to read a bedtime story' (Harry, 54), going for walks: '... finding stones and fossils and

things' (Kevin, 63), and travelling abroad: We've introduced our daughter to the joys of travel at a young age' (Trevor, 55).

Ian described some of the regular activities he engaged in with his six-year-old son. His comments convey a sense of emotional closeness and paternal pleasure that was typical of other participants' accounts:

So we do the shopping together, we usually on a Saturday go for a swim in the afternoon for a fun ... they have this thing called 'splash about session' where the pool is just full of parents and kids and big floats and loud music playing, and it's a bit anarchic but it's good fun and we swim about a bit. And we do other things like last weekend we baked a cake together and we went for a bike ride. And also just spending a lot of time just talking, a lot of time just in each other's company talking about this, that and the other.

(Ian, 58)

Like Ian, six other participants had only one child, and their level of involvement suggested that a lack of siblings had allowed them to devote more attention to their child's needs. Mike referred to this when discussing his five-year-old son's demand for parental attention:

Of course, he doesn't have a sibling, so he's constantly driven to seek us out and to want us to play and so we try to sort of balance that between us, my wife and I so that, you know, 'Oh, I'm knackered now, could you play with him for a bit?'

(Mike, 53)

With regard to their everyday paternal role, the overall impression these men conveyed was both positive and optimistic. Their involvement in fatherhood was considerable and each man appeared to have successfully adapted to his practical responsibilities as a father. The substantial extent to which participants were 'hands-on' in relation to childcare was obvious. It was also noticeable that

when talking about their domestic responsibilities, participants rarely referred to their wives' or partners' involvement in these tasks. Although some talked about how they shared childcare duties with their wife or partner, there was no suggestion that the men were resentful of their level of domestic involvement or that any of them viewed the practical, domestic aspects of parenting and childcare as implicitly gendered.

Having examined older fatherhood in terms of its impact and participants' practical involvement in fathering, the next part of this chapter considers the extent to which their accounts indicated emotional connection to their paternal role.

6.4 Emotional engagement

'It's just a lovely feeling'

As described above (Section 6.3), participants' descriptions of their domestic routines, childcare responsibilities and shared father-child activities offered clear evidence of their practical involvement in fatherhood. However, their emotional engagement was also evident in the sense of satisfaction and pleasure they conveyed when they described their role and talked about being with their children. The following extracts effectively convey the sense of close emotional connection that was demonstrated across the interviews:

To have children in your life is an extraordinary thing that happens to you, and you watch them grow up and it is a blessing without a doubt. For that to have

happened ... for that to happen at any age is good, for it to happen at an older age when you're relatively set in your ways is quite ... quite an experience.
(Pete, 61)

I love running around with her, having a laugh, get to the park, just ... seeing her laugh, seeing her wide-eyed at the ducks or the dandelions and just creating experiences for her to be ... to be happy, to see the world.
(Keith, 45)

It's just the magic of parenthood ... of seeing the children, and I think I can so appreciate it now. I think you have appreciation of ... things as you're older that you don't really have the tools to appreciate when you're younger. I think there's ... you know, I sort of look out of this window and I can see a beautiful purple tulip sort of thing.
(Joe, 46)

Revealing participants' emotional responses to and engagement with fatherhood was a less straightforward process than ascertaining their practical involvement. For example, Pete struggled to articulate the emotional impact of fatherhood: '... quite ... quite an experience', and Keith's description of his daughter's 'wide-eyed' response to the world around her seemed to reflect his own sense of wonder at the pleasure that fatherhood had given him. Joe was slightly more expressive as he revealed how both age and fatherhood had made him more sensitive to his surroundings and appreciative of the 'magic of parenthood'.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, participants expressed paternal pride when discussing fatherhood, which further demonstrated their emotional connection to the role:

You hold hands, you know, walking down the street and it's just a lovely feeling, you know, you feel very proud of her and protective and it's just a lovely feeling.
(Kevin, 63)

It is easy to foresee that any father of a young child, regardless of the man's age, might convey Kevin's palpable sense of pride. However, focusing on his comments demonstrates the idiographic nature of IPA and how the exploration of a single case can illuminate a concept such as an older father's emotional engagement in his paternal role. Kevin became a father for the first time at the age of 57 (the oldest first-time father in the cohort), having previously discounted the possibility of fatherhood (see Section 6.1). The evident delight expressed in this brief comment, plus recognition of how becoming a father had contributed to his overall well-being, which he referred to at other points during his interview, appeared directly linked to the fact that fatherhood had occurred later in his life:

I've been very, very fortunate, you know, not in every respect, but I've had a pretty good life ok? Doing what I wanted to do, being pretty successful at it ... most of the time ... and for me this is like the icing on the cake, and it's totally different and it's added so much. The best thing is ... is seeing your child develop and ... and erm ... it's hard to describe ... I just love erm ... having her, just ... gosh it's hard, really, really hard to describe. I love so much of it really, to be honest. Someone who erm ... you just instinctively know, they look to you to look after them and they feel safe with you.

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin, like Pete (above), seemed to have some difficulty encapsulating his feelings about fatherhood and the pleasure he gained from the father-child relationship, but his hesitation also conveyed his emotional connection to the role. This connection was further evident when he discussed the negative aspects of older fatherhood. For example, when he contemplated the possibility of him dying relatively early in his daughter's life:

I mean sometimes I feel a bit melancholy ... sometimes, occasionally I'll feel ... you know, you do all the sums in your head, you know, working things out, how old you're gonna be at certain periods and ... will I ever see her get married or anything like that? You know, not that that's a big deal but erm ... those sorts of things you think through and if it's not possible you might feel a little bit sad ... not really sad but a little bit er ... 'be a shame'.

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin said that he regarded emotional openness as an important part of his fathering role, thus indicating accordance with a contemporary notion of emotionally involved fatherhood (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1). He contrasted the open, demonstrative father-child relationship he shared with his daughter with the one he had experienced with his own father:

I think one of the things that's very important to me is to let your children know how proud you are of them; let them really know how much you love 'em and how proud you are of them. Being open about your emotions is a much more natural thing now, I mean I used to shake hands with my dad when I met him, you know, until later in his life, and we'd give each other an awkward sort of hug, you know (laughs), that's the way it was.

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin recognised the greater facility he enjoyed, compared with his own father, to express emotion within and about the father-child relationship. It was also clear that he regarded emotional engagement as an important aspect of his paternal role. Recalling how he used to shake his father's hand, Kevin was acknowledging changes in social expectations of such relationships in which his more demonstrative emotional connection to his daughter is regarded as an appropriate expression of contemporary masculinity (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3).

Across the cohort therefore, the men in this study conveyed, in individual ways, how being a father, being an *older* father, and being with their children provided an emotional focus for their lives.

The next section explores participants' approaches to fatherhood or the 'style' of fathering to which they subscribed.

6.5 Fathering approach

'I still reflect the generational norms of my own childhood'

With regard to a preferred style of fatherhood, participants generally endorsed a tolerant, understanding and encouraging approach, emphasising the need for guidance and discipline. Some referred to the notion of boundary-setting. For example, Harry (54) stated: 'I think children need boundaries and structure', and Joe (46) said he believed that: 'one of my big roles is to establish boundaries'. Kevin (63) also noted that children need: 'boundaries and rules ... that sort of thing'. To explore this further, participants were asked if they felt they adopted a particularly strict or lenient style of fathering. They indicated that, whilst recognising the need to establish clear guidelines, they did not endorse an overly authoritarian approach:

Well, I wouldn't say 'strict', we don't have arguments about getting his teeth brushed or going to bed on time ... just by encouraging him we get him to do these things, rather than strictness. I can barely remember any occasion where we've had to raise our voice to him to get him to do things.

(Ian, 58)

My wife would say I'm too lenient but I think I have quite clear boundaries, with an openness to engaging in a conversation about it, rather than just having boundaries that are inviolable. So in one sense I wouldn't say I'm strict but I have clear boundaries which some people would see as being strict (laughs).
(Trevor, 55)

Making a link between age and his approach to fatherhood, Dave believed that his own childhood experience had influenced his style of fathering. In the following extract, he articulates his approach, identifying features which, he implied, reflected his 'generational norms':

My view is quite a traditional one, that my role is to bring them up in a safe, secure, loving environment, teach them right from wrong, help in their education and development, try and make sure they have a good set of friends and are socially balanced, try and give them a very secure, loving home environment ... I still reflect the generational norms of my own childhood, which is different to the generational norms of a parent in their 20s and 30s. I think I still represent a respect for authority that belongs to the generation I was brought up with, so I'm kind of: 'The police are good, they are there to protect you; authority is there to look after you, not to be treated disrespectfully'. A ... probably a clearer view on right and wrong rather than a more blended morality ... Britain has got this traditional view of fatherhood and you might come across that more of older fathers ... that's formed my world view and that's pretty much how I try and discharge my duties as a father ... that sounds very posh: 'discharge my duties as a father' (laughs) ... I think overall, I'm a bit stricter, and stricter is entirely a verbal strictness of, you know, 'You're in time-out ... if you do that again there will be no chocolate ...' I think I draw my boundaries tighter than a lot of fathers ... today.

(Dave, 52)

Dave's comments allude to some customary understandings of a father's role and responsibilities (see Chapter 2, Sections 2.1 to 2.3). He evidently perceived his paternal obligations in terms of conventionally recognisable paternal functions, such as being a provider, protector and educator. Indeed, he acknowledged this by referring to his 'traditional' view. His comment regarding 'generational norms' stood out from other participants' descriptions of what had influenced their approach to fatherhood (some, for example, referred to the

influence of their own father) and he was therefore the only man in the cohort to explicitly connect his age to his fathering approach. References to terms such as 'authority' and 'disrespect' suggested that he associated his age (and 'norms') with social values he perceived to be lacking in younger parents. He indicated disapproval of what he referred to as 'a more blended morality' which, he implied, influenced younger fathers' approach to the role, but did not elaborate on this. He did however, note that he drew his 'boundaries tighter than a lot of fathers ... today'. Interestingly, Dave assumed that other older fathers might also hold such clearly defined views on fatherhood, although none of the other participants indicated accordance with this.

6.5.1 Comparisons with other parents

'I just get the impression that I talk to our son a lot more than some of the younger parents talk to their children'

Participants made various comparisons between themselves and other (mostly younger) parents. Kevin, for example, said he was keen to promote his daughter's creative abilities and to avoid what he regarded as the negative attitudes of some parents:

We're very, very conscious of listening to other parents tell their children 'No, don't do that, don't do that, no you can't do that type of thing' ... and we're very conscious of that and it's ... when you're saying that it seems really negative.
(Kevin, 63)

Echoing Kevin's comment, Pete also contrasted his relatively relaxed paternal approach with that of other parents:

I tend to be lenient. I let them watch films older than their age if I think it's gonna be alright for them, I don't care if they use bad language that much, and a lot of things that some parents would object to I don't.

(Pete, 61)

Both Kevin and Pete's comments suggest a comparatively open-minded parenting approach that is inconsistent with ideas about boundary-setting or the 'traditional' approach to fatherhood outlined by Dave (above). Although neither Kevin nor Pete suggested that being older influenced their liberal approach to parenting, both conveyed a sense of what appeared to be age-related confidence in describing how their approach differed from that of other parents.

Comparisons with other parents were also demonstrated when Ian described how he and his son interacted. He suspected this was different from how younger parents communicated with their children:

I just get the impression that I talk to our son a lot more than some of the younger parents talk to their children ... and I think people sometimes seem to be a bit surprised that we talk so much and the nature of the conversation ... we just constantly talk about all sorts of things ... about books and places and people and so on and when we're doing that I quite often work-in things that I've done or happened to me when I was younger and so on, and there's just a lot more experience to draw on.

(Ian, 58)

Ian's belief that he interacted more (or perhaps, more effectively) with his child than younger parents do with their children was linked to him being older and having a more extensive range of experiences to discuss. Later in his interview, Ian talked again about other parents and how he sensed that he and his wife enjoyed parenthood more than some younger parents. In the following

extended extract he explains this and, in doing so, identifies a particular advantage to being an older father (see Chapter 9, Section 9.1):

Ian: The other thing that's always struck me is ... for me and my wife is that we seem to enjoy parenthood more than a lot of younger parents. A lot of the young parents seem to be permanently grumpy and cheesed off about various aspects of their child or the fact that they can longer do the things they used to like doing and so on. Whereas we just seem to be more positive about it and enjoying it more ... I think older parents just seem to enjoy the whole experience more than younger parents.

Chris: Why do you think that is?

Ian: I think some of the young parents they seem to ... I can't think of a better word than say they sort of almost 'resent' the changes that have come about as a result of having the child, there's things that they can't do anymore ... or that are much more difficult to do. Whereas I think when you're older you've probably done all those things, you know, you've done all the sort of late night partying and fancy restaurants and so on and in some senses parenthood is sort of ... you know, it's sort of another big adventure really ...

Chris: Yes

Ian: I mean one of the things I'm actually aware of in the office where I work is that I know virtually nothing about the latest trends in cinema or television programmes or anything like that, but at this point I'm not that fussed to be honest (laughs) whereas I think younger people think 'oh, I'm missing out on all these latest things' ... whereas I think when you get older you think 'well it's nice to know these things but it's not actually essential'.

This was a particularly clear example of a participant differentiating his fathering experience from that of other parents. Ian was keen to highlight what he saw as marked differences between his own (and his wife's) approach to parenthood and that of younger parents. He conveyed a sense of confidence in his age in relation to his paternal role, emphasising the enjoyment he derived from fatherhood and how this seemed less apparent in other parents. His comments

regarding having 'done all the late night partying' suggested that age allowed him to devote himself to fatherhood in a way that he suspected younger parents were unable to as a consequence of social distractions that conflicted with their paternal responsibilities. His words echoed those of another participant (Dave) who, when reflecting on his younger self, said that he too had: 'done enough going out of an evening' (see Chapter 9, Section 9.2).

Chapter summary

By examining a range of practical and emotional factors, this chapter has explored the experience of 'doing older fatherhood'. Participants' accounts portrayed a largely positive, affirmative experience, and it was clear that the men willingly engaged in, and actively applied themselves to their paternal role.

There are two distinct threads running across the narratives explored in this chapter, each enhances understanding of the experience of older fatherhood. The first reflects the men's awareness, even prior to the birth of their first child, that being older would be a significant factor in their fathering experience. The second illustrates how each man, through practical and emotional involvement in fatherhood and contemplating its impact, began to construct a specific identity linked to older fatherhood. Theoretical discussion of paternal identity linked to older fatherhood follows in Chapter 10 (Section 10.4).

The next chapter broadens the analysis of participants' experiences by examining their relationship, as older fathers, to the wider social world.

7 Older fatherhood: A social perspective

This chapter explores the social context within which participants experienced older fatherhood. It is based on the second of four super-ordinate themes: *Social difference*. This theme brought together two thematic clusters: *Social attitudes* and *A social phenomenon*, plus emergent themes such as: *Fathering in public*, *Social acceptance* and *Relationships (with other fathers)* (Appendix L). These encapsulated participants' accounts of the social world they encountered as older fathers, and the meanings they attributed to being an older father in relation to that world.

The chapter begins by exploring participants' relationships with their social and paternal peers, demonstrating their awareness of being both socially and paternally 'out-of-step'. It then proceeds to examine the men's experiences of being an older father in public, demonstrating how the responses of other people informed their understanding and sense-making in relation to later paternity. Following this, an exploration of broader societal responses to older fatherhood reveals how participants were required to negotiate uncertain social attitudes to advanced paternal age. Next, the chapter considers the influence of media representations of older fatherhood and how these contributed to participants' understanding of their paternal experience. Finally, participants' views on older motherhood, and how they perceived contrasting societal attitudes to older mothers and older fathers, are examined. The chapter concludes with a brief summary, indicating its key theoretical implications and outlining the focus for the third 'findings' chapter.

7.1 Being paternally 'out-of-step'

'Nobody else has a five-year-old'

Participants conveyed a sense of social difference at various points during the interviews. Following their children's births, being paternally 'out-of-step' with friends who had had children at an earlier stage in their lives enhanced the men's sense of social difference. For example, it was not uncommon for an interviewee to be the only one in his social group to be the parent of a young child:

Because my own and my wife's peers have all had their families, or have not had families, we have nobody in our immediate sort of social circle who have school age children ... certainly nobody else has a five-year-old ... our friendship network doesn't correlate with our experience.

(Mike, 53)

Prior to becoming parents, Trevor and his wife had acknowledged that their lives would be at variance with those of their friends, but had not been concerned about this:

In an odd sort of way we thought about it as a 'curious fact', you know, that we would end up being out of sync with our peers but didn't worry about it as such.

(Trevor, 55)

Jim recalled the positive attention he received from friends when his daughter was born, and attributed this to the relative infrequency of childbirth within his social circle. He compared the attention he and his partner received when their daughter was born to his own relative indifference, as a younger man, to his friends having children at normative ages:

I think they were more excited than me, I don't know if it's just because there's been a long gap since there's been any children born. And the thing that really surprised me was that they all sent clothes and gifts, and I'd never thought of sending ... cos they were all having kids at the same time ... you just think 'Oh, you're having your baby, that's nice'. It seems as if we're the special ones, so it was really humbling ... everyone was really happy.

(Jim, 44)

Jim's comments highlight the social discordance experienced by some of the other participants. By having a child at a non-normative age his parenting was conspicuous in a way that his friends' parenting had not been. He recognised that, from the perspective of his social peer group, later paternity was particularly notable and that consequently he and his partner were 'the special ones'.

Kevin reflected on how his long-term friends might think about him having become a father, for the first time, at the age of 57:

I've got a lot of friends ... college friends and ... all their kids have grown up and gone. So I'm sure they'll look at me and think 'Blimey, [Kevin's] got a daughter of six and ours are all at uni or they've left uni ... have got professions ...' or whatever. Because they knew me when I was younger and they've gone through a completely different sort of lifestyle really.

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin's imagining of how his friends might respond ('Blimey ...') is an expressive illustration of the disparity between their lifestyles, and echoes the surprised reactions of participants' family and friends on receiving the news of impending older fatherhood (See Chapter 6, Section 6.1).

A further consequence of being paternally 'out of step' was that it reduced opportunities for support from friends going through the same paternal (or

parental) experience. Ian, for example, talked about how he and his wife found it: 'almost impossible, to get the family support that younger parents get'. He attributed this to the fact that his parents were elderly and his siblings, having had children at an earlier age, had now returned to work and were therefore unable to offer him a great deal of support. Ian felt this was a particular drawback, for both him and his wife, of being older parents:

So you don't have this ... being able to call on people at short notice if there's a problem. I think younger parents have that practical side of parenthood a lot easier ... they've got family or friends who are at the same point in their life who, you know, they've been to school with, they've grown up with, and now they're having children at more or less the same age so they can work these things out together.

(Ian, 58)

Kevin reiterated Ian's concerns. He too contrasted his situation, in relation to available support, to that of younger parents:

Being older, you don't necessarily have the same sort of support network you would as a younger parent. So you don't have youngish grandparents to look after ... babysit. So my dad's not around, my mum's 88, you know, and lives up north ... so we've not had any of that support network.

(Kevin, 63)

The idea of being paternally 'out-of-step' was not regarded as a particular disadvantage; rather it was part of the overall experience of older fatherhood that contributed to participants' understanding and sense-making. Awareness of being at variance with the norm was also evident when the men discussed their relationships with other (mostly younger) fathers.

7.2 Relating to other fathers

'What have we got in common really, other than the children?'

Most participants claimed to have limited contact with other fathers and some acknowledged that their age, particularly with regard to associating with fathers younger than themselves, contributed to this. Mike regretted what he perceived to be the lack of opportunity to corroborate his fathering identity and evaluate his paternal role in comparison to his paternal peers:

I don't know any other fathers ... in my sort of little interpersonal world, there are very few points of reference, which feels difficult. It's very difficult to measure and know how you're doing.

(Mike, 53)

However, Mike said he was starting to get to know some of the parents of his son's school friends: 'Predictably the ones who are a bit older (laughs)', and that he hoped this might present opportunities for him to develop supportive social relationships with other fathers.

Some participants commented on the predominance of mothers within child-focused settings. They felt that this limited opportunities for interaction with other fathers. Ian, for example, talked about taking his son to school:

There's very rarely other fathers there, it tends to be the mums who are taking the kids or dropping them off. So I don't really have that much contact with other fathers to be honest.

(Ian, 58)

Keith said he had expected to feel uncomfortable as a lone father attending social events with his daughter, but was surprised that a lack of fathers in social settings had not prevented him forming relationships with other parents. He felt being older had, in fact, facilitated social relationships with some of the mothers he encountered:

You go to the park or you go to some kind of soft play thing, whatever it is, parties that people have, and I always thought that it would be awkward as a dad, particularly if I was with my daughter on her own, to have interactions with other mums. But it's been much easier than I'd anticipated, much more 'normal' and I wonder whether me being older is a factor in that, that if I was younger maybe it might be a little bit more uncomfortable.

(Keith, 45)

An interpretation of Keith's remarks is that he sensed that mothers found him, as an older man, less socially intimidating. He gained confidence from this, and as a consequence, social interaction with those mothers became easier, both for him and for them.

Across the cohort, participants reported limited interaction with younger fathers. Some referred to their lack of shared interests as a reason for this:

Probably by choice, sub-conscious choice, you know, I'm not gonna gravitate towards fathers in their 20s or 30s around the schoolyard, you know, just because I don't have much in common with them.

(Trevor, 55)

There are some 20-somethings in the school, sort of playground type thing and I don't have much to do with them, not through any wilfulness or choice, it's just what have we got in common really, other than the children?

(Joe, 46)

Both Trevor and Joe portrayed their reluctance to associate with younger fathers in similar terms; each suggesting that having things 'in common' would be a likely basis upon which to form such relationships. The fact that each was inclined to seek out fathers closer to his own age echoed Mike's observation (above) that the parents he had started to get to know at his son's school were: '... predictably the ones who are a bit older'. This was confirmed when Joe discussed his relationships with his social peer group. Although he did have social contact with fathers younger than himself, the fathers he mainly associated with were still quite close to him in age, which is something he claimed not to have considered prior to the interview:

Most of them I would say ... actually no, that's interesting, I think a lot of them are in their early 40s ... only think I'm a few years away from some of them. That's very interesting actually, I've never really thought ... yeah, they're generally, the ones we're sort of with ... some are in their 30s, but not really any 20-somethings.

(Joe, 46)

Therefore, the younger fathers Joe associated with were not very much younger than him, and the relatively narrow age gap between them enabled him to take a fully participative role in the social activities of the group:

I don't ever find myself going 'Oh, I'm not gonna do that, I'm past ...' you know, when we have dads' nights out, I still go, I'm still involved ... whatever happens I'm there, I don't think 'Oh no, you boys carry on', do you know what I mean? We're all into similar things at this stage.

(Joe, 46)

Joe's comment about being 'into similar things' reflects remarks made both by himself and Trevor concerning their need to have something 'in common' with younger fathers in order to form effective relationships. It also suggests that, as

an older father, he was more likely to associate and feel comfortable with fathers of a similar age to himself. Joe acknowledged this, stating that he would be less inclined to socially participate if the age gap between him and the other fathers was greater:

I just don't think I could do it , I don't think I could ... do those sort of, you know, if all the dads around me were late 20s, let's put it that way, and they said 'Oh, we're gonna go out, we gonna go out into XXX' [nearby city] and ... 'Oh, I can't do that!'

(Joe, 46)

In addition to age differences, a barrier to forming relationships with younger fathers was the apparent disparity in their life-stages. For example, in the following extract Mike appears to have difficulty explaining what he sees as the differences between him and younger fathers:

I just sometimes feel a little bit awkward and a little bit like I've got to somehow quantify or justify what my position is. At times, you know, I'm either trying to, I don't know, blend in ... and I'm aware that we're not all on the same ... we're not all in the same position, and other times I have to just have to recognise that there's something different between us ... you know ... you guys are so incredibly young!

(Mike, 53)

In seeking to understand the difficulty Mike experienced relating to younger fathers, his words are informative. Initially, it appeared to be based on the fact that the other fathers were, in his words: 'so incredibly young'. However, as the interview progressed it emerged that his perception of difference was not solely age-related. He recalled a conversation he had with a younger father, in their workplace, regarding a house he (Mike) and his wife were purchasing:

We're in the process of buying a beautiful country home with a massive garden ... and we don't have a mortgage. I've not been a big earner ... I've been lucky, made some good decisions. And I've showed them the place and they've said 'Oh my God how do you afford the mortgage?' ... 'Well we don't have one ... ', 'What ...?' It's a positive of being ... so there are some differences, and the difference is where we are in our lives, apart from actually just being a parent or father, economically it's different ... yeah, I'm in a different world.

(Mike, 53)

It was noticeable that when stating '... it's a positive of being...' Mike did not complete the sentence. He was perhaps unwilling to acknowledge that the financial disparity between him and the younger father also served to emphasise their age difference, further identifying him, from his perspective, as having deviated from the norm in terms of paternal age. It seemed that both his age and lifestyle, in relation to younger fathers, contributed to Mike's sense of identity confusion:

I have an increasingly strong sense that I'm an 'outlier' because, you know, I'm 53 and the other parents that I meet are not.

(Mike, 53)

Mike perceived the disparity between himself and the younger father – their being, as he put it: 'in a different world' – more in terms of their contrasting financial positions than their ages; however, he seemed reluctant to articulate this apparent advantage of being an older father.

Two of the men, who were currently fathers of very young children, contemplated how they might feel in the future when they encounter younger fathers:

Inevitably there's gonna be a point fairly soon when I start rockin' up at the primary school gates ... I anticipate having to go through again the sort of re-setting where I am and ... 'Yes, I'm a bit older but I'm her dad and ... ' again those glances and people working out what the relationship is and ... yeah by that point I'll be approaching 50 and I'll be standing round the school gates with fathers more than half my age and inevitably there's gonna be a gap there ... it doesn't bother me.

(Keith, 45)

Jim, whose daughter was one year old at the time of his interview, had also considered how he might feel when she starts school and he encounters fathers considerably younger than himself:

One of the things about having a child as well, at that age, was turning up when you're speaking to 22 year olds who are fathers ... of friends of your daughter.

(Jim, 44)

Describing himself as 'adaptable', Jim was hopeful this would not be a problem for him as he was optimistic about his future engagement with other fathers:

I'm interested in people from all ways, shapes and forms ... that is one thing I am looking forward to is the interactions and having to speak to some bloke you've never met before for an hour while you're both watching gymnastics or something.

(Jim, 44)

Jim's comments were revealing with regard to the prospective concerns that an older father might experience while his child is still very young. Jim was already preparing himself for a time when he will be in a more obvious social position as an older father, a time when he would, by being in a public place with his daughter, expose his status as an older father to wider social scrutiny.

7.3 Fathering in public

'I don't feel any discrimination or judgement'

Participants discussed their experiences of fatherhood beyond the home.

Some, for example, described how they regularly accompanied their child to and from school or nursery, while others talked about their shared involvement in a wide range of social activities, including shopping, walks in the countryside, visiting the cinema and family outings.

Keith thought that, when he was out with his family, other people might evaluate him in some way, but not necessarily because he was an older father:

I think the perception probably that most people would form is that we're ... we're quite a tight little unit, the three of us, we quite often go out together, we go walking together or we go around the shops together and ... yeah, I think the perception that people would form is that we're a happy family and that we're probably a little bit excessively doting, I don't know, but we're ... what do you expect? You know ... she's two.

(Keith, 45)

Asked if they were any more aware of being an older father when they were in public places with their children, participants suggested that, mostly, they were no more (or less) aware of older fatherhood in these situations. However, some of the men believed that their physical appearance belied the actual age and that they looked younger than they were (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1).

Keith said that if people were to perceive him to be an older father, it would not concern him:

People's curiosity, interest, amusement, whatever it might be doesn't bother me, I've long ago ceased to care what people think of me ... if people are interested that's fine let them do that, I don't feel any discrimination or judgement. You know, I'm not constantly thinking: 'I'm an older dad, I'm an older dad', occasionally you see the sort of ... the little look to think: 'what's going on there? Is he the dad or is he ...? What's the relationship between him and ... is it his daughter?' You can see the sort of calculus going in people's heads trying to figure it out, but I'm not ... I wouldn't say it's something that is following me around all the time, no.

(Keith, 45)

Similarly, Mike denied being self-conscious with regard to being an older father:

We go to the supermarket, we go to the shops. I'm not, generally speaking ... I'm not self-aware at those times, certainly neither negatively or positively, I don't think I'm sort of that wildly obvious.

(Mike, 53)

However, Joe (46) who, like Keith, also claimed to be unconcerned about what others thought of him, admitted to some unease:

Joe: When I'm walking down the street and I'm walking along with a backpack with baby in there, am I self-conscious?

Chris: Are you aware of being an older father?

Joe: Yeah, if I was absolutely honest. Not very often and I'm more probably aware of middle-aged spread and that type of thing. My wife is a lot more conscious of it. It doesn't change what we do but she is conscious of it. I tend to not be ... it's just cos I'm not that self-conscious, I don't tend to worry what other people think, but I am aware of it I suppose. I've never felt direct judgement of ... 'well, you're a bit old aren't you?' I've never felt that, but I have felt conscious now and again that I'm the oldest dad in the room.

Joe claimed to be 'not that self-conscious', but his comments suggested both an increased awareness of being an older father and some unease at being: 'the oldest dad in the room'. It was noticeable that he attributed his concerns to his

physical appearance – his 'middle-age spread' – which reflected further comments he made regarding his physical condition and how he felt this impacted on his abilities as a father (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2).

Echoing Joe's remarks, other participants acknowledged that their awareness of older fatherhood was heightened when they were in the presence of younger parents:

I might feel a bit of an odd one out if I'm say at the school gates and everybody's obviously younger than me.

(Pete, 61)

Pete's perception of being 'an odd one out' appeared to relate solely to the contrast in ages between him and younger parents. However another participant, Keith, contradicting his earlier claim (above) that he was unconcerned about what people thought of him as an older father, indicated that he was, in fact, aware of being an older father when in public. He attributed this to the manner in which other people reacted when they saw him with his young daughter, or, more specifically, how he suspected they were reacting:

It's the reactions of other people I suppose that make you think that 'Yeah ok, I am an older dad' ... Do they think I'm a kind of irresponsible person who's not gonna be around for their child? Who's just maybe bouncing from one relationship to another? That's one of the stereotypes about older dads isn't it? That they tend to move around a bit and sow their oats and ...

(Keith, 45)

Keith presented a negative perception of older fatherhood, by linking later paternity to a lack of paternal responsibility and commitment. Although he sought confirmation of this view: 'That's one of the stereotypes about older dads

isn't it?' other participants did not echo this critical opinion. However, Keith subsequently indicated a basis for his concerns when he discussed being in the park with his daughter, and in close proximity to other, younger, fathers:

Well if you go to the park on a Sunday afternoon with a two year old and there's other dads there, the chances are they're a good 10, 15 years younger than me ... so just social comparison, I'm standing next to a guy and I'm older, that doesn't bother me necessarily, but it's an inescapable fact and I guess as time goes by I'm gonna start wondering what my daughter thinks of that and, you know, 'Why is my dad older than the other dads at school?'

(Keith, 45)

Keith's reference to his daughter's possible response to having an older father implied that his concern for what others may think of older fathers was linked to a more central concern regarding how older fatherhood might, in time, affect his daughter's perception of him.

The next part of this chapter explores how participants perceived and responded to broader, societal perceptions of older fatherhood.

7.4 Negotiating uncertain social attitudes

'Why have you waited?'

Participants were asked about societal attitudes to older fatherhood, and the effect they had on their own paternal experience. All appeared to be interested in how older fatherhood was socially perceived, and some of the men noted that their participation in this study was motivated by a desire to know more about what other people think about later paternity.

Participants were aware of some of the more commonly voiced social responses, such as those relating to well-known older fathers, whose paternity provides a recurrent source of tabloid media interest (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6 and Section 7.4.1). However, the men generally felt that older fatherhood, whilst having the potential to attract social comment – particularly in relation to 'celebrity' older fathers – was not a topic that aroused a great deal of social comment. A perception conveyed across the interviews was that older fatherhood had become more socially acceptable and less noteworthy:

I think if you look in say, the media or ... you know, books, films, whatever, there's very little portrayal of older fathers, it's almost like they're sort of invisible in a way. They're just not part of the ... I dunno, they're just not part of peoples' view of the world in a sense, so when we pop up in real life we ... (laughs).

(Ian, 52)

I think, at least in this environment, social environment, it is more and more common and less and less remarkable.

(Trevor, 55)

Some participants referred to broader social changes which they believed had increased the social acceptability of (or, possibly, enhanced social indifference towards) older fatherhood:

I think the social patterns have changed, people are getting married, or not getting married, just having open partnerships and having children later in life, that's documented, so I think partly it's just because it's less unusual I would imagine.

(Pete, 61)

However, the overall social acceptability of older fatherhood was questioned by some of the men who believed that while later paternity may well be

increasingly accepted, the environment in which the older father lives, works and socialises remains influential in terms of how his older father status is perceived. Two participants (Jim and Trevor) referred to 'demographic' factors they considered relevant to both the perception and social acceptance of older fatherhood. Their comments on this are now explored.

Firstly, in the following extract, Jim explains how he sensed there were differences in attitudes towards older fatherhood in one part of the country from another:

Whether you're talking about politics, Brexit ... there's different demographics in the UK. I would say further South maybe is more affluent ... and I can say that because I'm from a council estate in the North of England. I imagine some of the people I associated with, going: '44? You've gotta be kidding me! Don't you have 'em at 28?' Whereas if you speak to people in London they'd probably go: 'Sounds sensible, you've had a chance to get high in your career, travel the world, do all the things you want to do', while other people would go: 'Jesus, you're gonna be 60-odd and still have a child in the house ... you've lost your freedom'. One of my friends said: 'I'm gonna be retired at 60 with kids out the way, able to enjoy my life', and I wanted to say to him: 'Cancer? Inability to move? Bad backs? Blah, blah ... What travelling are you gonna do at 60?'

(Jim, 44)

Jim associated economic affluence (suggesting this is greater in the South of England) with acceptance of older fatherhood. He outlined a less tolerant approach, which he compared with what he believed would be the more permissive response: '... if you speak to people in London'. Jim sought to validate his views by referring to his own origins: 'I can say that because I'm from a council estate in the North of England', which suggests that, in addition to the geographical differences he referred to, he also sensed class-based disparities in attitudes towards older fatherhood. Jim countered a further

imagined reaction to older fatherhood: '... you've lost your freedom', with an argument based on physical capacity and the benefits, from his perspective, of living a more active life as a younger man. The way this extract unfolds suggests this was not a completely detached account in terms of how Jim perceived attitudinal differences to older fatherhood. His perception of more tolerant attitudes within his current (South of England) environment assisted him to rationalise his own experience of later paternity with the less impartial, but influential, viewpoints of his personal past. His comments, however, provide insight into one participant's personal perceptions of social attitudes towards older fatherhood.

Secondly, Trevor, who also referred to the influence of 'demographic' differences on people's response to older fatherhood, believed that older fatherhood was not an issue for those with whom he associated. Like Jim, he lived and worked in the South of England, where he held a senior professional position. His comments implied that a relatively older, professional and academically qualified population might be more supportive and accepting of older fatherhood:

I tend to gravitate towards people I've met through other engagements and we all tend to be of a like mind ... age, and it never comes up. Also I think that this environment in XXX, and even in our village, which is seven miles outside of XXX ... my wife was remarking one time that she was with a group of 'mum friends' in the village and they were chatting and they realised that out of the seven around this table in the pub chatting about kids, five of them had PhDs, you know, so in a sense the whole demographic of our village is unusual.

(Trevor, 55)

In addition to their perceptions of social attitudes towards older fatherhood, participants also recalled individual encounters that revealed curiosity regarding their paternal age. For example, some of the men described being questioned about why they had not had children earlier. Joe, who appeared to have enjoyed a busy and rewarding life prior to becoming a father, said that when he had been asked why he had not become a father earlier in his life, he had felt the need to justify his childless years:

I think there's a general 'Why have you waited?' This school reunion I went to a few years ago: 'So what have you been doing with your life then if you've not had children?' You've sort of gotta justify the time you've spent not having children.

(Joe, 46)

Joe felt that his former school friends' questions inferred an underlying evaluation of him and his lifestyle. He went on to talk more about this, explaining how he suspected his childless state led some to make assumptions regarding either his sexuality or his physical health:

Nobody directly questioned my sexuality but you felt it was there. I went with a mate. It was like 'Oh, you turned up with XXX? Is that your girlfriend?' sort of thing. So you have those questions ... 'Are you erm...?' There was also a tentative 'No children?' in that sort of, you know, trying to find out if there's any medical reason.

(Joe, 46)

Joe went on to describe how, once people had excluded reasons of sexual preference or ill-health, they seemed to accept he had made an independent decision to not have children by the time he had reached his late 30s. However, they then proceeded to make comparisons between their lifestyles and his:

After that it was the full-blown 'So what have you been doing? We've had three children, what have you been doing?'

(Joe, 46)

Like Joe, other participants had sensed a need to reconcile their personal stories with seemingly persuasive social imperatives regarding paternal age.

Keith recalled being asked why he had not become a father at an earlier age; pinpointing the assumptions he felt underpinned this question:

Part of my experience of being an older dad, is that I've noticed that other people tend to think that I must have been married before and it hadn't worked out, or I'd left my wife and met somebody else. I've never heard it said out directly, but a couple of times I've had searching questions about 'So how come you've left it so late to have children?'

(Keith, 45)

Keith suspected that people assumed relationship difficulties had prevented him from becoming a father at an earlier age. The implication of this is that they believed he would not have made a voluntary decision to delay paternity until he was in his 40s. Like Joe's former school friends, they seemed to suspect that unexplained, underlying factors had led Keith to older fatherhood. However, he was sympathetic to such an assumption, as he went on to explain:

I don't find that invasive ... I'd be as curious as well cos I think culturally we've been programmed to think of fatherhood being something that you do in your 20s and your 30s.

(Keith, 45)

Keith's reference to 'cultural programming' indicates the influential nature of societal attitudes regarding paternal age. It also suggests he may have asked himself why he had not 'conformed' to expectations of becoming a father in his 20s and 30s.

Participants therefore gained awareness of how society views later paternity through personal perceptions of social attitudes, and by way of individual encounters with those who questioned why they had not fathered sooner. However, across the interviews, the most frequently cited source of social comment on older fatherhood – and by implication, the most readily available source of social attitudes on the phenomenon – were the popular and news media (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6).

7.4.1 The influence of media representations

'I think the press views it as a bit of a joke'

Across the interviews, participants made frequent references to how older fatherhood is represented in the media. They were aware of, and possibly sensitive to, what they considered to be the generally light-hearted – and occasionally disparaging – tone of such reports.

The impact of media portrayals of older fatherhood was particularly noticeable when participants discussed 'celebrity' older fathers. For example, singer Mick Jagger was referred to in nearly all the interviews. From the participants' perspective, it seemed that reports on Jagger's later paternity epitomised how the media represent older fatherhood:

I think we've all sort of occasionally caught, you know, the headline of some red-top going 'Mick Jagger becomes a father at 72'.

(Mike, 53)

I think if you say to somebody 'Name an older dad' they probably wouldn't say me, even if they were a friend, they'll probably say 'Mick Jagger'.

(Joe, 46)

Dave felt that such reports adopted a light-hearted approach, but he sensed a disapproving undercurrent:

The likes of Mick Jagger, Rod Stewart ... I think the press views it as a bit of a joke. I think I've heard the phrase 'geriatric dad' but I might have just made that up from my own mind, but I think the press ... slightly, I'd say with negative overtones suggests that this is something slightly unusual and out of the norm ... with an undertone of not necessarily in a good way.

(Dave, 52)

Dave was unsure whether the term 'geriatric dad' was a phrase he had actually encountered in media reports or if he had formulated it himself. The term's two-word description seems typically *tabloidesque* and, whether or not it emerged from a media source, suggests the influential nature of such a reporting style. Ian had also noted a censorious undertone to media representations of older fatherhood:

Well yeah Mick Jagger ... there's nearly always some sort of undertone of disapproval.

(Ian, 58)

When asked to elaborate on this, Ian said:

Yeah ... of him sort of having another child with ... cos it's nearly always with another woman (laughs) and they seem to be getting younger each time ... but it seems to be more disapproval of his relationship with these increasingly younger women.

(Ian, 58)

Ian identified a moral subtext to appraisals of Mick Jagger, who he felt was criticised both for his promiscuity: '... it's nearly always with another woman', and his partner's age: '... they seem to be getting younger each time'. Pete had also noticed that the mother's age was a focus for media reports of older fathers:

(laughs) Well of course, I mean the subtext is 'Well, he's a bit of a lad, he's still at it and still able to father a child at that age', so there's a little bit of admiration there plus envy because, you know, he's not had a child with a woman his own age, you can be quite sure of that.

(Pete, 61)

Again, as with other participants, Pete had identified – and was, perhaps indicating his sensitivity to – the somewhat flippant or semi-humorous tone adopted in these reports. This was also recognised by Joe:

I think they like to laugh at them, I think it's a comedy. There's two things I see: laughing at older dads ... and then the other thing is: 'He can still get it up then, can't he?' And there's a little bit of 'Well you're not being a real dad, you've just delivered the means for a baby to be made'. And they just laugh at them, you know, just 'You silly old fool, what you doing having kids?'

(Joe, 46)

Here, in addition to what he saw as the comedic aspects of such reporting, Joe identified a further critical undertone; implying that the more senior age older father is: 'not being a real dad', as he has: 'just delivered the means for a baby to be made'. His comments were interpreted as suggesting that media reports implicitly endorse the notion of father-presence as a prerequisite of effective ('real dad') fatherhood. From this perspective, older fathers, particularly men who father at more senior ages; men such as Mick Jagger and his fellow member of the Rolling Stones, Ronnie Wood (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6.2) are

perceived to be less effective fathers as they have less overall time to offer to their paternal role.

It was clear that participants felt this perception of older fatherhood provided a basis for both media humour and disapproval. Although a perceived lack of paternal time may relate to expectations of these men's availability to their child on a day-to-day basis, the sense conveyed in these reports – as perceived by the men in this study – is that the 70-plus new father will have less overall time available to be with his child (to be a 'real dad') due to the prospect (or, likelihood) of him dying or becoming increasingly incapacitated relatively early in that child's life. Therefore, it is the inevitable limitation that an older, older father such as Mick Jagger places on his long-term paternal availability that participants sensed was the focus of media disapproval. However, none of the men in this study appeared to regard themselves in such an older, older father category, and their thoughts on the appropriateness of men becoming fathers at such senior ages are explored in Chapter 9 (Section 9.3).

Keith (45) highlighted the influential nature of media reporting when he talked about media criticism of older fatherhood. He noted how many 'celebrity' older fathers were seen as exceptional and their lifestyles as 'unconventional':

Keith: I suppose rock stars ... you know, members of the Rolling Stones and people like that who carry on having children into late life and ... well they're exceptional aren't they? They tend to be maverick, unconventional, creative-type people and that's kind of what you expect those kinds of people to do, whereas normal people they sort of... sleep in separate beds from the age of 40 ... you know ... it's not the done thing, you know, in respectable society you have children and then you settle down and you lose those urges. I think there's

very interesting social messages around older fatherhood but I'm not a rock star, I don't live a kind of flamboyant lifestyle so I don't think none of that attaches to me.

Chris: So those messages don't have any particular impact on you as a dad yourself?

Keith: No, then again it's all part of the cultural matrix in which perceptions of you are embedded isn't it? You think, you know, 'Is that what people are thinking of me?'.

Keith's reference to 'interesting social messages' about older fatherhood suggested that he felt that the 'celebrity' status of some well-known older fathers allowed them a degree of social latitude in terms of how their paternal age was perceived. These men were therefore not constrained by the social rules that apply to 'normal people' such as himself. He claimed he was able to distance himself from the more sensationalist aspects of media reports. However, his comment: 'Is that what people are thinking of me?' suggests that his concerns for how some people may regard older fatherhood with suspicion (see Section 7.3) were influenced by the approach to later paternity demonstrated in 'celebrity-focused' media reports.

Some participants referred to the greater financial security well-known older fathers may offer their children, and how they felt this, in some way, might compensate for paternal loss at a relatively early stage in a child's life:

I think the advantage that celebrities have is that they, by and large, will have enough money to cushion the impact if age does start to really take its toll.

(Dave, 52)

Jim referred to the entertainer Des O'Connor, who became a father at the age of 72:

Although the child's not going to get a really full father in their life, they're gonna be ... Des O'Connor I assume is a millionaire, so this child's gonna be well looked after, good schools, probably get good connections ... so although they're gonna get some of the full pot of things that ... none of us can give the full suite of things.

(Jim, 44)

Pete made similar observations on the perceived compensations of affluent older fatherhood:

I think because Mick Jagger is a wealthy man, the fact that he is not going to be a good father to his children in some respects, for example, by being alive at some point in their childhood, is overlooked because he can support them so amply in other ways, financially.

(Pete, 61)

The view that financial prosperity might compensate, to some extent, for early paternal loss, reinforces the 'provider model' of fatherhood in which the man's role is perceived primarily in financial terms (see Chapter 2, Sections 2.1 to 2.4). Additionally, Jim's reference to what he termed: 'a really full father', and Pete's more blatant observation: '... the fact that he is not going to be a good father ... by being alive at some point', echoed Joe's remarks regarding the more senior older father: 'not being a real dad', thus emphasising a perceived link between father-presence and successful or effective fatherhood. This is further explored in Chapter 9 (Section 9.3). Overall, however, participants seemed able to separate the somewhat exaggerated reporting of famous older fathers from the realities of their own lives:

I think there's a difference between 'celebrity' older fathers who probably, 90% of the time are on their fifth marriage and have 12 children unaccounted for at the time, you know ... it's a different situation.

(Trevor, 55)

An issue pertaining to older fatherhood, which was widely discussed within the news media in recent years, is the reported association between advanced paternal age and an increased risk for children of congenital disorders and diseases (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1). This did not appear to be an issue of particular importance to participants. However, two of the men did refer to such reports. Trevor (55), for example, was keen to reject the findings of epidemiological studies, stating: 'It's rubbish, you know, and yet, people want to try to show some kind of association'. It was tempting to accept Trevor's dismissal of a link between older fatherhood and adverse health outcomes for children as a reflection of his professional/academic understanding of the issues. However, it seemed that he was also presenting a self-protective stance rather than a purely objective evaluation of the facts. By distancing himself from the negative implications of such reports he was, indirectly, demonstrating the influential nature of media reporting. These reports, he seemed to suggest, were likely to affect people's perceptions of later paternity and, ultimately, of him.

In summary, social attitudes towards older fatherhood, as represented in the news and popular media, influenced participants' self-perception as older fathers. In particular, they informed these men's sense of uncertainty regarding how older fatherhood is socially perceived. This is discussed further in Chapter 10 (Section 10.5).

To further contextualise their perceptions of how older fatherhood is regarded, participants were asked about a more commonly discussed aspect of later parenthood – older motherhood – and if they identified differences in social attitudes towards older fathers and older mothers.

7.4.2 Older fatherhood and older motherhood

'... people probably view it as a little bit, I don't know, unnatural'

Participants noted a relationship between attitudes towards older fathers and older mothers. Dave for instance, sensed that the increasing social acceptability of older fatherhood reflected a corresponding advance in the social approval of older motherhood:

Society in general is becoming more tolerant of it [older fatherhood] particularly as older motherhood is becoming much more common. Older fatherhood comes along with it almost as a parallel activity.

(Dave, 52)

However, some of the men noted that older mothers attract greater social disapproval than older fathers. Two explanations for this were offered, the first of which related to the physiological risks of later maternity and the view that an older mother risks the health of both herself and her child:

I think perhaps for women it's different because there's a biological end point almost where it becomes difficult to conceive, you know, so an older mother might be regarded as irresponsible ... for perhaps risking her health as well as the unborn child ... at an older age ... the risks escalate as you get older.

(Harry, 54)

Harry also acknowledged that the physiological complications of later maternity were a likely source of social disapproval in relation to women pursuing older motherhood and, as a result, they may be considered 'irresponsible'. Ian went further, suggesting that, regardless of its risks or potential consequences, some people may view older motherhood as 'unnatural':

There's a limit to how old an older mother can be, you know, cos it's difficult to be a mother after about 42, 43, whereas in theory, you can be a father at any age. I think people probably view it as a little bit, I don't know, 'unnatural' ... to be honest.

(Ian, 58)

Ian raised an interesting and, within the cohort, unique point with regard to older parenthood. He did not elaborate on what he meant by 'unnatural' in relation to perceptions of older motherhood. However, his remark suggested that such a view was attributable to older motherhood but not older fatherhood. He thus identified a distinct social attitude towards older motherhood.

Keith sensed some inconsistency in aiming such physiologically-based criticism solely at older mothers as, in his opinion, older fatherhood was also a potentially hazardous endeavour:

There's almost discrimination on health grounds that doesn't attach to older fathers. There's a sense that, as you leave it later as a mother, you're taking risks with your body and you're taking risks with the health of your child. None of that attaches to older fathers ... nobody factors the father's health into the equation. You know, I may have been quite derelict in my own care of myself, which means that I've passed on that dereliction to my offspring, but no that's unfactored by society, if you can do it you can do it and if you can't you can't.

(Keith, 45)

Pete cited the physiological risks of older fatherhood that Trevor referred to (see Section 7.4.1); believing these were not highlighted to the same extent as the risks of older motherhood:

I mean there is a biological clock there and people are aware of the higher risk of Down's Syndrome and so on with older mothers. Actually there's a higher risk of problems with children with older fathers as well, there's a general genetic deterioration on both sides but I don't think anyone's critical of fathers for leaving it late.

(Pete, 61)

Notwithstanding health-related concerns, the second explanation for why older mothers might attract greater social disapproval related to participants' perceptions of the powerful socio-cultural status of motherhood. It was suggested that this demanded a higher standard of parental presence (of mothers) than that required of fathers:

Because the mother needs to be there for the child blah, blah, blah, you know ... I think that's the perception because the mother is seen to be more important than the father in terms of looking after the children, it's just a belief system I think.

(Kevin, 63)

And partly it's biological and partly it's got to do with ... let's think about this one ... the woman is ... regarded as the anchor of the family and therefore if a woman gives birth to a child and maybe won't see that child into adulthood because she'll die or become infirm or whatever, that's regarded as irresponsible in a way that it's not with men.

(Pete, 61)

Pete went on to confirm his view of the social significance afforded to the mother's role:

Society has a much clearer idea of what it expects a mother to be. It's much more judgemental, I think, about bad mothers ... much more judgemental than

bad fathers. Bad fathers have got a degree of leeway, socially, that a bad mother just, you know ... Mothers are supposed to model certain kinds of exemplary behaviour. So I think we fathers get cut a bit of slack. But the same time, the payback for that is the role of father isn't accorded the same kind of respect or acknowledgement as the role of mother.

(Pete, 61)

From these participants' perspectives, an older mother who accepts the risks of not living long enough to see her child into adulthood is deemed socially negligent in a way that an older father is not. Both Kevin and Pete pointed to the importance of the mother within the family structure and how social criticism of older mothers serves to confirm such prominence. Noticeably, Pete, like Harry (above) used the term 'irresponsible' to describe how an older mother may be regarded. Comments made in the media, such as those referred to by Joe and others (see Section 7.4.1), that an older father might not be perceived to be a 'real dad' or a 'good father' due to the possibility of him dying relatively early in his child's life, do not seem to communicate the same sense of social disapproval as those aimed at 'irresponsible' older mothers. As Joe observed, with regard to older fathers, the message conveyed within media representations is generally more light-hearted: 'You silly old fool, what you doing having kids?'

Pete's comments about society having '... a much clearer idea of what it expects a mother to be', and about 'bad' fathers having '... a degree of leeway', effectively illustrated the difference he perceived in attitudes towards older fathers and older mothers.

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an insight into the experience of older fatherhood outwith participants' immediate domestic environment. Their encounters with the social world helped them to understand how other people perceived advanced paternal age and, on most occasions, such encounters were generally unproblematic. However, it was evident that participants engaged in the process of social comparison and were sensitive to portrayals of older fatherhood in the media. This assisted them to make sense of what being an older father meant to others.

The next chapter further demonstrates how comparison with others was a feature of participants' older father experience. It reveals how physical activity and physical ability were important to the men's paternal identity and how they viewed their younger paternal peers as representing a paternal physical norm.

8 Ageing and physical activity

This chapter explores the interconnection between paternal age, physical activity and fatherhood. The chapter is founded on the third super-ordinate theme: *Physical self-image*, which combined the thematic clusters: *Self-image* and *Physical fatherhood*, and emergent themes such as: *Self-appraisal*, *Appearance* and *Physical participation* (Appendix L).

The chapter begins with participants' perceptions of their physical appearance in relation to being fathers of young children. It then moves on to consider their responses to being mistaken for their child's grandfather. The next part examines how the men in this study perceived the prospect and impact of physical decline and the final section of the chapter considers how they compared themselves, physically, with younger fathers. The chapter concludes with a brief summary and outlines the focus for the fourth 'findings' chapter.

8.1 Perceptions of age and ageing

'They've started to notice that not all dads have grey hair!'

As they discussed their experiences of fatherhood, participants frequently referred, directly or indirectly, to the physical effects of ageing. All participants indicated their awareness of a normative paternal age range, as Kevin (63) commented: 'I'd got to such an age and I associate being a dad with a younger person'.

One feature of ageing – physical appearance – was clearly important to some of the men, particularly regarding whether or not they 'looked their age'. More than half the cohort claimed at some point in their interview that other people believed them to look younger than they actually were. Harry (54), for example, remarked that: 'People generally say I don't seem as old as I am'. Some participants cited the absence of grey hair as evidence that their appearance belied their age: 'My hair's not turned grey ... when I say my age sometimes people they're surprised that I'm not five or ten years younger than I am' (Trevor, 55).

Other fathers also cited grey hair as a visible sign of ageing; one that offered physical evidence that they were an 'older' father. Dave (52) made the connection between this and his daughters' emerging sense of him as an older father:

Chris: Would you say that your daughters are aware of you as an older dad?

Dave: I think they're on the cusp of it.

Chris: How do you know?

Dave: Er ... they've started to notice that not all dads have grey hair!

However, others attributed the maintenance of a younger appearance to other, non-physical characteristics, such as their general demeanour and outlook on life. Mike for example, said that extending his child-free lifestyle into middle-age had enabled him to maintain a relatively youthful persona, which led people to underestimate his age:

It's an interesting thing, people didn't realise I was as old and people still don't realise I'm as old as ... people don't know that I'm 53 cos I think I just ... because I had not been a parent I had carried on being a sort of 30 something well into my late 40s cos I didn't have the responsibilities so I carried on carrying on.

(Mike, 53)

Mike's comments suggest that a childless man may retain a comparatively youthful identity that defies his chronological age. He can therefore, in Mike's words, 'carry on carrying on' into his middle-age. However, the implicit adjunct to this view is that once a man becomes a father he is likely to appear perceptibly older, irrespective of his age or physical appearance. Pete echoed Mike's comments concerning a link between fatherhood and perceptions of a man's age:

I was pretty young looking when I became a father, people used to think I was younger than I was, I think that's kind of gone now, people tend to think I am roughly what I am ... so there's been a movement there in perception of me.

(Pete, 61)

Another of the fathers endorsed Mike's view personality and outlook affect evaluations of a man's age. Kevin also believed that such individual personality and character traits endure across the lifespan, implying that some fathers may appear 'older', regardless of their actual age:

I mean whatever age you are ... people in their 80s still think they're 18, and I think you just think of yourself exactly the same as you were, but you're in a bit of an older body that's all. And so if you're an old fuddy-duddy, stuffy sort of person, that's how you probably were when you were in your 20s and 30s, you know?

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin appeared to be a fit and active man and he described his involvement in various outdoor activities and participation in sport. He reflected his positive outlook in his own outward appearance; in his seventh decade, he presented as a confident, optimistic and energised man who appeared (from an interviewer's subjective perspective) younger than his age. His belief that social evaluations of age and expectations of age-stereotypes have altered underpinned his sense of optimism. He explained what he saw as a distinction between contemporary perceptions of ageing and those of his past:

It's like, you know, 50's the new 40 ... 60's the new 50, so you look at pictures of people our age 50 years ago and they look ready for the grave really, you know, 'one foot in the grave', so it's quite different now.

(Kevin, 63)

Although none of the participants directly linked physical appearance to their ability to effectively undertake their fathering role ...:

What am I gonna do about that? Well I'm certainly not gonna reach for the Grecian 2000 or anything, I've got no interest in changing how I look ... other than maybe doing something about middle-age spread and ... you just gotta go through it haven't you?

(Joe, 46)

... it was apparent that looking younger than their actual age was important to some of the fathers in this study.

One eventuality, directly related to their appearance, which made participants particularly aware of their older father status was the prospect of them being mistaken for their child's grandfather.

8.1.1 The 'grandfather error'

'Are you having a nice time with your grandad?'

All the men discussed the possibility of being mistaken for their own child's grandfather. Although they found it disconcerting, they generally seemed inured to the prospect, regarding it as a foreseeable and understandable consequence of their age and physical appearance when compared with the age of their child. However, Pete recalled his surprise on the first occasion the misunderstanding had occurred:

The first time somebody said, you know, 'It's nice to see you out with your grandchildren', that's the first time it sort of hit home to me that people didn't expect that I was their father.

(Pete, 61)

Harry (54) described this unintentional error as the: 'Did you bring your grandad with you?' question. Ian recalled an incident when this had occurred:

There was one occasion when we were waiting at home for something to be delivered or for someone to come round and read the meter or something like that, and we both went to the door and this guy came to our house and made some comment about 'oh, are you having a nice time with your grandad?' (laughs). I didn't say anything, and I don't think my son really picked up on it at the time, but I think there have been one or two other instances like that.

(Ian, 58)

Keith had also experienced misinterpretation of his father-child relationship. He was a comparatively 'young' older father, but he believed he looked older than his age and, although not embarrassed to be mistaken for his child's grandfather, he found it to be an 'awkward' experience:

I mean I'm an older dad and I probably look older than I am so that, you know, it's awkward, I don't find it embarrassing. It's a little bit awkward to explain ... 'I'm actually her dad'.

(Keith, 45)

None of the participants recalled being asked about their relationship to their child; the mistake was usually an assumption of grandfatherhood and revealed as a conversational aside:

Oh, people will come and say 'Your granddaughter's very pretty' or 'Your grandchildren seem very happy', but it comes up as people's assumption that they're grandchildren.

(Dave, 52)

However, not all participants had experienced the 'grandfather error'. Others, such as Kevin had experienced being mistaken for a grandfather on one occasion only:

My daughter went to a friend's for like a play date one morning or something and I went to pick her up and one of this other girl's friends was there, from another school, and she thought I was my daughter's grandfather ... which is understandable I suppose. That's the only time.

(Kevin, 63)

Prior to becoming a father, Kevin had anticipated that the error would occur (see Chapter 6, Section 6.1) and reflected on why it had only happened once, so far. A possible explanation, he thought, was that people instinctively recognise a father-child-relationship:

I don't know whether it's when you're with your child ... the interaction you have, that people instinctively know whether you're the father or the grandfather.

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin suggested that the manner in which a father and child interact is indicative of the nature of their relationship. That is, there is something distinctive about father-child interaction that leads people to intuitively comprehend their relationship, regardless of whether or not the father appears older than the norm.

Joe said had not yet been mistaken for his children's grandfather, and was apprehensive at the prospect:

Right, that's one thing I think about and I think at some point, that I'm gonna be asked 'Oh, isn't it great you're out with your grandchildren?' Now that's the thing, in fact you've hit it, I think that is the thing that I'm conscious of ... and I think if it doesn't happen now ... depending on how I age as a person, at some point I'm sure in the next five years someone's gonna say 'It's so lovely to see a grandad out with their kids' (laughs), and I think 'What am I gonna do about that?'

(Joe, 46)

Although he appreciated its humorous connotations, Joe wondered how he might respond when the misunderstanding eventually occurred, and he evidently found the prospect unsettling. Jim anticipated how such a misinterpretation could be a future source of embarrassment for his daughter:

Maybe when I am at the school gates with lovely grey, flowing hair ... it is getting grey ... and she's going 'Oh my God, everyone's gonna say my grandad's turning up'.

(Jim, 44)

Joe and Jim's concerns reflected those of other fathers who, without verbalising the specific cause of their unease, suggested that being mistaken for their child's grandfather had been, or would be, troubling. As Dave commented:

It irks me a little bit when people assume I'm their grandad rather than their dad, but I can accept that it's an easy mistake to make. It happened a fair bit when I was on the extended paternity leave with them, when I was out and about pushing the pram.

(Dave, 52)

It is reasonable to assume that a desire for recognition of their social and biological connection to their child lay at the heart of participants' unease regarding the 'grandfather error'. However, their concerns also appeared to reflect their wish to retain a younger identity, both to reflect a normative paternal age and, perhaps more straightforwardly, to feel that they looked younger than their actual age (see Section 8.1).

However concerning the prospect (or actuality) may have been, the 'grandfather error' had not led any of the men to seek to portray a more youthful persona or to act in a way they believed a younger father might act:

No, I've never felt that at all. I'd feel silly. I mean you do things that you wouldn't do without a two-year-old ... you wouldn't go running round the park, but I don't find myself thinking 'I must change the way I dress or change the way I speak to appear younger'. No, I'd probably quite resist that in some ways, I'm quite comfortable with my age and who I am ... no I haven't felt that pressure.

(Keith, 45)

No, I'm sorry, I don't have enough ... I'm not linked in to this social thing enough to feel that kind of pressure very strongly.

(Pete, 61)

Although not all participants expressed concern for how they looked or whether or not their appearance accorded with expectations of normative-age fatherhood, it was clear that self-presentation contributed to their paternal self-image. This was particularly evident when the men discussed their physical

health and abilities and how they feared the age-related consequences of physical decline could impact on their fathering role.

8.2 Physical activity and the prospect of physical decline

'I'm getting too old for this lark'

Participants emphasised the importance of physical activity to their paternal role and it was clear they regarded being able to actively participate with their children as an important component of effective fatherhood. Some talked about wishing to be a (physical) role-model to their children. It was also evident that they were sensitive to and compared themselves against the (actual or perceived) physical attributes of younger fathers and that this motivated them to maintain reasonable levels of physical fitness and activity.

Notwithstanding some specific, localised problems or minor injuries, all participants described themselves as being in generally good health and as having maintained a reasonable level of physical fitness:

I'd like to think at 44 I'm still pretty healthy ... I do look after myself.
(Jim, 44)

I've always tried to keep fit and healthy; I think that helps.
(Kevin, 63)

I sort of generally look after myself; I'm pretty fit and healthy for my age.
(Ian, 58)

Each of the men portrayed an active, physically involved paternal role. When asked about the type of physical activities they took part in with their children, participants described their involvement in a range of pursuits:

I take him to a swimming lesson one day a week, I get a bit of a swim in as well ... we usually on a Saturday go for another swim in the afternoon ... they have this thing called 'splash about session' where the pool is just full of parents and kids and big floats and loud music playing, and it's a bit anarchic but, you know, it's good fun and we swim about a bit. And we do other things like ... last weekend we went for a bike ride.

(Ian, 58)

I'm physically fit, I'm a very active person, I run, I cycle ... so we enjoy lots of running around and we go outdoors as much as we can, we've got a nice garden and we play football and cricket and, you know, we rough and tumble about and I'm very lucky (laughs) in spite of the inevitable effects of age and cronkiness and aching this and that, that it's not been a problem.

(Mike, 53)

What I like to do is hill walking ... and I've got this place in XXX ... and part of the reason I got that was so that I could go there myself and take my children there. Like all children, they watch too much television and they play too many computer games, so I get them up there and I get them walking. So I tramp up hills with them and it's ... yeah, so I do that physical activity.

(Pete, 61)

These were typical examples of how participants portrayed their physically active, participatory paternal role. Although some of the men referred to family activities, it was evident that they both valued and engaged in on-to-one activities with their children. In the example offered by Pete (above) he had responded to what he perceived to be a lack of physical activity by his children and had bought a house in the countryside so they could share his love of hill walking. Mike, too, was keen to promote physical participation with his son although his reference to: '... the inevitable effects of age and cronkiness'

suggested that his physical paternal role was, at least to some extent, affected by his age:

... I mean our son, like any son, wants to run around and kick a ball and do everything else and ... maybe I'm more ... you know, whilst I am very physically fit, I am more inclined to sit down and, you know, just kind of take it easy (laughs).

(Mike, 53)

Mike was, as he pointed out, a physically active 53-year-old man and it was surprising to hear him say that he was 'inclined to ... take it easy'. His comments were instructive in terms of understanding the physical demands of older fatherhood, particularly with regard to keeping pace with an active young child. Mike contemplated a future in which he would be less physically able, and was evidently uneasy at the prospect:

I am still aware that actually despite all that there are certain things I can't do anything about, such as the fact that I'm already 53 and I won't be able ... I may not be able to be as ... I may not be able to do what I'm doing now in ten years' time ... and it becomes increasingly not up to me, but up to genetics and other issues. I mean I'm not there yet, but I'm moving into a phase of life in which, you know, there are more and more unknowns to do with the future. So I'm sort of already just a bit apprehensive about what that means really for us as a family.

(Mike, 53)

Other participants referred to the physical effects of age and expressed their concerns for the future with regard to the prospect of physical decline and how this may affect their capacity for active, participatory fatherhood. In the following extract, Keith effectively summarises his concerns:

I suppose as an older dad as well, part of you worries that you won't be able to keep up, that you're getting on a bit and, you know, 'Will I be able to run around

after her always? Will I always be in sufficiently good health to do that?'. I suppose it's a fear that you have as an older dad that ... maybe I won't be able to, maybe I'll be out of condition or maybe through ill health or something I won't be able to do that ... it's a worry.

(Keith, 45)

Mike and Keith's comments offer insight into older fathers' concerns for the future, particularly with regard to how age may impact on their fathering abilities. Keith's assumption that such fear would be common to older fathers was substantiated when other participants talked about the physical consequences of ageing. Joe, for example, sensed a lessening of his physical energies and, like Mike, was concerned for how his physical capacity might lessen over the next ten years:

Although I still feel like I've got loads of energy ... you get tired don't you? And I think the things that worry me is how it will develop in the next ten years, I think the next ten years it'll be critical ... to how I manage and I have to try and get on top of this, how I'm going to keep my fitness and health as I get older.

(Joe, 46)

Both Mike and Joe's concerns for how age might affect their physical abilities were indicative of the ages of their children. Mike's son was aged five, as was Joe's eldest child. Therefore, the next decade would, for both fathers, coincide with their children's formative years. Having been a fit and active younger man, Joe, in particular, was frustrated at having to assume a less physically active identity. He perceived this to be particularly relevant to his relationship with his son:

Joe: With my son now, he's five he's very active, he's very into sports and he does a lot of running. In fact that's his sport, and the fact is I used to do a lot of sport ... that is the first thing that's really hit me about age and that's really affected me actually ... I used to be able to run

half marathons, I used to run for county standard sprinter, I used to play rugby at university etc. etc. and I can't keep up with him doing the parkrun.

Chris: And he's five?

Joe: He's five and he's one of the fastest runners in school even at year one so he's very good. And I know, ten years ago, I could have been an inspiration. Whereas now he's said 'Oh let's not do the parkrun, daddy'. Yeah, that absolutely got me here and I'm sort of probably two, three stone heavier than I was ... I was very fit ... and again, I don't care about any of that sort of how you look ... it's all about can I keep up with him? Am I fit enough to inspire him? Because I say to him: 'Look, I used to play rugby for university and county and I used to run' and he looks at me with that sort of: 'Yeah, but you? Not you, cos you can't even keep up with me when we do a 5k run' and I think 'Yeah, he's right'. That's the biggest thing that's hit me I think and that's where I beat myself up a lot

Joe's negative perception of his fitness made him apprehensive about his ability to 'inspire' his son in terms of physical performance, and he sensed his son's uncertainty about this. When he described how his son had asked not to participate with him in the parkrun: 'cos you can't even keep up with me ...', Joe offered a singular example (across the cohort) of a child being reluctant to participate in physical activity with their father as a result of the man's lack of physical ability. It was also possible to sense Joe's anxiety regarding how his physical capacity might affect his future father-child relationships:

I don't wanna be just the driver, I want to be out there doing it and I think, you know, my inspiration when I was doing my sport as a youngster was from my dad, and at the moment I feel that ... and this is hard to say that ... I need to get there for my children ... but you know, maybe in four, five, six years, my son might think 'Oh, I'd like to go on a bike ride for five hours on a Saturday, I need to find somebody else cos dad can't ... he's not up to it'.

(Joe, 46)

The wish to inspire or be a role-model, in physical terms, to his children was also referred to by another participant:

I've almost entirely given up drinking, I do eat much better now and I'm starting to take more exercise. I'm not saying I'm in great shape at all but it does inform the choices that I'm making. One of the things that we've discussed, my wife and I, is that we want to be good role models for her [his daughter] in terms of health and well-being and physical activity.

(Keith, 45)

Participants generally believed that they were better fathers than they would have been as younger men (see Chapter 9, Section 9.2). However, this did not mean they were oblivious to the physical advantages of younger fatherhood. Dave for example, was an actively involved father, appearing to be both fully committed to and enjoying his paternal role. However, he revealed a sense of frustration (that was not evident in other participants' accounts) when discussing some of the physical demands of fatherhood, and how he might have dealt with these more effectively as a younger man:

There certainly are times with the children, if they've been particularly pushing at boundaries and whingeing and not doing as they're told when I think: 'I'm really too old, I'm not up to this anymore'. There are some times where I think: ... 'Well if I'd had children five to ten years before it might not be quite as hard as it is now' because sometimes it can just be a bit of a slog when they're not doing what they're told and you're forever spending your entire life clearing up after them and yes, sometimes it's just physically draining and you think: 'Oh I wish I'd done this five years ago ... I'm getting too old for this lark'.

(Dave, 52)

Although Dave suspected that, as a younger and presumably more physically able man, he might have coped better with the physical demands of fatherhood; his concerns did not appear to offer a serious indictment of later paternity. Indeed, his comments seemed to portray characteristic parental frustration

(regardless of a man or woman's age) when attempting to meet the demands of young children. As noted in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3) Dave and his wife were both in full-time employment, which necessitated considerable organisation of their domestic responsibilities. Dave described himself – presumably in relation to the allocation of their domestic workload – as '... the main parent'. It is reasonable therefore to accept his occasional lament of: 'Oh, I wish I'd done this five years ago' as a response to the pressure of his domestic commitments and not specifically age-related. However, such interpretation does not overlook the impact that being 52 had on Dave's abilities to respond to the physical requirements of being a father to two young daughters:

My girls are already getting to the stage that if we're chasing each other around the house, if it's straight line I'm fine but if's there any twists or bends I really can't catch them!

(Dave, 52)

Finally, in terms of physical activity, Keith highlighted a particular concern not expressed by other participants:

I wonder whether, and I do worry about this, as she gets older, am I going to be able to protect her? Am I going to be physically able to protect her as a girl growing up in an increasingly sexualised world? Am I gonna be strong enough? Am I gonna be there? And those are worries that you have, I mean they don't keep me awake at night but they're things that you do think about.

(Keith, 45)

Although Keith claimed such concerns did not overly concern him, it was clear that he was sensitive to the physical consequences of being an older father. He invoked some traditional and gendered ideas of fatherhood and protection in stating that he worried about his physical ability, as a father, to safeguard his

daughter in the future. However, this was not an issue discussed by any other participants. Keith made a number of references to health and fitness during his interview, and commented towards the end: 'Interesting ... in this interview I didn't expect to find myself talking about health so much!'

A notable feature of participants' accounts was the comparisons they made with other (mostly younger) parents (see Chapter 6, Section 6.5.1). A particular area of concern related to the physical demands of fatherhood, and whether they were as fit, and by implication, as paternally effective as other fathers.

8.3 Perceiving a physical paternal norm

'I need to be as fit and active as all the other dads'

The men in this study described how they compared themselves with younger fathers; perceiving fathers younger than themselves to be generally physically fitter and possessing greater capacity for active participation with children.

However, in the cases of Mike and Ian, such comparisons were not completely disadvantageous to older fathers as both men questioned the fitness of some of the younger fathers they observed:

I do think when I'm in the park that I need to be as fit and active as all the other dads and you know; oh whoops actually I'm probably fitter and more active than any of them lard arses anyway! So I'm doing fine, but I do check myself about it and, you know ... I'm probably over compensating! (laughs) I'm probably trying a bit too bloody hard!

(Mike, 53)

Ian (58) echoed Mike's comments regarding the physical abilities of some younger parents:

Ian: I think some of the younger parents I meet; they seem to be just physically less fit than I am. I mean I wouldn't claim to be in peak athletic form or anything, but some of the younger parents, you know, they're sort of wheezing going up a flight of stairs and so on. I mean I think that might be a ... recent development, but now a lot of them seem to be quite unfit physically.

Chris: What do you think is happening?

Ian: I think ... just affluence, you know, people ... 20, 30 years ago were physically more active in general, you know, people weren't driving to a desk job every day, a lot of people were doing more physical work ... were having to walk some of the way there or get a bus and so on, and I think people were just more physically active and physically fit, whereas now people can go from like an almost sedentary childhood to sedentary adulthood.

Mike's need to be 'as fit and active' as other fathers suggested that he felt they demonstrated a normative standard of paternal fitness to which he as an older father should aspire. However, his sardonic observation ('them lard arses') implied that he did not regard the normative standard of paternal fitness to be particularly high. However, his desire to physically match other fathers, if only from his own perspective, had motivated him to maintain a relatively high level of fitness, which he referred to a number of times during his interview. He evidently sensed the humorous connotations, and possible futility, of his paternal competitiveness, laughing when observing that he was: 'probably over compensating'.

Like Mike, Ian was conscious of the need to stay fit in order, perhaps, that he might compare favourably with other fathers. His observations regarding a

lowering of overall societal fitness reinforced his sense of a positive physical paternal identity – despite his age – and, echoing Mike's comments, Ian felt he was as fit, if not fitter, than many of the younger parents he observed.

Some participants expressed concern for how their children might compare them with other, younger, fathers. Joe, for example, was unsure about how his fitness levels compared with the fathers of his son's friends:

You know, when my son will come home and tells me what his mate's done with his daddy ... 'Oh, they've been playing rugby out in the garden' I was thinking: 'Oh, I'm tired' (laughs).

(Joe, 46)

Joe's remark that was not substantiated by further details of what the other father had accomplished, but it conveyed a sense of Joe's perceived inability to physically match the achievements of his (presumably younger) paternal contemporary.

Dave (52) contemplated, somewhat cautiously, the prospect of having to physically contend with younger fathers, stating: 'I'm certainly dreading the first *'Dads' Race* in the school's sports day should that ever come up'. Potential comparisons with younger fathers also occupied the thoughts of Jim. Although his daughter was only one year old, he imagined a future conversation he may have with her; anticipating her frustration if he is unable to actively participate to the extent he envisaged younger fathers being able to and, more significantly, how she might then compare him to other fathers:

If I'm saying to her 'I can't take you running' because maybe my metabolism and stuff's just caught up with me a little bit, that bit could be where she might get frustrated ... 'Why can't you do what XXX's dad does?'

(Jim, 44)

Chapter summary

In this chapter I have analysed the ways in which participants described how they managed the physical consequences of ageing in relation to fatherhood. They showed a connection between age, ageing and fatherhood, and revealed some of the challenges of older fatherhood when discussing both their physical appearance and the possibility of the 'grandfather error'. When participants indicated the importance of physical activity to their paternal role, the link between physical ability and paternal identity was apparent, and when they described their perceived physical capacity in relation to younger fathers, it was clear that social comparison was an experiential component of their older father experience. These issues of identity and social comparison are developed further in Chapter 10. The next, and final, 'findings' chapter, explores participants' broader reflections on the older father experience and its implications.

9 Reflections on older fatherhood

This final 'findings' chapter explores participants' reflections on the experience of older fatherhood and its implications, both for themselves and their children. The basis for this chapter is the fourth super-ordinate theme: *Reflecting on older fatherhood*, derived through analysis of the data. This theme brought together two thematic clusters: *The advantages of older fatherhood* and *Consequences of older fatherhood* plus emergent themes such as: *Benefits of age*, *Enjoying fatherhood* and *Consequences for children* (Appendix L).

The chapter begins by exploring what participants considered to be the advantages of older fatherhood and how they believed that attributes such as life experience and wisdom benefitted their paternal role. They generally viewed these advantages in comparison to younger fatherhood, and contemplated how they themselves might have approached fatherhood as younger men.

Across the interviews it was clear that a principal concern was for the effect older fatherhood might have on children's lives. The next part of the chapter explores these concerns and considers how participants rationalised later paternity with its potentially negative impact on children. The final part of the chapter offers a brief overview of the pleasures and regrets participants' cited in relation to their older father experience.

The chapter concludes with a brief summary, outlining the focus for the following chapter, in which the significance of the findings are discussed in light of current knowledge and relevant theoretical debate.

9.1 The advantages of older fatherhood

'You've got your infrastructure ... you're happy in your own skin'

Overall, participants did not consider that the age at which they became fathers had lessened their ability to undertake their paternal role. Although the negative aspects of being an older father were not concealed, particularly in relation to its physical impact (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2), the men in this study offered a generally positive portrayal of later paternity.

At various points during the interviews participants indicated, either directly or by implication, some specific advantages to being an older father. These included having greater life experience, enhanced self-confidence, financial stability and time to commit to fatherhood. Furthermore, some of the men referred to the energising effect of older fatherhood and how, as Dave (52) remarked: 'being an older dad stops you from having a mid-life crisis' (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2).

The men perceived a specific advantage to having life experience and being able to use this to benefit their children:

There's an extent to which the increased age allows more perspective, because I've seen and done more things and observed other parents, been able to take bits from all sorts of other places.

(Dave, 52)

Life experience leads you to know that you'll cope more or less with virtually anything. Whereas when you're younger you don't know that and it can sometimes seem that you're not gonna get out of this. There's this feeling that 'Oh, been through worse'. You know that you come out the other side. Whereas I think, with some younger parents, it just comes as a huge shock and they sometimes have trouble coping with it ... in a sense we can bring more to parenthood than younger parents can, simply because we've got more experience.

(Ian, 58)

I feel that I've got the resources in the backpack to do it, I've got life experiences, I've been through all the different things that you'd expect to have gone through by the time you get to this age, and that's a store of wisdom and lessons that I can pass on to her.

(Keith, 45)

Participants conveyed confidence in their paternal abilities when discussing the particular advantage of life experience to older fatherhood. They evidently considered it to offset some of the negative connotations of advanced paternal age.

A further advantage of being an older father related to participants feeling less vulnerable to social pressure and more in control of their own lives. A consequence of this was they were less concerned about people's perceptions of them which, in turn, reduced their need, or desire, to accord with the expectations of others:

I think with being an older father comes a degree of both calmness and comfort in your own skin. With age comes an awareness that actually you don't have to fit in the group, this is how I am and I'm not particularly gonna alter how I am to suit your desired behaviours.

(Dave, 52)

Harry (54) described a feeling of personal confidence in terms similar to those used by Dave. He said being older meant also being: 'A lot more settled, you've got your infrastructure ... you're happy in your own skin'.

Most of the advantages of older fatherhood were evaluated in relation to younger fathers. Some of the men, for example, felt they were less inhibited in their interactions with their children. Kevin (63) thought this was mainly due to younger parents' stronger need for social approval: 'When you're young sometimes you wanna fit in and do what everyone else does'. Ian illustrated this when he described taking his young son to a child's birthday party held at an indoor, soft-play centre; he had sensed that some of the younger parents were reluctant to 'join in':

XXX [Ian's son] said 'Oh, come on with me', and I was the only person who joined in, playing on all these big soft play things and going up and down the stairs and down slides and so on, and all the younger parents were just sat on the side ... either unable or unwilling to join in.

(Ian, 58)

Echoing Kevin's observation about the need for younger parents to conform to social expectations, Ian went on to explain what he felt was the basis for younger parents' unwillingness to engage in such activities:

When you're a younger parent I think you're sort of thinking 'Oh, I shouldn't be doing this at my age ... this is for kids' whereas when you get older you've sort of got through that and I thought 'Oh, why the hell not? Who gives a damn what other people think?' (laughs).

(Ian, 58)

A comparative lack of inhibition was also noted by Dave:

I will sometimes play the fool in a way that I don't always see the younger fathers playing the fool. So I'll happily join in with their games and be the butt of jokes in a way that some younger dads might not because it will affect their street credibility or something ... I think generally the older dads are too old to care.

(Dave, 52)

Ian's comment that, as an older father 'you've sort of got through that', in terms of social inhibition, was particularly revealing. It further assisted him, as an older father, to establish a secure paternal self-image.

In addition to the benefits of experience and enhanced confidence – the 'resources in the backpack' that Keith referred to (above) – some participants cited financial security as an additional advantage of older fatherhood. Age had enabled some of the men to accrue financial resources, and they saw benefits of this for their children:

We have the financial stability and freedom to go wherever we like ... and it allows my daughter to experience a broader sense of the world.

(Trevor, 55)

Things are less hand-to-mouth. It doesn't mean that they can have everything that they want but I think that the extra financial security does bring benefits to them.

(Dave, 52)

I suppose you're materially a bit more stable, so that's something for children, I mean I'm not a rich man but, you know, there's a certain level of comfort and predictability about the way that she's gonna live.

(Keith, 45)

In addition to conferring a degree of financial security, some participants

described how age had also allowed them more time to devote to their fathering role. All except one of the men were in paid employment (Kevin was self-employed) and some reflected on how being older had enabled greater flexibility regarding their working hours. Mike for example, took a one-year career break when his son was born, and since that time he and his wife had, by choice, worked part-time. He acknowledged that their financial stability had allowed them to reduce their employment commitments and that such a strategy was not a realistic option for most parents, stating: 'It's a thing that people perhaps aspire to but not many people manage to do'. Mike also appeared to regard his relative financial security as something that set him apart from younger fathers with whom he had contact (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2).

Kevin talked about the greater independence he enjoyed by being self-employed and choosing his working hours. His flexible and adaptable work commitments had enabled him to be more involved in his daughter's life:

I have a very good relationship with her because I've been around most of her early life. I've not been a dad who's been away a lot with work, so I've been around a lot. I've only been in here [his workplace] just over a year, before that I was working from home. So I was home a lot, so I've seen a lot of everything you know. I've been to every single school thing and everything.

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin attributed his good relationship with his daughter to the amount of time his employment status had allowed him to spend with her, and it can be assumed that this was related to his age and professional experience.

Participants generally felt that they would have been less successful fathers when they were younger, which further consolidated their paternal identities.

The next section explores their views on this.

9.2 Imagining fatherhood at a younger age

'I'd have probably not been very good at it'

In contrast to how he described his current level of paternal involvement (see Section 9.1) Kevin was sure his approach to fatherhood as a younger man would have been markedly different:

Oh gosh I'd have probably not been very good at it ... I was very, very career orientated, and also my work ... it was very long hours, you know, I worked through the night and stuff like that. I'd have expected a mother to sort of look after the child probably, much more so, I'd have been more of an old-fashioned type dad ... not horrible or anything but, you know, less hands-on.

(Kevin, 63)

Kevin cited his previously more focused attitude to his work and career to explain why he would have approached fatherhood differently as a younger man. He believed he would have had less time for fatherhood and would therefore have had a less involved paternal role. He acknowledged the negative connotations of what he referred to as: 'an old-fashioned type dad', by which it may be assumed he was referring to the breadwinner/provider model of fatherhood (see Chapter 2, Sections 2.1.1 and 2.3). He seemed keen to disassociate himself from this type of role and its implications of paternal distance and emotional detachment.

Dave's imagining of himself as a younger father was similarly unequivocal. He felt he would have approached fatherhood 'very differently'. Like Kevin, Dave felt his priorities had changed, and he offered a detailed and reflective illustration of this:

The reason I'm being so definite is when I was 30 I went out with a lady who had a daughter from a previous relationship and I can remember how I was dealing with that daughter compared with how I deal with my own daughters now. I'm conscious of the difference between a prospective step-daughter versus your own child, but when I was 29 to 30, it was very much that this potential step-daughter was a bit of an inconvenience, she was a lovely girl and I was quite happy to spend time with her, but I also wanted to spend time not with her, doing my own thing and going out with her mum. And that has definitely faded with time; I've done enough going out, so definitely very different. I might have matured quite late, I feel now I'm much more ready, willing, able to be a dad than I would have been in my 20s and early 30s ... I've done enough going out of an evening, I've done enough travelling round the world, I'm really quite happy to spend the time with the girls, I don't feel that spending time with the girls is taking me away from doing other things that I'd rather be doing.

(Dave, 52)

Dave's words were revealing in terms of how being an older father had afforded him greater emotional freedom to engage with his paternal role. His comments and the perception of having 'done enough' as a younger man to enable him to devote himself to fatherhood are discussed in more detail in Chapter 10 (Section 10.4.3).

Other participants also noted how their priorities had changed as they had got older, and how they believed this had benefitted their fathering role. Echoing Dave's recollections, Joe believed that becoming a father in his 40s had been less disruptive to his lifestyle than it would have been when he was a younger man:

I think when I was in my 20s ... that would have been a real struggle ... every opportunity to leave home I would take. Every weekend I could go away somewhere different, I'd be travelling all over Europe. I would constantly be away with the job I was doing at the time. That's what I wanted. So I think that change of lifestyle would have been tough.

(Joe, 46)

As a younger man, Trevor had actively pursued a professional career, and he described how the demands of work had left little time – practically or emotionally – for fatherhood. He felt that being older, and less career-focused, had enabled him to align his interests with the needs of his young daughter:

I'm not so much seeing my needs and my wants and my ambitions as being in conflict with hers ... which could have been the case when I was 25.

(Trevor, 55)

Reaffirming comments made by Keith regarding how becoming a father had led to an increased sense of social awareness and engagement (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2), Joe suggested that being older had enhanced his sense of social responsibility, and linked this to his paternal role:

I think I tend to be more involved from a community point of view because I'm older than I would have done in my 20s or in my 30s. I'm not sure I would have been a governor at school and, you know, whatever I get involved with. Would I have done that as a younger dad? I think I would have been too wrapped up in myself.

(Joe 46)

It was noticeable that none of the participants felt they would have been more effective – or even as effective – fathers when they were younger men. Their imaginings of themselves taking on the responsibilities of younger fatherhood enabled them to further highlight the advantages of older fatherhood to both themselves and their children. Their views on the appropriate age at which a

man should become a father were revealed when they discussed the suitability of men much older than themselves fathering children.

9.3 Thoughts on older, older fatherhood

'I would hate to have your first one at 65'

The ages at which participants became fathers ranged from 40 to 57 (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3), and, notwithstanding some concerns regarding their ability to stay physically active (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2), all the men seemed generally satisfied with their age in relation to performing their paternal role. However, some questioned the appropriateness of men becoming fathers at more senior ages to themselves – such as those who father children in their 70s – and appeared to differentiate themselves from such 'older, older fathers'.

The following extended extract offers one participant's views on this. Ian (58), who was 52 when his son was born, had been discussing media reports of a man who became a father at the age of 71. He was asked what he thought about a man becoming a father at that age:

Ian: I would start doing the calculations, because that child essentially has to be looked after until they're 18, so 71 plus 18 ... is 89 and, you know, with the best will in the world, even if you've looked after yourself well and had lots of good luck with your health, I'm not sure that an 89-year-old man would be up to looking after an 18 year old boy.

Chris: Is it a matter of 'looking after' or is it more about 'being there' ... having a 'fathering presence'?

Ian: Well it's just sort of discharging all the responsibilities really. There's

the physical side of it yeah, but there's more ... you know, the emotional, nurturing side. By the time you get to 89, I mean a lot of people are beginning to suffer dementia and so on ... and, you know, for a teenage boy to sort of essentially lose their father in that way would be ... very difficult for them and should you take steps that might lead to that?

Chris: It could be argued that a 52 year old man is on a similar path ...

Ian: On a similar downward spiral! (laughs) Yes, again it's 52 plus 18, that's 70, so I will be 70 when XXX [Ian's son] reaches the age of 18, so that's gonna be ... it might be quite tough in some ways ... and I don't mean you can draw a sharp dividing line cos it depends so much on individual circumstances, but at some point ... I think you have to make the calculation that, you know, the cards are stacked against you and it's probably not such a good idea to become a father.

Chris: And is there a tipping point, somewhere between 52 and 71 ... is there an age at which you think fatherhood becomes less advisable?

Ian: I'd probably say somewhere around 60.

As described in Chapter 6 (Section 6.1), when they had contemplated parenthood Ian and his wife had concluded that they were not yet at an age where parenthood would be 'unfeasible'. His comments on senior-aged fatherhood appeared to suggest an age beyond which he believed the feasibility of fatherhood was questionable.

Ian's concerns about more senior-aged older fatherhood focused on the likely consequences for a child who, at a relatively young age, could have a father with diminished physical and cognitive capacity. In determining fundamental paternal responsibilities, he referred to the 'physical' and the 'emotional, nurturing' aspects of fatherhood, and doubted that a man 18 years older than he was when he became a father could effectively undertake all these responsibilities.

These thoughts had led Ian to question the moral acceptability of men becoming fathers at a more senior age: '... should you take steps that might lead to that?' However, he recognised the difficulty of identifying a definitive age beyond which fatherhood was inadvisable. Ian's rhetorical question was unusual, across the cohort, in that it highlighted an important ethical consideration regarding older fatherhood. It was rare for participants' narratives to explore the ethical aspects of later paternity. As shown below (Section 9.5) Mike and his wife had also asked themselves if they had 'done the right thing' by having a child later in life, but generally, it did not seem that participants were overly concerned by the ethical implications of their own older father experience.

Jim also offered a critical perspective on older, older fatherhood. He too focused on the potential consequences for the child, particularly the possibility of paternal loss at an early point in the child's life:

I would hate to have your first one at 65 knowing you've a good chance, even with age expectancy getting higher and higher, to not even see them make teenage years.

(Jim, 44)

Other participants endorsed Ian's perception of an age – 'around 60' – beyond which fatherhood might be inadvisable. Dave felt that that age might represent an upper limit in terms of societal tolerance of older fatherhood:

I think there'll be some point, certainly by 60, where I think society as a whole would judge that [older fatherhood] a bit differently. There comes a point where society's beginning to think that you really are getting a little bit too old for the physical demands and certainly by the time the children are starting to get into the teenage years you're really going to be too old.

(Dave, 52)

Dave's reference to societal judgement was noticeable. He did not offer his personal perspective on an upper age limit for fatherhood; instead he indicated a broader, social perspective in his evaluation of older, older fatherhood.

The likelihood of age-related physical decline was central to participants' concerns about men much older than themselves becoming fathers. They thought this would diminish an older man's ability to undertake an active paternal role and expressed concern for how more senior-aged fatherhood would affect children's lives. Although most of the fathers in this study did not feel that their own physical abilities had been significantly compromised by age, some made reference to this as a prospective concern. Jim, for example, thought that his daughter might one day ask him: 'Why can't you do what XXX's dad does?' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.3). They were, therefore, aware of and concerned for the possible consequences older fatherhood might have for their own children.

9.4 Contemplating the consequences for children

'I'm worried that she'll be teased about it'

One of the subsidiary research questions this study sought to answer related to how participants perceived the consequences of older fatherhood for their

children (see Chapter 1, Section 1.2.1 and Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3). Although the interview schedule (Appendix E) included the direct question: 'How do you think having an older father affects your child/children?', participants' concerns for their children (in relation to having an older father) were expressed or implied at various points in their interviews. Much of what they discussed in relation to being older fathers, what people thought of older fatherhood and how they contemplated the future as older fathers, centred on the impact that older fatherhood might have on their children's lives.

Therefore, as these men discussed their own paternal experiences, they also contemplated how their young children would 'experience' older fatherhood. For example, they expressed concerns relating to its social impact: 'I'm worried that she'll be teased about it' (Keith, 45) (see below); its physical challenges: 'My son might think 'Oh, I'd like to go on a bike ride for five hours on a Saturday, I need to find somebody else cos dad can't ... he's not up to it'' (Joe, 46) (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2) and, perhaps most fundamentally, the prospect of early paternal loss: 'We brought a child into this world ... into a situation where in time it's gonna be an orphan' (Mike, 53) (see Section 9.5).

In addition to its prospective impact, participants also discussed how older fatherhood currently affected their children's lives and, in this sense, they viewed it more positively. As described above (Section 9.1) they felt that older fatherhood offered particular benefits to children and, apart from some physical limitations: 'I can't keep up with him doing the parkrun' (Joe, 46), did not feel that on a day-to-day basis their children were disadvantaged by having an older

father.

Although some of the men's younger children were not yet aware that they had an older father, most participants felt their children had some appreciation that their father was older than the norm. As Dave (52) commented: 'They've started to notice that not all dads have grey hair!' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1). Ian had also sensed his six-year-old son's growing awareness of older fatherhood. He recalled a recent conversation they had:

We had a funny conversation a couple of weeks ago; he suddenly started talking about 'What will I be doing when I'm 50 years old?' So we had a little about how 'You might have children of your own and you'll be doing some sort of job, we don't know what that'll be' and so on, and then we got to the end of it and then he said 'Mmm ... and you'll be dead!' (laughs) It was rather blunt! So there's already probably some awareness there.

(Ian, 58)

Other participants were unsure if their children were aware their father was older than the norm. However, Kevin suspected his six-year-old daughter was gaining some understanding of his age:

Whether her friends say anything I don't know, because she sometimes says 'How old are you?' but then it doesn't really mean anything when I tell her how old I am, and then it's like 'How old's Mummy?' and 'So, is Mummy older than you then?' that's how much she knows about numbers and figures ... it's not an issue at the moment although it could obviously be when she's older, you know.

(Kevin, 63)

Some participants felt their child's awareness of the ages of members of their wider family might prompt their understanding of older fatherhood:

My father's still alive ... so her Grandad is almost 90. So she knows that her Grandad is 90, whereas some of her friends' grandparents are in their 60s ... so she probably perceives it already without having to talk about it openly.
(Trevor, 55)

His cousins are ... sort of ten years older than him.
(Joe, 46)

The men did not regard older fatherhood as a significant factor in their current father-child relationships. However, comments such as those made by Kevin (above) who claimed: 'It's not an issue at the moment ...' suggested that some were sensitive to the possible impact it might have in the future. For example, as noted in Chapter 7 (Section 7.3) Keith, whose daughter was one year old at the time of his interview, had concerns about how she would eventually feel about having an older father:

I guess as time goes by I'm gonna start wondering what my daughter thinks of that and, you know, 'Why is my dad older than the other dads at school?'
(Keith, 45)

Other participants had also thought about how other people, particularly other children, might react to their child having an older father. Some were concerned that it could make their children conspicuous; possibly leading to them being teased:

There's always gonna be that opportunity to laugh at the other person ... whether it's the colour of your hair or whatever, and potentially for my children it will be how old your dad is.
(Joe, 46)

Keith had also anticipated this possibility:

Will she be ridiculed for that by her peers? It doesn't take much for children to latch on to ... you know, be nasty to each other ... and that may affect how she thinks of me ... social embarrassment, 'My grandad turning up to pick me up again from school' ... or from parties or whatever it might be

(Keith, 45)

Keith was apprehensive about how the attention his daughter might receive as a result of having an older father, and her anticipated response to this – her 'social embarrassment' – would impact on their relationship. The potential for her to be embarrassed had led him to question his decision to become an older father and, like Ian (see Section 9.3), Keith also posed a rhetorical ethical question about later paternity: 'Occasionally then I think, you know, 'Is that fair for me to put her through that?''.

Pete, whose daughter and son (aged 14 and 12) were older than any of the other participants' children, acknowledged that they understood their father was older, but denied that this affected either them, or their father-child relationships:

My boy makes jokes the whole time about how I was born before the dinosaurs and so on. I think that's been sort of developed over the years as a kind of comic routine. So I think they are aware that I'm old but I don't think beyond that it really plays much of a part. They might compare me with other fathers, they might see that so-and-so's father is much younger than me ... I don't think it causes them any kind of problem, I think it's just the way it is.

(Pete, 61)

As most participants were fathers to children aged ten or younger, they anticipated changes in their relationship that were likely to occur as children grew, particularly when they reached adolescence. Keith thought that his age might exacerbate any negative perceptions his daughter might have of him:

All children think that their parents are old fashioned and out of touch and don't know anything and ... she's gonna think that times two or three maybe with me and that's inevitable.

(Keith, 45)

However, other participants did not foresee older fatherhood being a significant factor in their future father-child relationships. Ian, for example, echoed Keith's views on how his son might one day regard him, but did not think his being an older father would be particularly relevant to this:

I mean there's bound to be times when he finds me an embarrassment, but I think that's par for the course, if it wasn't because of age it would be because of something else.

(Ian, 58)

Mike made a similar observation, stating that, in his view, older fatherhood would not be the specific cause of future difficulties:

We're gonna have some difficult times ahead, you know, and there are gonna be times when he absolutely doesn't get me, you know, wishes I was dead, you know, can't believe how unbelievably awful I am ... I will be 60-something then, but it would happen if I was 40 you know?

(Mike, 53)

Overall, participants did not feel that, on a day-to-day basis, having an older father disadvantaged their children. Compared with their younger selves, they felt capable of being better, more committed fathers, willing (and able) to devote more time, both practically and emotionally to their children. They perceived that these attributes differentiated them from younger fathers, thereby benefitting their children and, perhaps to some extent, offsetting some of the less positive aspects of later paternity. The most fundamental negative outcome they

perceived for their children was the possibility of them losing their father at a relatively early age.

9.5 Thoughts on paternal mortality

'I will have fewer years to enjoy her company and her life'

Although participants differentiated between themselves and older, older fathers (see Section 9.3), they acknowledged the possibility of their children experiencing paternal loss at a relatively early stage in their life. As Dave (52) noted: 'I won't see them as far into their lives as a younger dad would'.

As noted in Chapter 6 (section 6.1) when they had been planning to have a child, participants had calculated the age they might possibly reach in their child's life:

A consideration was ... I suppose a bit macabre but, kind of, what age would the children likely to be when I died?

(Dave, 52)

Participants talked about an age they hoped to live to and the minimum age they expected, realistically, to achieve. They had identified various life-stages for their children – such as completing education, getting married and having their own children – that they hoped to see them accomplish.

Keith recognised that how long he might be present in his daughter's life was a particular concern for him as an older father:

I will have fewer years to enjoy her company and her life, and that is accepted, but it feeds into a worry about, you know, 'Is she going to be ok? Who's gonna be around to look after her?' Probably younger fathers may not even be thinking of it ... the whole life is in front of you, but yeah, it's there in the background all the time, you think 'Am I going to see her go to university? Am I gonna see her go through those watershed periods in life?'

(Keith, 45)

It was clear that thoughts of early paternal mortality were a prominent feature of participants' older father experience and that the process of estimating age goals in relation to their children's life-stages – which commenced prior to their child's birth – persisted. Ian was asked what age he hoped to see his six-year-old son reach:

Oh well certainly 18, it's not that far away ... because he is quite an academic child so we'd like to see him through university, if that's what he ends up doing. Yeah, we'd like to see him through to, you know, 20s, early 30s I think.

(Ian, 58)

It was noticeable that Ian's age goals in relation to his son quickly extended from 18 to 'early 30s', indicating that seeing his son reach adulthood was his minimum objective. Other participants also referred to 18 as an achievable age (in relation to their own life-expectancy) in their child's life, suggesting that seeing their child reach adulthood represented accomplishment of the essential child-rearing responsibilities of fatherhood:

As far as immediate stages, well I'd like to make sure ... I'd like to see them through their childhood. You know, it sounds a bit silly but I'd like to get them to 18, it's as simple as that.

(Pete, 61)

Well you certainly want those 18 years and I think that's probably the calculation.

(Jim, 44)

A subsequent, related target that a number of participants identified was to live long enough to witness an event that traditionally, signifies the achievement of adult status - marriage:

I know you want to see them get married ... have children as well.
(Jim, 44)

Well yeah, I'd like to walk her up the aisle whatever age that might be.
(Harry, 54)

You do all the sums in your head, you know, working things out, how old you're gonna be at certain periods and ... will I ever see her get married or anything like that?
(Kevin, 63)

Dave, a father of two daughters aged five and four, described how he had considered the possibility of him dying early in their lives, but that he hoped to live to a point at which his death would not be too 'traumatic' for them. He estimated that the impact of his death would lessen as his daughters reach independent adulthood:

I think there's a point where you're probably sufficiently mature to have built your own life that, although it will be very traumatic to lose a parent it wouldn't be devastating. There might be an argument for late 20s, I certainly think while you're at school, that's massively traumatic experience and can have big impact on your development and your mental well-being, and I think that carries through to a lesser extent into university age, mid to late 20s ... but I think by the time my children's generation have reached 30 or so that they probably should have been fairly settled in their own life. I think through their 20s they're still probably going to need a lot of emotional and directional support and also probably direct financial support.
(Dave, 52)

Like other fathers in this study, Dave had considered a minimum age, in his children's lives he hoped to live to, but was reassured, to some extent at least,

that the impact of his death would become less as his daughters matured and gained independence from him.

When estimating their life expectancy, some of the men referred to evidence of good health and longevity within their families; particularly with reference to their own parents, and offered this in support of positive forecasts for their own life-span. Kevin, for example, stated:

I'm very optimistic about this (laughs) I've got quite good genes in my family, so touch wood, longevity's not uncommon. I mean, my dad was 86 and pretty fit and it was quite sudden when he died ... my Mum's 88 and still alive, and her aunt and uncle were 102 and 99, you know what I mean? So I'm very optimistic, as long as I'm in good shape.

(Kevin, 63)

Mike (53) evidently found his parents' (and his grandfather's) longevity and good health reassuring with regard to estimating his own fitness and life-expectancy:

Mike: I think if I can get to 75, yes ... as fit and healthy as my parents were at 75, I'll think 'Bloody hell, that was good' you know.

Chris: That would make your son 27?

Mike: It would make him 27, yeah ... I think I could sign that off as: 'job done'. You know ... it'll have challenges etc. But that would be sufficient ... that would be doable, that sounds OK. So if we could manage that ... probably as good as we can do.

From Mike's perspective, as a 53 year old man, he felt if he was able to live to 75 and be in good health, that would be sufficient in terms of fulfilling his

paternal responsibilities: 'I could sign that off as 'Job done''. However, as both his parents were still alive, he was optimistic of living beyond that age:

Life expectancy in my family historically is very good, my father's father was in his late 80s, and my father's mother lived until she was nearly 100. My dad is 80 and is in good health, my Mum is 80 and in good health ... so if I could just replicate what they've done. They've just started to have some health problems, and who knows what might happen in the next bit of time, but they've got to 80 ... well, you know, that's 27 years from now.

(Mike, 53)

Joe also cited his father's age and the current health of both his parents as reasons to be optimistic about his own potential:

My dad, well he's 80 this year, he's a very fit 80 ... both my parents are very fit, well and active, very active and have been all their lives ... so that bodes well.

(Joe, 46)

The possibility of living to the age some of their family members had achieved was evidently reassuring to these fathers. It assisted those fortunate to have, in Kevin's words: 'quite good genes', to rationalise later paternity with the possibility that children might experience harm as a result of it. That is, they were encouraged by the possibility of *not* dying at a relatively young age and imposing paternal mortality on their children while they were still young.

The prospect of a child being 'left alone', without the support of siblings or extended family, following parental death occupied the thoughts of some participants. Referring to his 11-year-old daughter, Trevor stated:

She knows that we have concerns about her ... life path because when we're gone ... you know, she will be on her own.

(Trevor, 55)

Mike expressed similar concerns regarding his only child, and acknowledged that the limited familial support available to his son was a consequence of him and his wife being older parents:

We clearly have very limited familial networks and that is in direct relation to our ages, and we're concerned about what that means for ourselves and our son really. And whilst it doesn't matter to him now, we worry about what it'll mean to him later ... I've wondered if maybe I've been socially irresponsible because, you know, I'm bringing up a son who's ... who knows ... whose dad might keel over and die in five years' time ... so yeah, those thoughts have crossed my mind ... but it's too late now! (laughs).

(Mike, 53)

Mike revealed a deeper, more analytical perspective on the implications of his own mortality by contemplating not only what his death might mean for his son, but also by questioning his 'social responsibility' in becoming an older father:

Yeah, we brought a child into this world ... into a situation where in time it's gonna be an orphan ... he just doesn't have much of a family beyond ourselves and there are times when you think 'oh...', you know. My wife certainly worries about that and she thinks 'Have we done the right thing?', because once we're gone, there will be nobody.

(Mike, 53)

Some participants acknowledged that the possibility of early paternal (and maternal) death might require their children to be more self-sufficient at a relatively young age. Ian described how, in awareness of this, he already encouraged a sense of independence in his six-year-old son:

We know that by the time he gets to say 18, we'll hopefully be in a state to provide him with emotional support, but in terms of providing much physical

support, in terms of, running round after him and cooking meals and this sort of thing, we might not be in a position to do so much of that, so he's gonna have to fend for himself, stand on his own two feet and so on. So we are conscious of that and we've gotta sort of perhaps do more of that than younger parents do. It might end up that he's still living with us when he's 30 perhaps but it won't be us looking after him, he's gonna be ... maybe looking after us to a great extent. So ... we're trying to raise him to be sort of independent and able to look after himself. That's why we do the little things like bits of cake baking and things like this and getting him to help out with the shopping ... so that he's gradually learning how to do some of these things for himself so that hopefully by the age of 18 he'll be fairly ... in terms of the practical things, he'll be pretty self-sufficient.

(Ian, 58)

The type of long-term planning outlined by Ian in the above quote was not something other participants alluded to. However, his awareness that his son might one day have elderly parents in need of care – 'it won't be us looking after him ...' – highlighted a possible distinction between older and younger fathers in terms of how they contemplate their children's future. Ian's active preparation for his son's future in this way indicated awareness of the implications of later paternity.

The concluding part of this chapter, and of the overall presentation of the findings, offers a brief insight into participants' perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of their older father experience.

9.6 Older fatherhood: pleasure and regrets

At the end of their interview, a final 'summing-up' question invited participants to describe the 'best and worst' things about their older father experience. What

had they enjoyed most? What, if anything, did they regret? The following sample of their responses concludes the presentation of the findings:

I love running around with her, having a laugh, get to the park, just ...seeing her laugh, seeing her wide-eyed at the ducks or the dandelions and just creating experiences for her to be...to be happy, to see the world.

(Keith, 45)

Gosh it's hard, really, really hard to describe. I love so much of it really, to be honest. Someone who you just instinctively know, they look to you to look after them and they feel safe with you.

(Kevin, 63)

You talked about regrets; I mean the thing I have sometimes said to my daughter is, you know: 'I might not see grandchildren'.

(Pete, 61)

Probably the only thing that ... it's not very likely is that we will be engaged, healthy, close grandparents. It would be a shame if she didn't have children whilst we were still alive, that would be a regret if that were the case.

(Trevor, 55)

There's a regret around the fact that, in all probability I'm likely to die when they're somewhere around their 30s, so I won't see as much of their lives as I'd like to and I may or may not ever get to see my own grandchildren.

(Dave, 52)

You know, if somebody said, "Let's go back... six years or ten years and see if you want to change any of your decisions" I wouldn't.

(Ian, 58)

Erm ... the best things are just being a dad at all. Because, you know, the alternative to this is that I wouldn't be, it would just be myself and my wife and whilst that was ... but I feel stronger and better and more part of the world because of being a father. So I think that's the most important thing ... actually feeling that you ... in some way you matter more because there's you and your son and that's a good thing.

(Mike, 53)

I would say the only regret is now, with hindsight, could I have done it a bit earlier? I was a commitment phobe, didn't want to get married. So yeah , I do have a bit of a regret... wouldn't it have been nice ten years ago?

(Jim, 44)

It's just the magic of parenthood ... of seeing the children I think. And I think I can so appreciate it now. Again remember I haven't felt my whole life going 'I want to have children but I can't' ... but I've always wanted children and so I think you have appreciation of ... things as you're older that you don't really have the tools to appreciate when you're younger.

(Joe, 46)

No regrets whatsoever.

(Harry, 54)

These final reflections offer a succinct insight into the experience of older fatherhood. As the findings have shown, participants appeared to enjoy fatherhood and gained evident pleasure from being older fathers. They conveyed a sense that fatherhood at a later age conferred particular benefits from themselves and their children.

The principal disadvantage of older fatherhood apparent within the findings is that the men regretted the lack of time they may have in their children's lives and, as with the perceived advantages, they viewed this from the perspective of both themselves and their children. Both would potentially forego important aspects of fatherhood/childhood as a consequence of later paternity.

Overall, therefore, the findings present older fatherhood as a positive individual experience. Older fathers, as demonstrated by the interview cohort, are sensitive to their older father status, but feel that its positive aspects outweigh its disadvantages.

Chapter summary

This chapter has explored participants' reflections on the older father experience.

Participants' portrayals of older fatherhood led them to identify a range of positive features of later paternity and, also, to offer a more wistful, reflective perspective that focused on the 'bigger picture', particularly with regard to the impact that having an older father might have for their children.

As the other 'findings' chapters have shown, the men in this study enjoyed fatherhood and did not believe that age had limited their paternal abilities to a significant extent. It was clear that they saw specific advantages to being an older father and felt that their children benefitted from having a father with skills and knowledge acquired through life experience. Imagining themselves as younger fathers enabled them to reflect further on the benefits of later paternity. However, it was also clear that they were cautious about men much older than themselves becoming fathers, citing potential physical disadvantages as a reason for this.

At the heart of these men's older father experiences were concerns about the impact that having an older father might have on their children's lives. They worried about its social consequences and the implications of their children experiencing early paternal loss. They also indicated their own sense of loss in

relation to the possibility of not living as long into their children's lives as they might have done as younger fathers.

The next chapter draws on the four 'findings' chapters to discuss the overall experience of older fatherhood. It reveals how analysis of participants' interview data enabled the identification of some specific conclusions about that experience.

10 Discussion

As described in Chapter 4, through the process of data analysis I identified four super-ordinate themes which, together, encapsulated participants' experiences of first-time older fatherhood (Appendix L). These themes provided a foundation for the detailed presentation of the findings in Chapters 6 to 9.

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret and describe the significance of these findings in light of current knowledge and relevant theoretical debate. Critical examination of the findings, explaining insights they offer into the experience of older fatherhood, will inform the conclusions identified in the final chapter (see Chapter 11, Section 11.1).

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the discussion, outlining its structure and acknowledging two key concepts – identity theory and social comparison theory (see Chapter 2, Sections 2.7 and 2.8) – which, together with the research paradigm outlined in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2), provide a theoretical foundation for explaining participants' perceptions and experiences.

The main body of the discussion focuses on four interconnected elements, derived from the findings, which provide a framework for understanding participants' lived experience of first-time fatherhood beyond the age of 40. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the discussion and an outline of the subsequent concluding chapter of this thesis.

10.1 Overview

The aims of this study were to explore the perceptions and experiences of fatherhood of men who become fathers for the first time beyond the age of 40. It was anticipated that this would contribute to existing knowledge concerning the lives of fathers, families and children (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1).

To achieve its aims this study addressed the primary research question:

- How do older fathers describe the experience of later paternity?

And the following subsidiary questions:

- What are the practical, emotional and social consequences of older fatherhood?
- How is the experience of older fatherhood affected by social attitudes towards advanced paternal age?
- How do older fathers perceive the consequences of older fatherhood for their children?

Employing an interpretative phenomenological methodology by means of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009; Smith and

Osborn, 2008) this study has exposed the complexity of the paternal experience located within the previously unexplored world of older fatherhood.

This discussion focuses on a mostly positive older father experience. It shows how engagement with the practical, emotional and social consequences of later paternity assisted participants' sense-making, and that the meanings these men ascribed to older fatherhood were a consequence of pragmatic self-evaluation, which clearly formed part of their everyday paternal experience.

The findings reveal four overarching features of participants' lived experience (in relation to older fatherhood) which, together, provide a basis for theoretical explanation of their 'objects of concern' and 'experiential claims' (Smith et al., 2009, p.46) (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5.1).

Firstly, they show how the men formed a discernible 'older father' identity. Secondly, they reveal how sensing uncertain social attitudes to later paternity contributed to participants' sense-making and the meanings they attributed to their paternal experience. Thirdly, the findings show that concerns about physical capacity and physical ability were a prominent feature of participants' older father experience, and fourthly, they highlight these older fathers' concerns about the consequences of later paternity for their children.

10.2 Accessing participants' personal and social worlds

In response to the research questions I sought to examine how first-time older fathers made sense of their personal and social worlds and to explore the meanings they ascribed to older fatherhood as it was lived and experienced. Applying a phenomenological ontology, older fatherhood was viewed as both a socially constructed and socially defined phenomenon, but also as a subjective experience to which individuals assign particular meanings. These perspectives formed the research paradigm that guided this study (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2).

The goal of exploring and explaining older fathers' experiences suggested that an interpretative (hermeneutic) approach would be appropriate. This, in turn, guided my methodological choice of IPA as a systematic means of gathering and analysing data and illuminating participants' lifeworlds.

I recognised that access to participants' inner worlds would be dependent on individuals' personal, descriptive accounts and their ability to articulate their thoughts and experiences (Arroll and Senior, 2008; Brocki and Wearden, 2006). Consequently, reflecting IPA's idiographic approach (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2), each father in this study was viewed as an individual 'experiencing, meaning-making, embodied and discursive agent' (Eatough and Smith, 2006, p.486). This meant acknowledging that not all participants offered similar, clear, unequivocal access to their Husserlian 'world of lived experience', or 'lifeworld'

(Carr, 1970) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4). In order to gain such access, I examined each participant's account in detail, paying particular attention to areas where ambiguity and nuance indicated the need for a more focused, interpretative approach to the data.

An example of this is provided by analysis of part of Mike's interview (10.4.2 below). It shows how an understanding of social reality must be grounded in the individual participant's experience of that reality (Gray, 2014). It also demonstrates IPA's idiographic commitment to understanding experience from an individual perspective, and how it seeks to: 'capture particular experiences as experienced by particular people' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 16).

10.3 Structure of the discussion

This discussion illustrates a 'chain of connection' (Smith, 2011a, p. 10) between the aims of the study and the research questions; participants' experience of older fatherhood; their description of that experience; their sense-making and, finally, my interpretative analysis. To achieve this, the main body of the discussion explores the four interconnected areas of participants' experiences outlined above (see Section 10.1).

In order to demonstrate theoretical linkage between the various parts of the study, the discussion maintains consistency with both the phenomenological and constructionist research paradigm and the assumptions of IPA. However, additional theoretical framing draws upon the sociological theories of identity

and social comparison (see Chapter 2, Sections 2.7 and 2.8). These two theoretical concepts are especially applicable to understanding two overarching features of participants' older father experience that stood out both during the interviews and through data analysis. The first of these was the men's self-perception as older fathers and the second was the ways in which they sought to make sense of that experience in relation to others.

In exploring participants' sense of identity in relation to older fatherhood, this discussion will reflect a synthesis of social constructionist and symbolic interactionist approaches to identity (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7). The rationale for focusing on these two perspectives is firstly, a social constructionist viewpoint accords with the research paradigm that has guided this study (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2). Secondly, the symbolic interactionist approach both demonstrates consistency with the theoretical background of IPA (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.3) and shows how features of participants' older father experience became located within their identity hierarchy (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7). The approach to hierarchical identity formation taken in this study is that the men's paternal identity related to its psychological importance to them, rather than its salience in particular situations. That is, participants' perceptions of their self-identities as fathers – and as older fathers – were regarded as fundamental to their paternal experience.

It should be noted that identity development is one of the strongest prevailing themes in the IPA literature (Bennett et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2015; Vangeli and West, 2012; De Visser and Smith, 2007; Timotijevic and Breakwell, 2000),

and this link between theoretical framing and methodological approach provides additional endorsement for the employment of IPA in this study.

Comparisons (revealed as observations and criticisms) of other parents were central to the meanings participants ascribed to their older father experience and informed their paternal self-evaluation. Social comparison theory therefore assists in explaining these men's experience of later paternity and in understanding older fatherhood as a socially constructed phenomenon.

In combination, theories of identity and social comparisons provide a coherent theoretical basis for understanding the meanings participants ascribed to older fatherhood.

The subjective experience of older fathers provides the empirical lens through which the findings, discussion and conclusions of this study should be understood. Therefore, reflecting IPA's endorsement of the use of extracts from participants' narratives to facilitate understanding (Smith and Osborn, 2007), participants' words (used sparingly) are included in this discussion where it is believed they assist clarification or add value to the discussion, and a link to the relevant part of the findings is included where appropriate.

Having set the scene for the discussion and outlined its theoretical foundations, this chapter now proceeds to consider the intrinsic features of participants' older father experience in more detail.

10.4 Fatherhood and Identity

The findings show how the men in this study drew upon experiential features of fatherhood – in both their domestic settings and beyond – to describe their everyday lives as older fathers. As they discussed a broad range of paternally-related activities, they demonstrated their practical and emotional engagement in fatherhood, reflecting nurturing, supportive and 'involved' paternal roles (Gillies, 2009) and revealing deeply-rooted father-child relationships.

The sense that fatherhood was fundamental to each participant's self-perception was therefore evident and all had established a well-defined 'paternal identity' (McBride et al., 2005; Maurer et al., 2003) (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7). It was also apparent that this paternal identity was framed and informed by older fatherhood, and evidence of this formed a conceptual thread running through the men's narratives.

In order to understand how participants formed a paternal identity shaped by older fatherhood, this discussion will draw upon the approach to identity theory outlined by Stryker (1987) (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7). According to Stryker (1987), knowledge of the self is acquired by way of social interactions founded within an individual's social position or status (Stets and Burke, 2003), and the expectations and meanings that both society and the individual attribute to a particular role (Burke and Stets, 2009). Therefore, expectations of a role such as 'father' or indeed 'older father' connect to personal, social and cultural understandings of that role.

The ways in which participants made sense of being fathers (showing they had assimilated the social and cultural expectations of fatherhood) were demonstrated across the findings. So, when Dave described how he sought to: 'discharge my duties as a father' (see Chapter 6, Section 6.5), or when Ian recalled being mistaken for his son's grandfather: 'This guy came to our house and made some comment about 'oh, are you having a nice time with your grandad?' (laughs)' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1.1), each man indicated awareness of social and cultural understandings of fatherhood, which contributed to the formation of their paternal identities.

The following section explores in more detail how the men in this study established a paternal identity shaped by their experiences of older fatherhood.

10.4.1 Forming an 'older father' identity

Each participant's paternal identity was aligned with a less well defined, but equally important, 'older father' identity. However, the men found that the social and cultural expectations of this role were less familiar, and therefore less accessible than those of fatherhood itself. The development of an older father identity therefore occurred gradually as the men experienced the personal and social consequences of fathering beyond the age of 40.

With respect to the personal consequences of older fatherhood, the findings show that the preliminary construction of an identity aligned to older fatherhood occurred at an early stage in the paternal process. For example, when

considering whether or not to have children, some of the men had regarded their age a significant and possibly determinative factor and had calculated how old they (and their wife or partner) would be at various points in their child's life. These calculations appeared to have been prompted by considerations of paternal mortality (and paternal loss for their as-yet unborn child).

The findings suggest therefore that participants experienced 'anticipated regret' (Crawford et al., 2002) in relation to the possibility of dying relatively early in their child's life and with regard to certain events in their child's life (such as marriage) that they might miss (see Chapter 9, Section 9.5). They showed that contemplating a potentially limited paternal timeframe was a feature of their older father experience that contributed to the establishment of a discrete older father identity.

However, it was evident that the possibility of such regret had not significantly influenced the men's behavioural choices in terms of whether or not to become a father. Hadley and Hanley (2011) note that men's desire for fatherhood, irrespective of their age, remains strong and that childless men experience regret at opportunities for fatherhood denied or not utilised. On balance, it seems that the fathers in this study elected to experience the anticipated regret of 'missing out' on their children's lives and the possibility of not 'being there' for their children, rather than the regret caused by not becoming a father.

With regard to understanding older fatherhood in a social context, the comparisons participants made, during the prenatal period, with their future

paternal peers were particularly helpful. They enabled the men to begin to conceptualise later paternity and to contemplate the actuality of older fatherhood. For example, when they accompanied their wives or partners to pregnancy-related activities, such as medical examinations and ante-natal classes, events at which increasingly men are encouraged to play an active role (Reed, 2009) and which assist in the transformative process of new fatherhood (Draper and Ives, 2013), the men had an opportunity to compare themselves (and their ages) with those of other prospective fathers.

Exposure to older fatherhood in this context was a point at which participants' appreciation of it as both a personal and social undertaking became more tangible. Their contemplation of these issues at an early stage of their paternal experience shows the importance of the transitional (prenatal and postnatal) period to the men's appreciation of older fatherhood. There was, as one participant observed: 'A recognition that people we were meeting were not in the same position age-wise' (see Chapter 6, Section 6.1).

Exploring the transition to fatherhood has been a popular topic for fatherhood researchers (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2). It is a time when men engage in a process of self-reflection, information-gathering and adjustment that serves to acknowledge the formation of a separate identity linked to their new paternal role (Habib, 2012; Höfner et al., 2011; Habib and Lancaster, 2006). This process commences during the preconceptual period, when couples discuss the possibility of having a child and subsequently, during pregnancy, when a man becomes an 'expectant father' and begins his integration into fatherhood

from a social perspective (Genesoni and Tallandini, 2009). A range of age-related issues (including anticipated regret and comparisons with younger men) demonstrate that, for the men in this study the transition period was of additional significance in terms of understanding their future roles as older fathers.

Forming a paternal identity (for any man, regardless of his age) can be a protracted endeavour; it involves, for example, readjustment to a new self-image, the establishment of a triadic family relationship and adaptation to a new social role (Genesoni and Tallandini, 2009). For older fathers, the lack of clear social and cultural expectations of older fatherhood extends this process. Keith for example, a 45-year-old father of a one-year-old daughter (and therefore a relatively inexperienced older father) expressed uncertainty about the social expectations of the role: 'Do they think I'm a kind of irresponsible person who's not gonna be around for their child?' (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3). He was therefore reliant, like other participants, on experiential knowledge, acquired progressively over time, to comprehend the social expectations of older fatherhood.

Further evidence of the ways in which participants constructed an older father identity was found in their descriptions of day-to-day activities as fathers (see Chapter 6, Section 6.3); their thoughts on the physical aspects of fatherhood and how these may be affected by age (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2 and Section 10.6.1), and when they discussed older fatherhood in its social context (see Chapter 7 and Section 10.5).

The exposition of an older father identity by means of interpretative engagement with the data reflects Smith et al.'s (2009, p. 35) advice for the IPA researcher:

There is a phenomenon ready to shine forth, but detective work is required by the researcher to facilitate the coming forth, and then to make sense of it once it has happened.

The next part of this discussion demonstrates the 'detective work' Smith et al. refer to. It offers further reflections on the concept of an older father identity, revealing how the interpretation of participants' narratives provided insight into a discernible identity linked to advanced paternal age. By doing so, it adds to the understanding of the behavioural expectations men associate with fatherhood (Maurer et al., 2003) and to the meanings they ascribe to that role (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7).

10.4.2 Detecting an 'older father' identity

The formation of a discrete older father identity was evident when participants talked about age-related aspects of their paternal experience. For example, when they expressed concerns about the consequences of ageing and how these might affect their paternal efficacy (see Chapter 8, Section 8.2 and Section 10.6.1), or when they talked about whether being older made them conspicuous in public (see Chapter 7, Section 7.3), participants depicted a paternal self-image that was influenced by age. Similarly, their sensitivity to what their children might, in the future, feel about having an older father; their comparisons with younger fathers, and their thoughts on how they might have

approached fatherhood as younger men revealed an identity embedded in the experience of later paternity.

The following brief discussion, focussing on a part of one participant's narrative, shows how interpretative engagement with the data facilitated the exploration of a particular feature of an older father identity.

The findings show that Mike frequently alluded to his paternal distinctiveness; on a number of occasions describing himself as: 'an outlier ... because, you know, I'm 53 and the other parents that I meet are not' (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2). He also talked at length about how he and his wife felt disconnected from their social peers, none of whom had young children, and of the difficulty he had experienced in getting to know other fathers. Although Mike appeared keen to establish the acceptability of his socially detached situation, his words conveyed a sense that he was reconciled to this as a consequence of being an older father rather than expressing genuine satisfaction with his circumstances: 'It's very nice, but it's just us'. Part of the analysis of Mike's interview therefore focused on understanding the extent to which his conflicted sense of satisfaction had become an internalised expectation of his paternal role and, therefore, a contributory feature of his older father identity.

The empathic, hermeneutic aspect of IPA encourages the analyst to try to understand what it is like *to be* the participant in a given situation. Indeed, according to Smith and Osborn (2015), in an IPA study, access to participants' personal worlds is dependent on the researcher's own conceptions, which are

required in order to make sense of these worlds through a process of interpretative activity (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1). Therefore, understanding Mike's experience of social detachment required closer interpretative reflection on his relationship with his social and paternal peers, the meanings he constructed in relation to his sense of detachment, and how these contributed to his sense of himself as an older father.

To achieve this, I returned to both the recorded interview and written transcription a number of times to determine whether my initial interpretation of Mike's sense of social isolation – despite his reassurance that all was well – was confirmed. In so doing, I sought to understand his own interpretation of his situation and I engaged in the 'double hermeneutic' process described by Smith and colleagues (2009) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1).

Mike's words appeared to convey a mixed message. He seemed to find the situation within his self-contained family unit satisfactory, but remarks such as: 'In my sort of little interpersonal world, there are very few points of reference ...' suggested that he wished for greater contact with friends and other fathers. More specifically perhaps, he wished to gain feedback on his own fathering by way of social interaction and comparison. However, his account also indicated his unwillingness to seek out and form these relationships.

Identity theory suggests that identification with a role foretells the enactment of expected behaviours (Maurer et al., 2003) (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7) and, from an analytic perspective, Mike appeared to view his status as an 'outlier' as

both a consequence of later paternity and, more significantly, an explanation for not having established reciprocal relationships. I concluded therefore that this participant's behavioural associations had become internalised and part of his self-concept as an older father.

This example demonstrates how one older father experienced difficulty reconciling his paternal age with the social expectations of fatherhood and how this had become an assumed component of the man's sense-making in relation to his paternal role. It also shows how interpretative phenomenological analysis revealed an otherwise concealed aspect of an older father identity and thus provided fresh insight into an aspect of paternal identity.

By listening to, engaging with and, most importantly, interpreting Mike's words, it was possible to understand the older father experience at a deeper level than would have been possible solely through accepting his descriptive account in its literal sense. This analysis demonstrated the process of 'second order sense-making of someone else's experience' (Smith and Eatough, 2007, p.36), moving between the levels of interpretation described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.1).

A further example of how interpretative analysis enabled a feature of an older father identity to 'shine forth' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35) is provided in the next section, which explores how the participants adapted to becoming older fathers after spending a considerable part of their adult lives without paternal responsibilities.

10.4.3 Relinquishing an extended 'youthful' identity

All the men in this study became fathers for the first-time following a substantial period of child-free adulthood. Their accounts reveal how, by not having children at an earlier point in their lives, older fathers may retain a relatively 'youthful' self-identity into their middle years. This reflects Charlton's (2007) hypothesis that adults in Westernised societies increasingly retain many of the attitudes and behaviours traditionally associated with youth. One of the fathers observed that he had: 'Carried on being a sort of 30-something well into my late 40s' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1) which typified this sense of 'extended youth'.

However, although fatherhood required considerable adjustment as they sought to form and incorporate a new paternal identity, participants perceived advantages to having both experienced and then surrendered a long-standing period of comparative independence (notwithstanding relationship commitments to others, such as wives or partners). Dave, for example, believed that making a practical and emotional commitment to fatherhood had been a positive experience, made easier because of his age. Compared with his younger self he had fewer competing interests to distract him from fulfilling his paternal obligations to his young daughters: 'I've done enough going out of an evening' (see Chapter 9, Section 9.2).

Dave's comment adds to the understanding of older fatherhood and how men form a separate older father identity. By having 'done enough' in his previously less constrained (child-free) adulthood he now had greater emotional freedom

to take on his paternal role, and his words (in the context of the interview) conveyed a sense of relief that his extended period of relative autonomy had lessened any resistance he may have felt to assuming the obligations of fatherhood and meeting the social and cultural expectations of a paternal role.

As with the analysis of Mike's comments concerning his perceived social isolation (see 10.4.2), interpretative engagement with Dave's brief remark provided an insight into the older father experience, which informed the analysis as a whole. This again demonstrates the idiographic nature of IPA and emphasises the importance of the individual participant – and individual comment – as a unit of analysis (Eatough and Smith, 2006). Smith (2011b, p. 6) describes the pivotal role that a single expression can play in the analysis of data, and how it can have: 'significance completely disproportionate to its size'. Dave had inadvertently provided what Smith (2011b, p. 7) refers to as: 'a gem ... the thing that stands out when you're reading a transcript'.

Dave's comment, and those of other participants, also alluded to the significant alteration to their lifestyles they had experienced on becoming fathers. First-time fatherhood signifies one of the most profound changes a man may experience (Chin et al., 2011a) and, irrespective of age, is likely to involve decreased personal autonomy in exchange for paternal responsibilities (Condon et al., 2004). Becoming a father for the first time is also one of the traditional markers of the transition to adulthood (Sharon, 2016; Arnett, 1998) and represents, in developmental terms, the adult stage of generativity (Erikson,

1950), 'when the focus shifts from the self to guiding the next generation' (Goldberg, 2014, p. 3).

In view of its association with emerging adulthood, it is unsurprising that research into difficulties men may face when forming a paternal identity has focused on the experiences of younger fathers. It has, for example, been observed that the early assumption of paternal obligations may impose a disrupted and disordered transition from adolescence into adulthood, with lifelong consequences that influence emotional well-being (Mirowsky and Ross, 2002). It may also disrupt young men's investment in job skills or career development (Sigle-Rushton, 2005) and be unsettling to their sense of identity and perception of their 'possible selves' (Strauss and Goldberg, 1999). However, although participants in this study had long-since transitioned to adulthood, the developmental impact of fatherhood was clearly tangible, suggesting that disruption to a perception of 'possible selves' is not only a consequence of younger fatherhood. Older fathers may also encounter the disruption to an ingrained self-image as they seek to bring together the social and cultural expectations of fatherhood following a lengthy period of child-free adulthood.

In summary therefore, the sense of an identity shaped and informed by older fatherhood was evident across the interviews. Some participants offered a clear indication of how older fatherhood influenced their self-perception, revealing its significance to their personal and paternal identities. However, others' narratives

were less explicit, requiring interpretative engagement with the data to enable aspects of these men's older father identity to emerge.

It was clear that being an older father was important to participants' understanding of their paternal role. It was evident therefore that older fatherhood (rather than fatherhood alone) occupied a position of psychological centrality (Stryker and Serpe, 1994) within each of these men's identity hierarchy (see Chapter 2, Section 2.7). The identification and exploration of a discrete 'older father' identity provided a clear focus for examining older fathers' experiences and offered new insights and understanding of later paternity.

The discussion now moves on from specifically examining identity to consider how participants experienced older fatherhood in its social context.

10.5 Social uncertainty

In accordance with its phenomenological and constructionist underpinnings (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2), this study approached older fatherhood as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by a range of social and historical factors and experienced in negotiation with other social relationships. Reflecting this epistemological perspective, a focus for analysis was to determine the extent to which participants' sense-making, meanings and identity – as older fathers – were dependent on what Gergen (2015, p. 3) refers to as: 'the social relationships of which we are a part'. This revealed that social comparison with

their paternal peers underpinned participants' experiences (see Chapter 2, Section 2.8).

The data suggest that society and culture are located at the heart of how the men in this study experienced older fatherhood. However, they also show that as a consequence of this, ambiguity and social uncertainty permeated their older father experience. For example, being in public with their children exposed participants to what was, at times, an inquisitive social lens: 'So how come you've left it so late to have children?' (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4) and they found that they sometimes challenged expectations of age-related paternal appearance: 'It's a little bit awkward to explain ... 'I'm actually her dad"' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1.1). Such encounters influenced the men's self-perception, particularly their social identity, as older fathers.

Stryker's (1987) approach to identity theory (see Chapter 2, Section 2.8) echoes the social constructionist perspective that has guided this study as it assumes that: 'Identities are embedded in roles and roles are embedded in social statuses' (Pasley et al., 2014, p. 298). This suggests that the formation of paternal identity (described in Chapter 2, Section 2.7) is not something a man undertakes independent of other people, but is a 'reciprocal process negotiated by men, children and mothers, and other interested parties' (Marsiglio et al., 2000a, p. 1178). Such a process was noticeable when participants described their social relationships – for example, how they related to other fathers (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2) – and indicated the effect older fatherhood had on these.

As with other aspects of their paternal role, when contemplating older fatherhood in its social context, participants used other fathers (and parents) as reference points. Contemplating information about other people in this way is central to social comparison theory (Wood, 1996) (see Chapter 2, Section 2.8). Individuals have different motives for engaging in social comparison (Helgeson and Mickelson, 1995). It is argued that self-evaluation is best accomplished through lateral comparison (comparison with similar others), whereas those who seek to enhance or protect their self-view – possibly perceiving a threat to self-esteem – might engage in downward comparison with people who are seemingly worse off (Corcoran et al., 2011). Sus and Wheeler (2012, p. 467-468) note that: 'exposure to a less fortunate other (i.e. a downward target) boosts subjective wellbeing'.

From this theoretical perspective participants' critical views of younger parents are understandable as they locate younger parents – perceived as lacking the advantages of older fatherhood (see Chapter 9, Section 9.1) – in a 'worse off' situation. From this view, participants' negative comparisons assisted them in consolidating their own identities as older fathers. However, participants also engaged in lateral comparison with other parents, including other fathers and, indeed, older mothers. Self-evaluation by means of comparison with older mothers facilitated participants' understanding of social attitudes and expectations of older fatherhood (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4.2).

Although Festinger (1954) suggests that people choose similar others (such as parental or paternal peers) for comparison, more recent thinking shows that

comparison with dissimilar others also plays a significant role in self-evaluation and identity formation (Suls and Wheeler, 2012). This assists understanding of how the process of distancing themselves from their younger paternal peers assisted some participants in confirming their own paternal identities. That is, they viewed the younger fathers in terms of them being 'dissimilar others': ' ... it's just what have we got in common really, other than the children?' (see Chapter 7, Section 7.2).

Older fatherhood signals, from some perspectives at least, nonconformity with paternal norms (Sarler, 2011). Contemplating the meanings attributed to it by other people – whilst at times disconcerting – assisted participants' perception and understanding of later paternity as a social phenomenon and contributed to their sense-making and comprehension of their own experience. For example, representations of older fatherhood in the popular and news media contributed to the men's understanding of older fatherhood as a loosely defined social and cultural concept (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4.1). However, it was clear that they were able to reconcile the occasionally sensationalist media representations of older fatherhood (particularly those which were celebrity-focused) with their own paternal experience: 'I'm not a rock star; I don't live a kind of flamboyant lifestyle so I don't think none of that attaches to me' (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4.1).

This suggests that, although informative, media representations do not significantly impact on the individual experience of older fatherhood. They may, however, affect wider social attitudes towards advanced paternal age as the popular and news media play an influential role in focusing public interest on a

particular subject (Happer and Philo, 2013). Although, in recent years, the influence of traditional news sources has diminished due to the advance of mobile and social media, newspapers and television remain a prominent source of media power (Sorrell, 2017; Amory, 2015). They offer a widely accessible source of comment on later paternity, with 'celebrity' older fathers, regarded by the public with a 'mixture of admiration and scepticism' (Kuhnert and Nieschlag, 2004, p.327), providing an enduring topic of interest (Tonkin, 2016; Gallagher, 2013).

Ylänne's (2016) work on how later parenting is represented in the British press is helpful in understanding the ways in which the media frame this phenomenon and how they tend to reinforce expectations of 'age-appropriate' reproduction (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6). Ylänne' (2016) applied a media framing analysis and reported, for example, that late parenting is represented in news discourse as a challenging concept, in contrast to what the author refers to as 'normative' parenting, and that the 'deliberate risks' taken by older parents in terms of reproductive choice need to be balanced against their desire to be parents. This echoes the finding referred to in Section 10.4.1 that participants' desire to be fathers outweighed the sense of 'anticipated regret' (Crawford et al., 2002) they experienced when contemplating fatherhood.

Participants' awareness of 'age-appropriate' activity was demonstrated across the findings; some believed that an increasing trend towards delayed parenting (Khandwala et al., 2017; Ylänne, 2016) had led to greater tolerance of men becoming fathers at a later age. This strengthened these participants' self-

assurance in their paternal – and more specifically older father – role. They referred to changes in cultural norms, which they believed had led to an increase in the number of men becoming older fathers, thus potentially lessening its atypicality. They also gained confidence from perceiving a general relaxation in social evaluations of age, as one of the fathers commented: 'It's like, you know, 50's the new 40 ... 60's the new 50' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1).

Their perceptions were reflective of the view that sociocultural ideas about ageing, the life course and reproductive choices have changed in the last half-century (Kokko et al., 2009):

The question increasingly arises as to what constitutes 'old' in a time of changing age norms.

(Frieze et al., 2008)

It has been reported that there is now greater latitude in the timing of parenthood, and a reduction in cultural pressures towards early parenthood (Goldberg, 2014). It was evident that participants were sensitive to these social developments.

In summary, the findings show that participants experienced older fatherhood as a social phenomenon. They were aware that their father status could attract inquisitive attention and that they might sometimes challenge expectations of what a father should look like in terms of his age in relation to his child.

Contemplating what others might think of later paternity helped to establish

participants' social identity as older fathers, and they strengthened this identity by engaging in a process of social comparison with other (mostly younger) parents. Overall, social attitudes towards older fathers were perceived by participants to be uncertain. They were aware of media reports of later paternity but generally seemed to distance themselves from reports of 'celebrity' older fatherhood. Participants gained confidence in their older father role by perceiving that ideas about ageing had changed, offering greater latitude to paternal age.

The discussion now moves on to consider the third theme identified across the data, which was the importance of physical capacity and physical activity to participants' understanding of fatherhood.

10.6 Physicality and fatherhood

The findings show that participants believed themselves to be more effective and committed fathers than they would have been as younger men. In describing their approach to fatherhood, the men conveyed a sense of age-related confidence (see Chapter 6, Section, 6.5.1), and recognised specific advantages to children of having a father with greater life experience, self-assurance and wisdom who was also able to devote more time, both practically and emotionally, to his paternal role. By emphasising its positive aspects, participants were able to differentiate older fatherhood from younger fatherhood. They also implied that these attributes compensated their children, at least to some extent, for the negative implications of later paternity, such as the

possibility of experiencing relatively early paternal loss (see Section 10.7) and having a father who was less physically able or active than his younger paternal peers.

The perception of fatherhood as a physical activity, requiring a credible level of paternal health and fitness was pervasive across the findings as the men's narratives revealed a paternal experience influenced by concern for physical capacity and ability. The following two sections discuss in more detail how physicality and older fatherhood interconnected and how the non-physical attributes of later paternity served to reinforce masculine identities threatened by ageing and physical decline.

10.6.1 Physical activity, paternal ability and masculinity

Although concerns regarding physical ability were infrequently expressed (a notable exception being Joe's observation: 'I can't keep up with him doing the parkrun' – see Chapter 8, Section 8.2), participants' narratives strongly suggested that their understandings and expectations of fatherhood, and self-confidence in their paternal role and abilities – particularly in relation to caring for young children – were closely linked to their perception of it as a physical undertaking. Presenting a credible standard of paternal physicality was therefore central to their interpretations of successful fatherhood.

This was evident when participants discussed their physical appearance and whether they 'looked their age' (see Section 10.6.2) and was particularly

noticeable when they discussed their capacity to be physically active fathers, with sufficient strength and fitness to participate in activities with their children. Such an association between effective or successful fatherhood and physical capacity is recognised by Shirani (2013), who notes the importance of physical activity to father identity among younger, normative age fathers who expressed concern for the impact that age might have on an older man's fathering abilities.

I interpreted participants' desire to represent themselves as physically active fathers as confirmation that they recognised and accepted fatherhood as an involved, engaged role. It was also indicative of how influential the revised perceptions and understandings fatherhood (described in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1) have been. These changes encompass both physical and emotional aspects of paternal involvement, creating what Ives (2015) terms 'a moral imperative' to engage in the kinds of involved fathering that benefits children.

A consequence of acknowledging the physical requirements of the father's role in caring for children (as distinct from being a physical 'provider' or 'breadwinner' – see Chapter 2) has been an increased focus on paternal health and physical activity and awareness of how these contribute to optimising child health and promoting the father-child relationship (Young and Morgan, 2017). Chin et al. (2011b) observe that, in comparison to mothers, men perceive themselves as adopting a more playful and physically active role with their child. This suggests that the fathers in this study were likely to be inclined towards physical participation, and the findings show that involvement in leisure activities (swimming, running, walks) was a means by which the men demonstrated their

physical involvement in fatherhood and, in doing so, substantiated their sense of paternal effectiveness. Shaw and Dawson (2001) suggest that such purposive leisure activities can strengthen family relationships, reflecting a contemporary view that paternal involvement in sport and leisure has become a key component of the paternal role (Such, 2006) and a means by which 'good fatherhood' may be defined (Fletcher, 2019).

In evaluating their physical abilities, it was apparent that participants used younger fathers as a benchmark, self-evaluating against a perceived physical norm demonstrated by fathers younger than themselves. Measures of self-appraisal included monitoring their paternal peers – and by implication their own fathering performance – through their own children's accounts of other fathers' physical accomplishments (see Chapter 8, Section 8.3).

Although some participants were critical of the standard of physical fitness presented by younger parents, it appeared that younger fathers posed a threat to the men's paternal self-confidence and masculine identity. This was demonstrated when they considered the likelihood of them being able to match-up, physically, to younger men. As one participant (Dave) observed: 'I'm certainly dreading the first *'Dads' Race* in the school's sports day' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.3). However, it is possible that this father's concern did not only relate to his ability to physically contend with younger men. Jeanes and Magee (2011) note the role that sporting activities can play in relationship formation between fathers and their children and how they may form part of a desirable masculine identity that allows men to portray an idealised fathering role. Dave's

'dread' might therefore signify a perceived threat to his paternal and masculine self-identity (in the presence of his children), as well as concern for being physically outdone by other fathers.

When one of the participants described being unable to compete with his five-year-old son in the parkrun (above) his obvious frustration reflected the value he ascribed to presenting a positive physical image to his child. However, the findings do not suggest this concern was gender-specific or that participants regarded physical activity with sons as being of particular importance. Those who had daughters also revealed their concern for how ageing and physical decline might affect their fathering role and father-child relationships.

The ways in which participants described their ongoing evaluation of other fathers (and, on occasions, other parents in general) reflected the process of social comparison outlined by Festinger (1954) who suggests that individuals evaluate their own opinions and abilities by testing them against those of other people (see Chapter 2, Section 2.8). This proved to be a pertinent and influential factor in participants' identity development and behaviour; adding further to understanding of the older father experience. Furthermore, constructing and monitoring appropriate masculine behaviour by means of comparisons and conversations with other men is a way in which, it is claimed, men regulate normative masculinity (Gill et al., 2005).

Closely linked to participants' physical self-evaluations was the prospect of future physical decline; an unavoidable consequence of ageing (Kuh et al.,

2014). The men in this study appeared to be in good health and most engaged in some type of regular physical exercise, such as walking, cycling and swimming. Their desire to maintain physical fitness – and to limit the impact of physical decline – appeared to be motivated as much by their obligations to fatherhood as by their age. As older fathers, they seemed to fear that an age-related reduction in their overall health and fitness might compromise their ability to represent an appropriate level of paternal physicality. In this way, age and physical decline threatened both their paternal functioning and masculine identity.

The manner in which dominant models of masculinity frame fatherhood identities is well established. However, it is recognised that such traditional forms of masculinity may co-exist with other models such as a 'caring masculinity' (Elliott, 2016; Ives, 2015; Connell, 2005) (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). The realignment of masculinities that takes place as men age (Mann et al., 2016) was reflected in the findings as participants' accounts demonstrated their concern for the impact – or prospective impact – of ageing and physical decline.

It is helpful to comprehend participants' concerns regarding the effects of ageing, and their physical comparisons with younger fathers, from the perspectives of 'ageing masculinity' (Shirani, 2013; Tarrant, 2013; Fleming, 1999) or, more specifically, 'shifting masculinities' (Mann et al., 2016) (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Such a view links issues of masculine ability and masculine identity to the meanings participants' ascribed to physically active fatherhood. For the men in this study, being older fathers, and sensing that they

were not as physically potent as their younger paternal peers, necessitated an altered perception of their masculine self-image. This does not suggest that the men's masculine identities were solely aligned to their physical abilities.

However, the findings show that other contributors to this identity, such as economic provision (Henwood et al., 2010) and personality traits such as stoicism and self-reliance (Dolan, 2014) were less prominent.

Having discussed the older father experience from the perspective of physical capacity and masculinity, the next section discusses the importance for older fathers of presenting what they feel to be a conventional physical paternal appearance.

10.6.2 Physical appearance

Notwithstanding concerns about the possibility that their children might experience early paternal loss (see Section 10.7) and the prospect of paternal physical decline (see Section 10.5.2), participants did not appear to be particularly troubled by their age and seemed opposed to the view that it affected their ability to undertake their paternal role. However, the findings suggest that some of the men gained confidence from believing they did not appear to be as old as they were and that other people perceived them to be younger than their actual age.

For example, when Harry remarked that: 'People generally say I don't seem as old as I am' (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1) he was responding to a question about

his age and whether being 54 ever deterred him from taking part in activities with his young daughter, such as joining in games in public or attending social events. However, it was perhaps significant that he chose to frame his response with reference to his (seemingly deceptive) appearance, implying it was important to him as an older father to present what he felt was a normative (age-related) paternal image, particularly with regard to being the father of a young child.

It was also noticeable that Harry did not refer specifically to his physical appearance, but commented on how old he 'seemed' to others. This reflects observations made by other men in the study who drew upon additional forms of evidence in support of their 'younger-looking' selves. For example, as well as the characteristic, physical signs of appearing older – such as a lack of grey hair, an embodied sign of ageing (Gilleard and Higgs, 2014) – some participants noted how presenting a positive, optimistic character and outlook influenced people's perceptions of their age.

Those fathers who claimed that they appeared younger than their age, or implied that to do so would be in some way desirable, were acting in accordance with a more general trend. Seeking to maintain a younger image – through appearance or behaviour – is increasingly common among adults in western societies (Schafer and Shippee, 2010) where: 'To feel, look and act young is generally considered to be something positive' (Teuscher, 2009. p. 23).

Studies of age identity have found that adults' subjective age tends to be lower than their chronological age (Kotter-Grühn et al., 2016; Teuscher, 2009; Rubin and Bernstein, 2006). Subjective age derives from a process of fixing – and, if necessary, adjusting – personal age perceptions in light of various reference points or markers (Montepare, 2009). These might be physical reference points, such as appearance, or life-stage markers such as becoming a parent.

Therefore, some participants' wish to appear younger – or their subjective belief that they actually did so – is at least partially explained by the social and cultural expectations of fatherhood and its link to younger-age men. Hence, these men's sensitivity to age-related appearance reflected both a general trend among westernised adults; an awareness of normal paternal age and, it can be assumed, a desire to avoid critical judgement. The way they appeared to others contributed to their paternal self-perception, suggesting that age-identity was an embedded component of their older father experience.

To summarise the physical aspects of participants' paternal experience, the findings show the importance of physicality to their understanding of fatherhood. Physical decline is an inevitable consequence of ageing, and the men in this study were concerned about their ability to compare, in a physical sense, with younger fathers. This, in turn, led some to be sensitive about their physical appearance and how old (or young) they appeared to others. The prospect of being less physically able was both a component of their paternal, older father identity, and a threat to their masculine identity. It also raised concerns regarding their children's perception of them as physically active fathers.

The next, final section of this discussion explores how participants perceived the consequences of older fatherhood for their children.

10.7 Imposing older fatherhood on children

Contemplating the impact of later paternity on children's lives was a pervasive feature of participants' older father experience (see Chapter 9, Section 9.4). As the findings show, the men identified some specific advantages to children of having an older father, and their confidence in their older father status was, it seemed, enhanced by reflecting on the positive contribution that older fatherhood made to their children's lives (see Chapter 9, Section 9.1).

As fathers of young children, participants did not suggest that being older played a particularly significant role in the current father-child relationships. Concerns they expressed with regard to how older fatherhood impacted on their children's lives were therefore mostly prospective. The men contemplated the future both in relation to physical decline (see Section 10.6.1) and their own mortality (see Chapter 9, Section 9.5).

They were concerned for the future in terms of their abilities to be physically active fathers (see Section 10.6.1) and also for how their children might eventually feel about having an older father. Some worried that their children might be teased about it and were unsure if they had acted responsibly in taking the decision to have a child: 'whose dad might keel over and die in five years' time' (see Chapter 9, Section 9.5). Indeed, the issue of paternal mortality and

paternal loss was fundamental to the meanings participants ascribed to their experience of fatherhood. In this way they perceived that older fatherhood imposed a threat to children's well-being.

Evidence of how important the prospect of children experiencing relatively early paternal loss was to participants' older father experience was located in the comments they made in relation to reports of men much older than themselves (in their 70s and beyond) becoming fathers (see Chapter 9, Section 9.3). They doubted the wisdom of men fathering children knowing there was a high probability of paternal mortality or age-related physical incapacity at a relatively early stage in a child's life. Their comments reflected age-based expectations of the physical limitations of old-age (Bennett, 2007; Vincent, 2006), inferring disapproval of reproductive decisions that imposed a distinct threat to children. Reflecting Festinger's (1954) view on social comparison (see Chapter 2, Section 2.8), participants used these 'older, older fathers' as a benchmark against which to positively evaluate their own reproductive decisions, paternal age and accountability (both themselves and their children).

Some participants framed the moral significance of later paternity in terms of the risk it imposed with regard to paternal loss, as Mike's recollection of his wife questioning their decision to have a child: 'Have we done the right thing' (see Chapter 9, Section 9.5) confirmed. However, they reconciled these anxieties both with pragmatic understandings: 'Those thoughts have crossed my mind ... but it's too late now! (laughs)', and by contemplating how their children benefitted from having an older father (see Chapter 9, Section 9.1).

In summary, the findings demonstrate that concerns for their children formed a central component of participant's experience of older fatherhood. They believed that specific attributes differentiated older fatherhood from younger fatherhood and their accounts suggested that they perceived these to offer some compensation for the less positive consequences of later paternity, particularly the possibility of their children experiencing relatively early paternal loss.

Chapter summary

This chapter has referred back to the aims and research questions of the study (set out in Chapter 1, Section 1.2.1 and Chapter 3, Section 3.1) and drawn on a number of conceptual ideas to help explore the data more theoretically, using interpretations of participants' narratives to facilitate this process.

Focusing on four key aspects of the older father experience, the discussion has revealed older fatherhood to be a complex and dynamic experience that is influenced by a range of personal and social factors.

Four features of paternal experience, as demonstrated by the men in this study, were identified as central to older fatherhood. Interpretative engagement with the data revealed the existence of a discrete older father identity and showed that participants experienced older fatherhood as an active social undertaking. They compared themselves with other fathers, and the responses of others, at both an individual and societal level, informed the meanings they ascribed to

their older father experience. Participants linked physical ability with successful fatherhood. They were concerned that age, and the implications of physical decline, could threaten their paternal abilities in both a practical sense and from the point of view of their children. Their principal concerns regarding their children related to the prospect of paternal mortality.

The concluding chapter of this thesis presents the main conclusions drawn from this discussion and identifies their contribution to existing knowledge. It also evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the study and makes suggestions for future research.

11 Conclusions and evaluation

The previous chapter considered the complex and nuanced nature of the older father experience. It focused on four key characteristics which, together, represented the experiential components of participants' lifeworlds.

Identification of these overarching features has enabled conclusions to be drawn which contribute 'new knowledge' in relation to understanding the experience of older fatherhood. This chapter outlines these conclusions and their contribution to the field of older fatherhood research. The chapter also provides an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the study and offers suggestions for future research.

11.1 Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the thesis are as follows:

Firstly, men who father for the first time in their 40s and beyond perceive a connection between their age and their paternal functioning. In assimilating the social and cultural expectations of fatherhood, the men in this study incorporated aspects of their own paternal experience to establish a recognisable 'older father identity'. The formation of such an identity commenced at an early stage – in some cases, prior to the birth of a man's child – and was subsequently strengthened by the practical and emotional

consequences of being an older father. These included: disruption to an established self-image following a lengthy period of child-free adulthood; being mistaken for their child's grandfather; perceiving advantages to later paternity for both fathers and their children and sensing social detachment from their paternal contemporaries.

Secondly, the meanings attributed to older fatherhood by other people assist men's sense-making in relation to the experience of later paternity. Participants felt they benefitted from increasing social acceptance of older fatherhood, but they encountered and negotiated uncertain social attitudes, which had a critical impact on their identities as older fathers.

Thirdly, participants perceived fatherhood as a physical undertaking, and a sense of physicality formed part of their paternal and masculine identities. They valued the presentation of a positive physical paternal image to their children. This included being fit and active enough to participate in physical activities with them and, for some participants, appearing younger than their actual age. These older fathers compared themselves, physically, with younger fathers and worried about how physical decline might impact on their fathering abilities.

Fourthly, older fathers frame the significance of advanced paternal age in terms of how it affects their children. The men in this study experienced anticipated regret regarding the amount of time they might spend in their children's lives. They revealed the contemplation of a limited paternal timeframe to be an internalised expectation of older fatherhood.

11.2 Contributions to knowledge

As described in Chapter 3 (Section 3.1.2), a principal aim of this study was to contribute to the understanding of older fatherhood and to complement existing knowledge concerning the lives of fathers, families and children. The conclusions delineate four important features of later paternity which, in combination, provide a framework for understanding the older father experience and complement existing knowledge.

As a result of a lack of previous research into later paternity this was an innovative study and its findings and subsequent discussion detail how participants experienced older fatherhood. This in itself represents an important contribution to knowledge. By revealing the day-to-day lived experience of older fatherhood, exploring how older fathers perceive specific advantages, and some disadvantages, to later paternity, how they encounter uncertain social attitudes, and demonstrating their concerns for how older fatherhood might affect their children, this study also goes some way to providing a counter-balance with the extensive body of literature devoted to older motherhood (for example, Budds et al., 2016; Mills et al., 2015; Lavender et al., 2015).

In demonstrating that older fathers perceive differences between older and younger fatherhood, and how the men in this study compared themselves with their younger paternal peers, the thesis adds to existing knowledge in relation to delayed parenthood (Mac Dougall et al., 2012) and the timing of parenthood (Billari et al., 2011). It complements investigations into younger fatherhood (for

example, Johansson and Hammarén, 2014; Beggs Weber, 2012, Wilkes et al., 2012) and sheds new light on the role and expectations of men within a previously under-researched paternal context.

The identification of a discrete older father identity and showing how that identity is formed contributes to the understanding of paternal identity as an organising principle for comprehending how fatherhood affects a man's life (Goldberg, 2014; Rane and McBride, 2000). Furthermore, revealing how important physical activity was to the men's paternal experience and their interpretations of successful fatherhood connects to the work of researchers such as Shirani (2013) who have explored normative-aged fathers' concerns about ageing and the importance of physical activity to father identity. It also aids understanding of the relationship between fatherhood and masculinity.

Exploring how older fathers perceived the consequences of later paternity for their children revealed particular concerns in relation to its social consequences, the role of the 'physically active' father and the possibility of prospective paternal loss. The findings also assist understanding of father involvement (Pleck, 2012) and father-child relationships (Jessee and Adamsons, 2018). In recognising the outcomes for children of older fathers as a discrete phenomenon, this thesis highlights the need to examine this under-explored corollary of advanced paternal age.

Finally, by enhancing the understanding of older fatherhood and effectively responding to the informal question: '*What is it like to be an older father?*' (see

Chapter 1, Section 1.2), this thesis contributes to a broader social understanding of fatherhood and older fatherhood in particular. Therefore, in addition to its contribution to academic knowledge and understanding, the conclusions to this thesis may also be of interest to individuals and families for whom older fatherhood forms part of their own lived experience, and to members of the general public for whom exposure to the subject may be limited to media accounts of 'celebrity' older fathers.

11.3 Strengths and limitations of the study

This study set out to explore the perceptions and experiences of men who became fathers for the first time after the age of 40. It achieved this by interpretative phenomenological analysis of interview data obtained from a group of ten 'older father' participants. The meanings participants ascribed to their experiences of older fatherhood were the focus of this study, and the process of data collection and analysis illuminated that experience. The findings provided the basis for an in-depth discussion, which led to the identification of the conclusions described above (Section 11.1). Therefore, the methodological approach and methods used responded effectively to the research questions set out in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2.1) and Chapter 3 (Section 3.1.3). The next two sections consider, in more detail, the success of the methodology and methods employed.

11.3.1 The choice of IPA as a methodological approach

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provided a means of systematically and critically exploring older fathers' experiences; examining men's perceptions of this role and examining issues relating to identity and the self. Employing IPA enabled me to draw upon participants' everyday experiences in order to comprehend the meanings they attached to the lived reality of older fatherhood, whilst also reflecting on the dynamic nature of my own role in the research process. Indeed, one of the key strengths of this study is that it demonstrates the characteristics of 'good IPA' as described by Smith (2011a) which include having a clear focus; having strong data; demonstrating rigour; allowing space for the elaboration of themes; offering interpretative (and not just descriptive) analysis; and pointing to both convergence and divergence within the analysed data (Smith, 2011a).

In terms of its methodological limitations, I recognised the potential for an idiographic study of a narrow and homogenous sample to be overly subjective. I therefore addressed this issue (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6) mindful that it was not my intention to represent the overall experience of older fatherhood or reflect the full diversity of older father types and contexts. I was also alert to the emphasis IPA places on theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalisability (King et al., 2014; Pringle et al., 2011) which meant that I recruited participants with the aim of accessing individual viewpoints on the experience of older fatherhood. That is, the fathers in this study represented: 'a perspective rather than a population' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49).

11.3.2 Evaluating the methods

Although initial recruitment was problematic (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3), the purposive sampling approach and use of semi-structured interviews produced a considerable amount of rich data for analysis.

The process of data collection and analysis lay at the heart of this thesis. The semi-structured interviews were the point at which the research paradigm and the 'real-world' experience of older fatherhood intersected. Within the interviews I believe I created an effective relationship with each participant and was able to develop and maintain a good rapport. I achieved this by displaying confidence, being attentive to their responses and exercising judgement about which to pursue further, by expressing interest in, empathy and respect for their individual narratives and remembering important points to return to later in the interview. I established my credibility by asking questions that were relevant and meaningful to participants, and which demonstrated my own understanding of the subject (Legard et al., 2003).

The interview schedule and organisational structure were helpful; the categories, questions and prompts enabled me to explore participants' experiences in a coherent and systematic manner. The participants were receptive to the questions and their responses seemed well-considered. Despite the need for me to occasionally refer to the printed interview schedule, I was able to develop and maintain a reasonably relaxed and conversational approach to the interviews. Audio recording of the interviews was efficiently

managed and the presence of the digital recorder was not too distracting.

However, I was aware of some limitations associated with interviewing.

Fundamentally, the qualitative research interview is a social encounter (Myers and Newman, 2007) and, as on all such occasions, the nature of the encounter is inevitably contextual. The ways in which participants represent themselves and recount their experiences within an interview is dependant, for example, on the types of questions asked, and the participant's mood at the time.

Participants will choose particular narratives as demanded by the situation and their own need to present themselves in certain ways (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). I was also conscious that I, as a researcher, brought my own personality, background and style to the interview and that, as a result, both the participant and I were active contributors to the research process and its outcomes (Smith et al., 2009).

There were occasions where I believe my interviewing technique could have been more effective. For example, during transcription, I was aware of instances where I did not allow a participant to effectively express himself or where I failed to follow-up a potentially useful comment. The following exchange from the first interview I undertook offers an example of this:

Chris: Have you ever felt the need to act in a way that you think ... that you believe a younger father might act when out with your daughter?

Trevor: Erm, not really, no. I do what I think is right

Chris: I want to move on to ask how you believe ... if being an older father will have an impact on your daughter ...

I viewed my response to Trevor's comment as a 'missed opportunity' to gain a valuable insight into his world. For example, it would have been helpful to have asked him to explain what he meant by 'do what I think is right'. On reflection, I recognised that these missed opportunities were likely to occur, particularly within a first interview. However, I was satisfied that the volume and richness of material I collected during the interviews ensured that such an oversight did not detract from the overall quality of participant data or impede the process of analysis.

Data analysis was time-consuming (see Section 11.3.2) but I felt that my approach to analysis (described in Chapter 4, Section 4.5) was effective. The time taken was worthwhile in allowing me to develop and maintain a greater degree of familiarity with the data – and participants' meanings – than would have been possible using data analysis software. However, it is acknowledged that some of the more subtle means by which participants communicated their experiences may have been lost in an analytic process that was insensitive to non-verbal cues. I also recognise that the outcomes of the analytic process can only ever be partial (Smith and Eatough, 2007) and therefore anticipate that the findings of this study will be considered as such in the expectation that they will be complemented by future research.

11.4 Suggestions for future research

The findings and conclusions of this thesis provide the foundation for further research into older fatherhood.

It would be helpful to examine components of an older father identity in more detail. For example, understanding the relative importance of physical activity to that identity and to older fathers' masculine identity would require further investigation.

The experiences of 'second-time-around' fathers, that is, men who re-father in new family formations, would add to the understanding of the older father experience. Furthermore, participants' views on the appropriateness of much older men becoming fathers (see Chapter 9, Section 9.3) also point to the need for an exploration of older fatherhood that employs a higher minimum age criterion. For example, examining the experiences of men who become first-time fathers aged 60 or older would complement this thesis and add to the knowledge about older fatherhood and its consequences for fathers, mothers and children. It would also be beneficial to explore the experiences of a sample of older fathers drawn from a broader socio-economic base and from a wider age-range. The suggestion for such a study emerges from comments made by participants in this study about 'demographic' factors they felt influenced attitudes towards older fatherhood (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4).

As noted above (Section 11.2), the experiences of the children of older fathers remain an under-researched area. Such exploration – from the child's perspective (although most likely to be from the adult's retrospective viewpoint) – would provide an alternative and important view on later paternity. Finally, a comparative study of the experiences of older fathers and older mothers would further complement the findings and conclusions of this study. It would increase

the body of knowledge relating to the timing of parenthood and advanced parental age.

Chapter summary

This final chapter of this thesis has presented the conclusions to an in-depth study of older fathers' experiences and demonstrated how these conclusions may contribute to existing knowledge. Reflections on the research methodology and methods have confirmed their appropriateness for examining the experiences of older fathers. This chapter has also identified the strengths of the study whilst also demonstrating awareness of its limitations.

Overall, the thesis offers a valuable, in-depth, exploration of how men experience first-time fatherhood beyond the age of 40. Its conclusions are revealing and informative. Together with the methodology, methods and findings, they have, I hope, provided an effective foundation for further research inquiry and for the acquisition of additional knowledge about this increasingly prevalent paternal phenomenon.

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Appendix A:



From Dr Louise Westmarland
Chair, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee
Email Louise.westmarland@open.ac.uk
Extension 52462

To Chris Chaloner, WELS

Subject Older fathers: perceptions and experiences of later paternity

Ref HREC 2016 2374 Chaloner
AMS (Red)
Submitted 31/08/2016
Date 11/10/2016

Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review, **has been given a favourable opinion** by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee. Please note that the OU research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of grant awarding bodies and their Frameworks for Research Ethics.

Please make sure that any question(s) relating to your application and approval are sent to Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk quoting the HREC reference number above. We will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible so that your research is not delayed in any way.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

Kind regards,

Dr Louise Westmarland

Chair OU HREC

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

OLDER FATHERS: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF LATER PATERNITY - A RESEARCH STUDY

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study being conducted as part of a PhD study at The Open University. Before you decide whether or not you wish to participate, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If you have any questions or would like more information, contact details are provided below.

Who is conducting this research?

My name is Christopher Chaloner. I am studying for a PhD at The Open University.

What is the aim of this research?

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the experiences of older fathers (men aged 40 or over at the time of their first child's birth). The study will focus particularly on the day-to-day experience of being an older father.

Background to the study:

An increasing number of men in their forties and fifties (and older) are fathering children for the first time and, as an older father myself, I am keen to explore other older fathers' experiences. However, there is little evidence available about what it is like to be an older father. We do not know, for example, how older fatherhood differs from younger fatherhood or how older fathers feel that their age affects their children. A favourable view of later paternity is that older fathers are more emotionally mature and patient. Alternatively, an older father may be regarded as less physically able to deal with the demands of young children. A lack of research means that such views of older fatherhood have not been systematically explored.

Why have I been invited to participate in this study?

You have been invited to take part because you have indicated that you are an older father and are that you are interested in volunteering to take part in this study. You may, for example, have responded to an advertisement seeking study participants

Who can participate in this study?

A participant in this study should be:

1. A man, aged 40 or over at the time of their eldest child's birth, and
2. A father whose eldest child is currently aged 15 or under and has lived with their father from birth

Appendix B (continued):

Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation is entirely voluntary and, if you agree to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason up to the point at which the findings of the study are published – this is currently estimated to be October 2018. If you decide to withdraw, any data that is related to you will be destroyed.

What will the study involve?

The study involves interviewing older fathers about their experience of fatherhood.

What will I have to do?

If you agree to participate you will be invited to take part in a one-to-one interview with me that will be conducted in a location and on a date and at a time convenient to you. The interview will last for approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded. Prior to the interview I will ask you to sign a Consent Form confirming your agreement to participate and for the interview to be recorded. During the interview, we will discuss your experiences of being an older father. I will not be seeking a particular viewpoint and there are certainly no 'right answers' to any questions you may be asked as anything you may wish to say in response to my questions will be of potential value to the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is not anticipated that participation in this study has any disadvantages nor poses any risks. If, for any reason, you have concerns about a particular interview question you need only inform me that you would prefer not to answer that question. If at any time during the interview you do not wish to continue, it will be stopped.

What are the possible benefits of taking part? How will the information be used?

Although there are no direct, immediate benefits to participants, I hope that you will find taking part in the interview interesting. The interviews will contribute valuable information to the study, which, it is anticipated, will make a significant contribution to fatherhood research and to existing knowledge about the lives of older fathers, families and children. I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the eventual findings of the study.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes, your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Your personal details and interview data will be kept strictly confidential and not made available to anyone who is not directly involved in the study. All interview transcript data and any quotations used in the write-up of the study will be anonymised so that participants cannot be identified from them. None of the data used in the final thesis or subsequent publications will allow you to be identified personally.

How will data be stored?

Audio recordings and transcripts will be kept on encrypted computer files that can only be accessed by me. All data will be destroyed ten years from the end of the study.

Appendix B: (continued)

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has received favourable opinion from The Open University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

What if I have other questions?

If you have any other questions about the study, either myself or one of my academic supervisors would be very happy to answer them. Thank you for reading this information.

Contact details:

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CONSENT FORM

OLDER FATHERS: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF LATER PATERNITY - A RESEARCH STUDY

Before signing this form, please ensure that you have read and understand the 'PARTICIPANT INFORMATION'. If you have any questions or would like more information before you sign the form, please contact the researcher (contact details in the Participant Information).

I _____ (Name of Participant)

Please initial each box

Confirm that I have read and understand the 'Participant Information' for the above study, that I have been given a copy of this information to keep and that I have had the opportunity to consider it, ask questions and have had any questions answered satisfactorily.

Understand that I will be asked to participate in a one to one interview with a researcher.

Am willing for my interview with the researcher to be audio recorded and I give permission for the data collected about me in the interview to be used in this research study.

Understand that the data collected about me will be coded and used anonymously, that my identity will be protected and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will appear on any reports or publications resulting from the study.

Understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time up to the point at which the findings of the study are published, without giving any reason, after which my interview data will be destroyed.

Agree to take part in the above study

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix D:

'Call for participants'

 The Open University

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Are you an older father* whose first child is currently aged 15 or under?

**aged 40 or over at the time of your first child's birth*

A growing number of men in their 40's, 50's and older are fathering children for the first time

I am conducting a research study at the Open University into the experiences of 'older fathers'

Participation would involve an interview with a researcher lasting approximately one hour at a time and location convenient to you

If you are interested in taking part or would like more information please contact me

chris.chaloner@open.ac.uk / olderfathers.wordpress.com



Appendix E:

Interview Schedule

Introduction (read to all participants)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research interview. My name is Chris Chaloner. I am a postgraduate student at the Open University and I am undertaking a research study into older fatherhood.

Our interview will be recorded using this digital voice recorder and the recording will later be transcribed i.e. written out so that participants' responses can be compared. However, the recording will not be heard and the transcription will not be read by anyone who is not directly involved in the study. The findings from the study will eventually be reported within my PhD thesis. This may involve using written quotations from the interviews but these will be strictly anonymised so that participants cannot be identified from them. I must stress that there are no 'right' answers to any of my questions; I am simply interested in you and your experiences of older fatherhood. I should also like to point out that you – and your fathering abilities – are not being 'tested' or 'judged' in any way.

I hope that you enjoy the interview. If any part of it is unclear please let me know and, if at any time during the interview you have any concerns or do not wish to continue, we can pause the interview or it can be stopped altogether. Before we start, do you have any questions?

<p>1. To begin, could you briefly tell me about yourself and your family?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– How old are you?– Do you have a wife/partner? How old is your wife/partner?– How many children do you have? What are their ages?– What age were you when your eldest child was born?– How old was your own father when you were born?
<p>2. Can you tell me about how you came to be a father?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– When you decided to have children (or when you knew you were going to be a father), to what extent was your age a consideration?– What responses did you receive when you told people you were going to be a father?
<p>3. How would you describe yourself as a father?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– What, for you, defines a 'good' or a 'not so good' father?– Where do you get your ideas about fatherhood from? Who or what has influenced your views?– What would you say are your good or not so good qualities as a father?– How would you describe your approach to fathering e.g. would you say you were a strict or indulgent/lenient father?– How do you think other people regard you as a father?

Appendix E (continued):

<p>4. Could you describe a typical day, for you, as a father?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What sort of things do you do with your child/children on a day-to-day basis? – How involved are you in the day-to-day care of your child/children? – What sort of physical activities do you take part in with your child? (E.g. playing games, sport etc.) – Which other activities do you take part in with your child? (E.g. reading, watching TV together etc.)
<p>5. Are there any aspects of your fathering role that you feel you do better or less well because of your age?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are there ever activities you feel reluctant (or unable) to participate in with your child because of your age?
<p>6. What is it like for you being out, in public with your child/children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What type of places do you go to with your child/children? (E.g. school, shops, park etc.) – How aware of being an older father are you when out with your child/children? – Have you had any negative experiences directly related to being an older father? (E.g. misunderstanding regarding your relationship)
<p>7. Do you think other people see you as an 'older father'?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To what extent do you feel 'judged' or that others are critical of you for becoming a father at your age? (E.g. because it is 'selfish' or 'wrong')
<p>8. What do you think people (society) in general think about older fathers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What are your thoughts on how the media represent older fatherhood (e.g. 'celebrity' older fathers)? – How do you relate your own fathering role to such stories? – How do you think society views older mothers – in comparison to older fathers?
<p>9. How do you think your experience of fatherhood compares with that of a younger father?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How much contact do you have with other fathers of children of a similar age to your own? – Have you ever been concerned about 'fitting in' with other (younger) fathers? – Have you ever felt the need to act in a way you feel a younger father might act? – In what ways would you approach fathering differently if you were younger?
<p>10. How do you think having an older father affects your child/children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is your child aware of you as an older father? If so, how do you know? (N/A if child <5) – What do you think your child thinks about having an older father? (If child <5: In the future, how do you think your child might think about having an older father?) – How does (or might) you being an older father affect your relationship with your child/children? – What do you think your child gains or loses as a result of having an older father?
<p>11. Can you tell me what being an 'older father' means to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To what extent does being an older father cause you concerns or worries e.g. guilt, regrets? – What are your thoughts on the likelihood of you having, ultimately, less overall time with your child/children because of your age? – Is there a particular age you hope to reach? – What are the best and worst things about being an older father?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I have no further questions. Is there anything that we have not already talked about that you would like to talk about now before we finish the interview? – That is the end of the interview - Thank you for taking part

Appendix F:

Interview transcript (example)

Participant: 02 ('Dave')

Date of interview: 28th February 2017

Interview length: 57.25

'I' = Interviewer

'P' = Participant

I	Introduction [Read from interview guide]I hope that you enjoy the interview. If any part of it is unclear please let me know and, if at any time during the interview, you have any concerns or do not wish to continue, we can pause the interview or it can be stopped. Before we start the interview, do you have any questions?	
P:	<i>No</i>	1.45
I:	Ok, to begin, could you just tell me some biographical details about yourself, your family background?	
P:	<i>Ok, born in XXX 1964 from a naval family, I'm an only child, dad left the navy when I was 7 and we moved to XXX, so largely brought up in XXX attended the local junior school, local secondary school, went to XXX university to study XXX, been employed as a XXX pretty much since, first worked for XXX and now I've been with the various incarnations of XXX for a lot of years now, worked in this country, worked in XXX, worked in different bits of this country. Married quite late in life, married XXX, who's currently upstairs, in...I should know the answer to this, 2009 and the we had our first child XXX in December 2011 and our second child XXX in February 2013</i>	1.00
I:	So your children are 5 and 4. How old are you?	
P:	<i>I am 52</i>	
I:	Can you tell me how you came to be a father?	
P:	<i>It was, I always...it sound a bit daft because I married late in life, but I've always wanted...I say 'always' that isn't strictly true...say from 30s onwards I wanted to have a child, I liked the idea of having a ...a baby and a child and somebody to look after and bring up, so obviously, part of courtship with my wife and things...we talked about children, we both agreed that we wanted to have a child or children, so I'd say for a good 15 to 20 years it had been part of planning, the idea that...I'd always wanted to get married, and with marriage comes children, a very traditional view, if you wanted to have a child</i>	2.00
I:	And when you were considering fatherhood, did you give thought to the fact that you would be an 'older father'? Was your age a consideration?	
P:	<i>I was aware of it...in my thoughts of ...not that having a baby when I'd be in my sort of late 40s or early 50s would be a particular consideration, a consideration more was ...suppose a bit macabre but, kind of, what age would the children likely to be when I died Well I think, well actually you kind of look at the percentages and think that there's a good chance that I'll be in my...or, sorry, they'll be in their thirties or so and should be sufficiently independent, emotionally stable that...it will be sad but it wouldn't be particularly traumatic and my wife wouldn't be left with ...obviously accidents can happen, people get diseases, but it was unlikely that my wife would be left with young children and a dead hubby! So, only...to some extent it was a consideration but the view that actually it shouldn't be ...catastrophic, there shouldn't be no particular reason not to be an older dad</i>	3.00

Appendix F (continued):

I:	Did you receive any comments or any response from other people regarding your age, when you either announced you were a prospective father, you were considering fatherhood or you actually became a father?	4.00
P:	<i>Generally, people, friends and family were pleased. I certainly didn't receive any negative reactions, there were a few comments along the lines of 'oh you know I didn't think it was gonna...happen'. My mum had been very good cos she had never been... there'd have been no constant campaign for 'where are the grandchildren?' so she was being very good, so people were overall pleased. I didn't have...I mean there was a few comments around, you know, 'you're gonna be tired' but I wouldn't think that would be different from an older man to a younger guy</i>	
I:	About you as a father, how would you describe yourself as a father?	
P:	<i>I would think probably ...you're probably better asking my daughters but...for myself, I would say...probably fairly traditional, I'd like to think that I'm quite a ...loving father but, there are boundaries which my daughters will push against....we'll try and go...kind of ..these are boundaries...now let me flesh out 'traditional' a bit. So, I don't take the view that my children are my friends, I take the view that you know I love my children I want the best for my children but I am their dad, if I'm their dad and also their friend then that's a really good thing, and they do like playing with me, which is lovely but I think that my view is ...my view is quite a traditional one that my role is to bring them up in a safe, secure, loving environment, teach them right from wrong, help in their education and development, try and make sure they have a good set of friends and are socially balanced, try and give them a very secure, loving home environment</i>	5.00 6.00
I:	What, for you, defines a 'good' or a 'bad' father?	
P:	<i>.....I think it would probably be easier to start with 'bad' and work backwards rather than...a bad father being one which doesn't give their children sufficient attention, love and support, so a father who is not interested in their children to me would be a 'bad father'. Obviously, moving into the realms of abusive, that is quite clearly, dramatically a 'bad' father, although I'd say for me a bad father would be one who was not interested. There will be fathers, myself included, who would like to think of themselves as 'good' fathers who make mistakes and get things wrong...so a 'bad' father is one who's not interested...whose heart is not in the right place...anybody who's putting their children first for me is a 'good' father whether what they turn out to have done ultimately in the long run works out well or poorly they can't really say so...good is the parent – mother or father – who puts the children and the children's needs first, who's looking out to do their best for their children</i>	7.00
I:	And where do you get your ideas about fatherhood from? What's influenced your views about what represents 'good' or 'bad' fatherhood?	
P:	<i>Clearly from...my own dad, I think the biggest single influence. From other fathers I know, so my friends who've been fathers and watching them. I would say also from the traditional societal views that I've been brought up with. Britain has got this protestant, Christian protestant view, traditional view of fatherhood and...you might come across that more of the older father studies have brought up in that tradition and that's formed my world view and that's pretty much how I try and discharge my duties as a father...that sounds very posh 'discharge my duties as a father' (laughs)</i>	8.00
I:	It sounds very impressive! (laughs)	
P:	<i>As I try to be a dad!</i>	
I:	You say you're influenced by other fathers, how much contact do you have with other fathers who have children of a similar age to your own	

Appendix F (continued):

P:	<i>So...I'm still quite close with a number of people that I was at university with, so...actually I'm the very last of them to get married but...as times gone from leaving university, people have got married, settled down, had children...I'm just stopping there cos I think everybody did do it in that order which is quite unusual nowadays but let's...that's probably irrelevant ...so they used to, I'll come back to ... used to meet up about once a month, touring people's houses and as some got.. had children, bless them they still let us go and nowadays I can't ...how they ever did this ...you go along and ...so I'd start interacting with babies and children. One of our friends in particular had twin boys and then relatively, a year or two...two years after that they had a girl, another two years after that they had another boy, we used to go there, we used to go there quite regularly, and they were very playful children, we used to really enjoy playing with them so I think that's been an influence although they're nearly grown up now, and then when XXX our oldest was coming along we joined the NCT group and that gave another group going through exactly the same experience as us and now as they get older we started meeting up with their...the parents of their school friends. Sorry, does that answer your question?</i>	9.00 10.00
I:	Yes, no it is...in terms of contact with other fathers...	
P:	<i>Oh sorry, I said 'I used to', as more and more people have...there's a group who've gained children, it's not meeting once a month anymore, it's probably a couple of times a year if we're...if we're lucky actually...meeting, meeting</i>	
I:	Yes. What would you say are your good or not so good qualities as a dad?	
P:	<i>Erm...I'm told I'm very patient. I don't necessarily feel patient but the feedback I get from other people is that I'm a very...patient dad</i>	
I:	Where does that come from do you think?	
P:	<i>Er...I think that...where does patience come from?...</i>	
I:	Do other people perceive, maybe as a result of your age that you are ...more relaxed or more easy going?	11.00
P:	<i>It might be...for me I think it comes from being an only child...and having spent a lot of time as a child by myself, entertaining myself...I think that generates a degree of patience...I've lost the question...what do I think are my good traits?</i>	
I:	Good and not so good...	
P:	<i>Erm...So...if I think...patience...I'm pretty good at playing with them so I'll engage in play...I think I'm quite good at general teaching and educating them, I'm not a professional teacher by any means, but I like showing them things and explaining things...I think I'm pretty good at being consistent and fair, so where I'm not so good er...I think I probably foist expectations upon my children in terms of where they should be in their education and development, so I might have a view that kind of, you know, you really ought to be reading ...better than you are so I might over-emphasise the need to practise reading...I really do all I can to avoid, I say I have avoided ever saying 'look, you know, you're not good at reading, you should be better at reading...we need to practise, we need to get better' is what I...I think could possibly be over forceful in academic development</i>	12.00 13.00
I:	Where does that come from do you think?	
P:	<i>That comes from a view that...really to do well in today's world, you need to be well educated, that you need to do well at school, go to university, that will increase your chances of having a good job and a successful, happy life. I think in turn that comes from my own parents where that was their expectation and message ...</i>	

Appendix F (continued):

	<i>I was the first one in my family to go to university and university was a lot cheaper in my day, so I'm not sure how much I can split the two views but certainly how I was brought up and how I still see the world, that if you come out well educated your life chances are...far better</i>	
I:	Are there any aspects of your fathering role that you think you do better as a result of your age or ...anything that you do less well as result of being older?	14.00
P:	<i>Er...at the moment I don't think there's anything I do less well...although I can remember, cos I think most people...can, it's a lifetime...the age I became when I could run faster than my dad...</i>	
I:	(Laughs)	
P:	<i>...and my girls are already getting to the stage that if we're chasing each other around the house, if it's straight line I'm fine but if's there any twists or bends I really can't catch them...</i>	
I:	(Laughs)	
P:	<i>...anymore, so there's gonna be that part...there's certainly gonna be the ... fact that I'm not anywhere near as physically fit as I was when I was 30, I'm certainly dreading the first dad's race in the school's sports day should that ever come up...so there's the physical stamina bit where I'm not as good...and there certainly are times with the children, if they've been particularly pushing at boundaries and whingeing and not doing as they're told when I think 'I'm really too old, I'm not up to this...anymore' so that thought certainly happens. On the more beneficial side, I think for me, being that little older, I've done enough going out of an evening, I've done enough travelling round the world, I'm really quite happy to spend the time with the girls, I don't...I don't feel that spending time with the girls is taking me away from doing other things that I'd rather be doing, er... the drawbacks...I don't think it's age-related it's probably related more to the modern world which is...going back to drawbacks of parenting, I do feel 'guilty' about their long school days, that they go to before-school clubs, they go to after-school...clubs, they go to holiday clubs</i>	15.00 16.00
I:	Is that as a result of work commitments?	
P:	<i>Yes, my wife and I both work full-time. I don't think that's age-related, but going back to the bit about where do I feel my parenting is less good, that's an aspect that I'd...I think the poor girls spend too much time in ...out of school hours care rather than with their Mum and dad</i>	
I:	Can you describe a... typical day for you as a father?	
P:	<i>Right. I'll give you er, probably a week day and a weekend day, typically. So, weekday I get up just after half-five, get myself all up washed, dressed ready, bring the girls round about quarter to seven, which XXX the older one is quite slow to wake up so I play music on her...in her room, we have in winter times a daylight simulating lamp in both their rooms to bring them up and get them round. XXX the younger one wakes up more...easily. So, I'll get them up and...my wife is normally running round trying to get up at the same time...she might bring XXX the younger one downstairs and we'll bring XXX [older child] downstairs, get them fed. Somewhere through getting them their breakfast my wife will normally go off to work. Finish breakfast, get them upstairs, get their teeth cleaned, get them washed...get them dressed. Normally, just before they've woken up I've got the car out of the garage, got their school bags in the car, drive them to school, get them into the 'fore school club, make sure they're all comfortable, we got the day's arrangements sorted out. I head off to work. I head back from work...no I'm sorry, I drop them off at school at...quarter to eight more or less, which is the start of the 'fore school club...go to work.</i>	17.00 18.00 19.00 20.00

Appendix F (continued):

	<p><i>Finish work, come back collect them at about five o'clock from the after school club, have a bit of a chat with the after school carers, I normally have some interaction with...whatever children are still in the after school club, see what fun things they've been doing, get them into the car...in the morning in the car, I'll provide them with a little bowl of fruit, strawberries, raspberries a few blueberries...I don't recall during the summer, but they seem to have given up eating them in the morning, driving to school, but they now eat them in the evening, on the way home. Get them back in, shoes off, coats off, they get to watch television while I get their food. So we have the evening meal. The younger one's more adventurous with food, but XXX, the older one, is almost always...pasta...and then...after, sort of, over the course of dinner to after dinner, XXX the older one has a little bit of homework each day, so we'll do her homework then they have some free play time, depending on what's going on I'll either join in and play with them or I'll be doing little chores, then it's bath, stories, bed. Depending on how long the day is, my wife will come in at some stage in the evening, she normally gets... I like to have them in bed, asleep by eight o'clock and my wife will get home anywhere between half-past six and half-past seven, so you've probably gathered from that I'm the...the main parent...so that's...</i></p>	
I:	So that's the weekday routine	
P:	<p><i>That's the weekday. ...Weekends, they...I'll normally get up anywhere between half six and seven, I like to be, by and large, up and semi-ready before they're awake, so they get to wake up at whenever they want to wake up...we'll try and do something with them...each day of the weekend, so on a Saturday they have ballet and tap lessons...I try and get them up...the kind of morning routine's much the same as it is for a school day but more relaxed...take them to ballet and tap, or if we're not doing that we'll go out to town...by and large there'll be birthday parties...there'll be something ...to do, there'll be some homework to do over the course of the weekend, we'll try and fit I, but then as you can see, it won't come out on the tape, there's a lot of toys round the house, so we spend quite a long period on a Saturday and Sunday in...play. The girls will play by themselves for quite long periods, but to a greater extent particularly XXX the older one likes me to play with her. XXX the younger one will normally want me as kind of part of the group playing, so we're either playing doll's houses, which is not my favourite but it's their favourite, or I might have one of them playing snakes and ladders or, which is more my favourite, we might get the Brio out and set up a train track...at some stage of the weekend we'll normally go out and have a meal...out. Obviously, you can tell the weekend's not as structured as the weekdays, I'm not giving you a minute by minute account...they'll watch a DVD or some television over the course of the weekend. We don't particularly restrict television but they...to an extent they restrict it themselves, they have a tolerance of about an hour and then they themselves will...will stop. Er, and then I'll...I can see that it's a theme now...try and do something that's a little bit educational, so we'll look at how colours mix, what colours you get if you mix colours or...XXX the younger one loves nature so we" go out in the garden or to the local park, and they'll play on the swings and slides, but we'll find leaves or seeds or something interesting. As we head round to the better weather, we'll be getting bikes out of the garage...does that kind of answer your question?</i></p>	<p>21.00 22.00 23.00</p>
I:	Yes, absolutely, yeah. You talked a little bit earlier about the...chasing around the house or dreading the father's race at sports day. How physically involved would you say you are in terms...in the time spent with your girls?	24.00
P:	<p><i>There's a...I'd say a 'fair amount' because I've got nothing to judge against...there's an amount of rough and tumble play, there's an amount of out and out physical play. XXX the younger one is inclined to leap at you, you really need eyes in the back of your head...they...neither of them are overly cuddly but they're both you know, decently cuddly so there'll be ...cuddles but there'll also be a bit of wrestling as well from time to time, either with their dad or with each other...</i></p>	
I:	Yes	
P:	<p><i>...and they still like ...I don't know if you can see amongst all the mess...there's brick trolley, they like pushed round in as well. And as the better weather comes there'll be kicking a ball in the garden and ...</i></p>	25.00

Appendix F (continued):

I:	Have you ever felt unwilling or unable to participate in any sort of physical activity as result of ...due to your age?	
P:	<i>Not yet!</i>	
I:	OK, I want to move beyond the home. How do you feel, being out with your ...daughters in a public place? Are you in any way conscious of being an older father?	
P:	<i>No, not at all...er...another bit which might be relevant ...shortly before we had our eldest one, there was a change in the law that allowed couples to split maternity leave, so with both of ours, my wife took the first six months and I did the second six months, so I'm very used to being out with them by myself, pushing the pram, taking them to 'aquababies' or 'sing n sign' or all sorts of things so I'm...I don't feel in any way inhibited or embarrassed about being out and about with them, having both of them, and only one parent is a struggle, but that relates to, well I suppose, them and me...it's a dynamic that's independent of age. As we said in the...discussions before the recording started...I understand, it irks me a little bit when people assume I'm their grandad rather than their dad, but I can accept that it's an easy mistake to make</i>	26.00 27.00
I:	When has that happened?	
P:	<i>It happened a fair bit when I was on the extended paternity leave with them, when I was out and about pushing the pram and...it happened sometimes in shops or if you're seeing people you don't know in the park and you're pushing them on the swings or...</i>	
I:	How does it actually realise itself, the 'grandad' error?	
P:	<i>Oh, it's people...will come and say oh, you know 'your granddaughter's very pretty' or they'll...people will say that 'your grandchildren seem very happy' or sometimes there'll even be a compliment and say that they seem very polite, but it comes up as people's assumption that they're grandchildren...</i>	
I:	And is that a bother?	
P:	<i>...I mean not always, more often than that they still assume that I'm their ...dad or sometimes you'll see a little bit of a quizzical look come over their faces...kind of 'I'm not sure ... which way am I gonna go?!'</i>	
I:	And is it concerning to be...for you personally, to be mistaken?	28.00
P:	<i>A little bit, it's not a big issue cos I can understand why people do it, it's a natural mistake to make, I still find it slightly irksome, it's not a big issue</i>	
I:	Have you had any other negative experiences as result of being an older dad?	
P:	<i>No. I would say no.</i>	
I:	How do you think others regard you as a father?	
P:	<i>As I said earlier, the most common bit of feedback I get is that I'm a very patient father with them. I've had people say that 'you're a...a good dad' but by and large that's friends or family so you would expect a certain degree of...positive bias...I don't think you get a...give or receive necessarily a lot of particular general feedback with other parents, but if they start playing on swings and slides with other children you strike up a conversation with the other parents...I wouldn't say anything comes across as particularly out of kilter in the sort of discussions and slight acquaintances you strike up</i>	29.00
I:	So, do you think people in general see you as an older father...?	

Appendix F (continued):

P:	<i>I...I think so because it's...kind of...obvious. But I don't think it would...I think after an initial couple of seconds of adjusting perceptions, then people are just going 'well, you know, those children are playing nicely, they seem fine'</i>	30.00
I:	Have you ever, or do you ever feel judged or that others are critical of you for becoming a father at a later age?	
P:	<i>No, I don't think so... I don't...cos I know, sometimes in the press there are perceptions...there are negative perceptions of teenage parents, I don't feel the same negative perception of being an older dad, no I don't think so</i>	31.00
I:	Have you ever felt the need to act in a way, or to fit in with a way that you think a younger father should behave?	
P:	<i>No, I don't, which I...for me I think does actually come with being an older father, I said earlier that I don't particularly feel the need any more to go out and go on exotic holidays and things. I think with being an older father comes a degree of...both calmness and a degree of comfort in your own skin. I less feel the need to modify my behaviour to fit in with...with the approval of others</i>	
I:	Where does that come from?	
P:	<i>I think that does come with age and experience, I think that that does. When I think back to ...university days and younger days when I might make an effort to fit in with the group...</i>	32.00
I:	Sure	
P:	<i>...I think with age comes an awareness that actually you don't have to fit in the group, I've become comfortable in my own skin, this is how I am and I'm not particularly gonna alter how I am to...to suit your desired behaviours</i>	
I:	How do you think society in general views older fatherhood?	
P:	<i>Society in general is becoming ...more tolerant of it, particularly as...older motherhood is becoming much more common it's kind of ...older fatherhood comes along with it almost as a parallel activity. I...where I think – which would probably be a different academic study – the perception would be different is for men who never become fathers, so I think there's a small amount...'oh you know, I didn't think it was gonna happen' so I don't think there are...I think society is generally pretty accepting of older fathers. Now there might be an age...so I was a father at 47, I think, I couldn't tell you what that age is and it'll be a range, but I think there'll be some point, certainly by 60, where I think society as a whole would judge that a bit...differently</i>	33.00
I:	Why? What difference do those 15 years make do you think in terms of how people...how men are perceived in terms of reproducing at an older age?	
P:	<i>There comes a point where you really are...not necessarily 'really are', but society's beginning to think that you really are getting a little bit too old for the physical demands and certainly by the time you...by the time the children are starting to get into the teenage years you're really going to be too old, so I, I think maybe there's probably been slightly a shift of perceptions as to where that age comes...I suspect when I was child in the late 60's early 70's I think there might well have been a view, I can't remember, that sort of 45-50 is too old to start being a father, I think that's probably shifted upwards...</i>	34.00
I:	Yes	
P:	<i>...I think there is still I suspect in society's mind...a figure where you know, you really are a bit too old now. I think that figure has probably shifted up...</i>	
I:	Shifted towards 60...ish? In terms of...	

Appendix F (continued):

P:	<i>Yeah, that may well reflect a move away from heavily manual labour and the nature of work...it's hard to tell with perceptions. My view is that people that are in their 50s now are actually a lot healthier and fitter than my memory when I was a boy...that might well be when I was a boy if somebody was 50, you'd just think 'unbelievably old and ancient' and now I've got here it doesn't feel quite so unbelievably old and ancient but I still think, aside of that, I think people in their late 40s to late 50s now I think are generally fitter and healthier than they were 40, 50 years ago</i>	35.00
I:	Yes, and is that enabling the older dad to be less conspicuous?	
P:	<i>Yes, I think so, yes</i>	
I:	You mentioned briefly about press representations of older dads. How do you think the media deals with older fatherhood in general? Are you aware of any...I'm thinking particularly in terms of 'celebrity' older dads...Mick Jagger...	36.00
P:	<i>That's what I was thinking...the likes of Mick Jagger, Rod Stewart...there was somebody...I can't remember, which one, who became a dad really quite...so I think the press views it as a bit of a...quite light heartedly...as a bit of a...a bit of a joke. I think I've heard the phrase 'geriatric dad' but I might have just made that up from my own mind but I think, I think the press uses that kind of ...</i>	
I:	So reporting on these guys tends to be fairly...if not 'positive', not necessarily 'negative'?	
P:	<i>I'm not sure if its positive or negative...slightly, I'd say with negative overtones that this is something slightly unusual and out of the norm...with an undertone of not necessarily in a good way</i>	37.00
I:	Yeah, and do these stories impact on you at all? Any more now than perhaps they would have done ten years ago?	
P:	<i>I don't think so...er no that isn't true...definitely more, cos there are some of them when I think 'ooh poor you, you're gonna struggle, you might have a fair amount of money but I know how I feel sometimes after a tough day and you're another 10, 15 years older again'</i>	
I:	Yes	
P:	<i>But I don't, certainly don't feel 'oh no, you shouldn't have done that'. I think the advantage that celebrities have is that they, by and large, will have enough money to cushion the impact of...if age does start to really take its toll and they can't...</i>	
I:	Ok, moving on to comparisons with younger fathers, do you think you would approach fatherhood differently if you were younger?	38.00
P:	<i>Ooh...yes...definitely very differently. The reason I'm being so definite is when I was...30 I went out with a lady who had a daughter from a previous relationship and I can remember how I was dealing with ...that daughter compared with how I deal with my own daughters now. I'm conscious of the difference between a prospective step-daughter versus your own child but when I was 29-30 when this time was, it was very much that this potential step-daughter was a bit of an inconvenience, she was a lovely girl and I was quite happy to spend time with her, but I also wanted to spend time not with her doing my own thing and going out with her Mum. And that was definitely...as I've said a few times now, that's faded with time, I've done enough going out so definitely very different. I might have matured quite late, I'm much more...I feel now I'm much more ready, willing, able to be a dad now than I would have been in my...in my 20s and early 30s</i>	39.00
I:	Do you think that your view of your daughters' childhood is different than it would be if you were younger?	

Appendix F (continued):

P:	<i>Yes. I think it's different in probably two ways. One is a generational difference, that I still reflect the generational norms of my own childhood, which is different to the generational norms of a parent in their 20s and 30s...and there's also an extent to which the increased age allows more perspective, because I've seen and done more things and observed more other parents, been able to take bits from all sorts of other places</i>	40.00
I:	What are these 'generational norms' for the parents in their...the father in their 20s...	
P:	<i>Er...so, that's a perfectly valid question...I ...</i>	
I:	Or how do they differ from...?	41.00
P:	<i>How do they differ? Er... I think overall, I'm a bit stricter, and stricter is entirely a verbal strictness of, you know, 'you're in time-out... if you do that again there will be no chocolate...' I think the boundaries are much...I think I draw my boundaries tighter than a lot of ...today so I think also I still represent a respect for authority that belongs to the generation I was brought up with, so I'm kind of: 'the police are 'good', they are there to protect you, the authority is there to look after you, not to be treated disrespectfully or challenged'. A...probably a clearer view on right and wrong rather than a more blended morality, so I think...so they're the...some of the softer things, there are harder things, I mean you look round the house, you don't see a lot of technology so although...they don't have tablets, they don't have iPads...</i>	42.00
I:	I asked you earlier about 'fitting in' with younger dads, have you ever felt the need to act in a way that you think a younger father should act?	
P:	<i>No, I will...no, I don't...I will sometimes play the fool in a way that I don't always see the younger fathers playing the fool. So I'll happily join in with their games and in the after school club there are a few children around with kind of the rest of their games and be the butt of jokes in a way that some younger dads might not because it will affect their street credibility or something...I think generally some of the older dads are too old to care. I say 'some of the older dads' because I'm not ...when I was off on paternity leave, by and large I was dealing with Mums rather than dads...</i>	43.00
I:	Yes	
P:	<i>...I was dealing with were generally younger than me. Now the girls are at school, there are a number of dads who kind of...there or thereabouts are the same age as me so I'm not standing out as particularly unique at gatherings with lots of parents</i>	44.00
I:	OK, I want to move on to the consequences of your being an older father for your daughters. Would you say that they, either of them, are aware of you being an older dad?	
P:	<i>I think they're on the cusp of it</i>	
I:	How do you know that?	
P:	<i>Er...they've started to notice that not all dads have grey hair. So they've started to notice that...they haven't...they have yet to say 'You're older than the other dads' ...as they get older and their...the amount they know and their ability to perceive increases, it's not that far away so I don't think it's made any difference yet, but I don't think it's that far</i>	45.00
I:	How do you think they might...once this next stage arrives, how do you think they might feel about having an older father?	
P:	<i>I suspect they won't mind as long as they still feel loved and secure and get everything they want</i>	
I:	And do they gain or lose out on anything as result of you being ...older?	

Appendix F (continued):

P:	<i>Er...no...they...at this time of life I don't think they lose out on much because I can still physically play with them, I can pick them up. I think they gain from...they do gain a bit from my experience, the other thing they gain from I think would probably be generally true of older fathers is we'll have a bit more financial security so that things are less hand-to-mouth. It doesn't mean that they can have everything that they want but I think that the extra financial security does bring benefits to them, in ways they probably won't perceive until they're much older, they may even never perceive them, but I think it does benefit them</i>	46.00
I:	Does being an older father cause you any particular concerns? Is there any feeling of guilt or regret?	47.00
P:	<i>Touched on it...earlier, there's a regret around the fact that, in all probability I'm likely to die when they're somewhere around their thirties, I mean who really knows, so I won't see as much of their lives as I'd like to and I may or may not ever get to see my own grandchildren. So that's the negative and the regret, there is a...I've touched on it a couple of times...there are sometimes where I think really I am too old for this and I think 'well if I'd had children five to ten years before it might not be quite as hard as it is now' because sometimes, I'm sure you'll know from your own experience, it can just be a bit of a slog when they're ...</i>	48.00
I:	Of course	
P:	<i>...when they're behaving, they're not doing what they're told and you're forever spending your entire life clearing up after them and yes, sometimes it's just physically draining and you think 'oh I wish I'd done this five years ago...</i>	
I:	(laughs)	
P:	<i>...I'm getting too old for this...lark'</i>	
I:	Is there a particular age that you hope to achieve? Is there an age that you wish, either for yourself to reach or for them to reach where you think 'well...I hope I can live to see them...20s, 30s...you said you anticipate in the 30s?	49.00
P:	<i>I would like to see them get to at least 30...</i>	
I:	Where does that age come from in terms of your...?	
P:	<i>I think that's a point where you're probably sufficiently mature to have built your own life that, although it will be very traumatic to lose a parent it wouldn't be devastating. There might be an argument for late 20s, I certainly think while you're at school, and sadly I know one or two people that did lose a parent when they were at school, that's massively traumatic experience and can have big impacts on your development and your mental well-being and I think that carries through to a lesser extent into university age, mid to late 20s...again reflecting a world view perhaps of my generation which was, you went to school, you got a job or you went to university and by and large, by the time you were in your late 20s you'd left home, you'd got a house, and I'm conscious that that's not as realistic a prospect for my children's generation as it was for...my generation which again, where being an older father and having more financial security is probably gonna prove beneficial, but I think there's still probably a point by the time my children's generation have reached 30 or so that they probably should have been fairly settled in their own life. I think through their 20s they're still probably going to need a lot of emotional and directional support and also probably direct financial support. So that's kind of my view that...I would like to live long enough to see them through into their...getting to about 40 or so and having children of their own, cos I really quite like being a dad and I would like to have a go at being a grandad. But I...I would like to do that whereas I think getting to about 30 is...kind of the essential...</i>	50.00 51.00

Appendix F (continued):

I:	Yes	
P:	<i>...bit</i>	
I:	Ok... my final question is what are the best and worst things about being an older dad...for you?	
P:	<i>The worst...as I've said a few times, is the point where you're just thinking 'I'm shattered...I'm just too old for this', so that's the immediate worst, the other ones, again we have already touched on is the fact that I won't see them as far into their lives as a younger dad would. The best bit is that I think...if I haven't said it before, I reckon being an older dad stops you from having a mid-life crisis. That your life is so completely different and, by and large, in a good way different to it was before that things take on a different...lease of ...you almost get a different lease of life...I think most people find as they get older, time seems to pass quicker...that you know, it's January one year, blink of an eye it's January the next year. When you become a father, probably at any age, but certainly with an older father, that slows down again because you're having so many different new experiences all the time...I think it's really quite different. I think an older father advantage is ...you have built up more life experiences, there is more to share, you have more tools in your toolbox about how to approach problems. If they're struggling in one way or you're finding their behaviour for instance, you have more different things you can try and do and apply to help. And the other thing, I haven't touched on it so far is there's gonna come a point probably where you can actually spend more time with...different older fathers, depending on different financial circumstances...</i>	52.00 53.00
I:	Yes	
P:	<i>...there's a point where you might actually retire or semi-retire at a time when they're still children... rather than have all the before school club and after school clubs and holiday clubs, they'll actually have a stay-at-home parent... And I can certainly see it in myself that not now but if you look forward another three or four years I'm thinking well actually retirement or semi-retirement, early retirement, is there as a possibility and I think that would be very useful for my girls as they head into their latter part of their childhood and certainly through the teenage years which can be quite difficult...to have parents around a great deal</i>	54.00
I:	OK, well that's the end of the interview basically, is there anything you wish to add or ask me or comment on before we turn the tape off?	55.00
P:	<i>I don't think so...</i>	
I:	And is there an area that you expected me to cover I haven't covered ...?	
P:	<i>No</i>	
I:	OK	
P:	<i>No, I don't think so. I think it's been...I've thoroughly enjoyed it, I think it's been a good conversation</i>	
I:	Are you happy that I turn the recorder off?	
P:	<i>Another thing to say while the recorder's still on, if you have any follow-up questions, I'm happy, if you think 'oh I wish I'd asked that' or 'I didn't quite understand that answer' I'm very happy for you to come back and say 'could you expand on that?' or 'what's your view on this?'</i>	
I:	Thank you very much for your time, it's been a pleasure, an absolute pleasure!	
P:	<i>Good</i>	

Appendix G:

All emergent themes (n =127)	Occurrence (n = number of interviews in which the theme emerged)
Age goals	10
Age identity	8
A new lease of life	2
Anomalous life course	6
Anticipating (older) fatherhood	6
Appearance	9
Aspirations	7
Awkwardness/Embarrassment	3
Becoming a burden	1
Becoming a father	10
Being available	4
Being different	3
Being the 'main parent'	2
'Being there'	8
Benefits of age	9
Benefits of experience	10
Beyond the home	3
Celebrity older fathers	10
Challenges	5
Changed priorities	1
Childcare	9
Children's grandparents	4
Children's perceptions	7
Comparison with older mothers	7
Comparison with other (younger) fathers	10
Comparisons with other parents	10
Consequences for children	10
Contemplating the future self	1
Day-to-day fathering	7
Demographic aspects	6
Digital, social media	4
Dissimilar lifestyle to social peers	7
Domesticity	5
Doubts/Uncertainty	1
Effective/Ineffective fathering	7
Emotional aspects	3
Emotional consequences	4
Emotional maturity	1
Encouraging and nurturing	10
Engaged fatherhood	10

Appendix G (continued):

Enjoying fatherhood	8
Expectations of fatherhood	4
Family background	6
Father-child communication	6
Father-child relationship	9
Fathering approach	9
Fathering in public	10
Fatigue	3
Feedback on fathering	7
Financial advantages	8
Gender (Child)	4
Generational difference	6
'Grandfather' misunderstanding	9
Guilt	2
Health and fitness	9
Health risks to children of older fathers	2
Humorous comments	6
Imagining younger fatherhood	9
Impact of fatherhood on lifestyle	7
Independence sacrificed	5
Influences	10
Involved fatherhood	10
Legacy	2
Less effective fathering	3
Less inhibited	3
Media representations	10
Misgivings	3
Number of children	3
Older motherhood	6
Older, older fathers	6
Older parenthood	4
Optimum age for fatherhood	3
Other people's expectations	3
Other people's opinions	2
Other people's perceptions	10
Other people's reactions/comments	10
Own childhood/upbringing	3
Parenthood	2
Parenthood – effective	2
Parenthood – ineffective	1
Parenting approach	3
Paternal mortality	10
Perceptions of 'fatherhood'	2
Personal relationships	1
Physical capacity	8

Appendix G (continued):

Physical participation	10
Promoting educational activity	6
Promoting independence	3
Prospective concerns – age	2
Prospective concerns – general	3
Prospective concerns – health and fitness	8
Prospective concerns – isolated child	2
Prospective concerns – when child is older	7
Prospective grandfatherhood	9
Regret	9
Relationships (with other fathers)	9
Relationships (with other parents)	8
Reproductive decision-making	6
Responsibility	4
Retirement	4
Route to older fatherhood	9
Self-appraisal	7
Self-awareness	8
Self-conceptualisation	9
Self-reliance	2
Setting boundaries	6
Shared experiences	5
Shared interests	7
Shared parenting	2
Social acceptance	8
Social identity	4
Social judgement	9
Social network	4
Social norms	6
Social responsibility	4
Societal attitudes	7
Societal views	9
Stability	5
Support network	6
The family unit	2
Time available for fatherhood	10
Time passing quickly	1
Time passing slowly	1
Values and beliefs	6
Wife's/Partner's wishes	1
Worries/concerns	3
Younger wife/partner	5

Appendix H:

<p style="text-align: center;">Recurrent themes Emerging in more than half of the transcripts (n =69)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Occurrence (n = number of interviews in which the theme emerged)</p>
Age goals	10
Age identity	8
Anomalous life course	6
Anticipating (older) fatherhood	6
Appearance	9
Aspirations	7
Becoming a father	10
'Being there'	8
Benefits of age	9
Benefits of experience	10
Celebrity older fathers	10
Childcare	9
Children's perceptions	7
Comparison with older mothers	7
Comparison with other (younger) fathers	10
Comparisons with other parents	10
Consequences for children	10
Day-to-day fathering	7
Demographic aspects	6
Dissimilar lifestyle to social peers	7
Effective/Ineffective fathering	7
Encouraging and nurturing	10
Engaged fatherhood	10
Enjoying fatherhood	8
Family background	6
Father-child communication	6
Father-child relationship	9
Fathering approach	9
Fathering in public	10
Feedback on fathering	7
Financial advantages	8
Generational difference	6
'Grandfather' misunderstanding	9
Health and fitness	9
Humorous comments	6
Imagining younger fatherhood	9

Appendix H (continued):

Impact of fatherhood on lifestyle	7
Influences	10
Involved fatherhood	10
Media representations	10
Older motherhood	6
Older, older fathers	6
Other people's perceptions	10
Other people's reactions/comments	10
Paternal mortality	10
Physical capacity	8
Physical participation	10
Promoting educational activity	6
Prospective concerns – health and fitness	8
Prospective concerns – when child is older	7
Prospective grandfatherhood	9
Regret	9
Relationships (with other fathers)	9
Relationships (with other parents)	8
Reproductive decision-making	6
Route to older fatherhood	9
Self-appraisal	7
Self-awareness	8
Self-conceptualisation	9
Setting boundaries	6
Shared interests	7
Social acceptance	8
Social judgement	9
Social norms	6
Societal attitudes	7
Societal views	9
Support network	6
Time available for fatherhood	10
Values and beliefs	6

Appendix I:

<p style="text-align: center;">Non-recurrent themes Emerging in half or fewer of the transcripts (n = 58)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Occurrence (n = number of interviews in which the theme emerged)</p>
A new lease of life	2
Awkwardness/Embarrassment	3
Becoming a burden	1
Being available	4
Being different	3
Being the 'main parent'	2
Beyond the home	3
Challenges	5
Changed priorities	1
Children's grandparents	4
Contemplating the future self	1
Digital, social media	4
Domesticity	5
Doubts/Uncertainty	1
Emotional aspects	3
Emotional consequences	4
Emotional maturity	1
Expectations of fatherhood	4
Fatigue	3
Gender (Child)	4
Guilt	2
Health risks to children of older fathers	2
Independence sacrificed	5
Legacy	2
Less effective fathering	3
Less inhibited	3
Misgivings	3
Number of children	3
Older parenthood	4
Optimum age for fatherhood	3
Other people's expectations	3
Other people's opinions	2
Own childhood/upbringing	3
Parenthood	2
Parenthood – effective	2
Parenthood – ineffective	1
Parenting approach	3
Perceptions of 'fatherhood'	2
Personal relationships	1

Appendix I (continued):

Promoting independence	3
Prospective concerns – age	2
Prospective concerns – general	3
Prospective concerns – isolated child	2
Responsibility	4
Retirement	4
Self-reliance	2
Shared experiences	5
Shared parenting	2
Social identity	4
Social network	4
Social responsibility	4
Stability	5
The family unit	2
Time passing quickly	1
Time passing slowly	1
Wife's/Partner's wishes	1
Worries/concerns	3
Younger wife/partner	5

Appendix J:

Recurrent themes	Thematic clusters
Anomalous life course Anticipating older fatherhood Becoming a father Family background Impact of fatherhood on lifestyle Reproductive decision-making Route to older fatherhood	Transition to fatherhood
'Being there' Childcare Day-to-day fathering Engaged fatherhood Father-child relationship Involved fatherhood Shared interests	Paternal involvement
Comparisons with other parents Effective/Ineffective fathering Encouraging and nurturing Father-child communication Fathering approach Generational difference Influences Promoting educational activity Setting boundaries Values and beliefs	Paternal approach
Celebrity older fathers Comparison with older mothers Demographic aspects Fathering in public Humorous comments Media representations Older motherhood Other people's perceptions Other people's reactions/comments Social acceptance Social judgement Societal attitudes Societal views	Social attitudes

Appendix J (continued):

Dissimilar lifestyle to social peers	A social phenomenon
Relationships (with other fathers)	
Relationships (with other parents)	
Social norms	
Support network	
<hr/>	
Age identity	Self-image
Feedback on fathering	
Self-appraisal	
Self-awareness	
Self-conceptualisation	
<hr/>	
Appearance	Physical fatherhood
Comparison with other (younger) fathers	
'Grandfather' misunderstanding	
Health and fitness	
Physical capacity	
Physical participation	
Prospective concerns – health and fitness	
<hr/>	
Benefits of age	The advantages of older fatherhood
Benefits of experience	
Enjoying fatherhood	
Financial advantages	
Imagining younger fatherhood	
Older, older fathers	
Time available for fatherhood	
<hr/>	
Age goals	Consequences of older fatherhood
Aspirations	
Children's perceptions	
Consequences for children	
Paternal mortality	
Prospective concerns – when child is older	
Prospective grandfatherhood	
Regret	

Appendix K:

An example of the links between a thematic cluster (Transition to fatherhood) and participants' interviews

Recurrent theme	Participants										Occurrence
	Mike	Trevor	Dave	Joe	Kevin	Harry	Ian	Keith	Jim	Pete	
Anomalous life course	4	1	-	6	1	-	-	-	1	1	6
Anticipating (older) fatherhood	-	1	1	1	1	1	3	-	-	-	6
Becoming a father	2	2	1	2	4	2	5	3	3	7	10
Family background	6	1	-	6	2	-	1	-	3	-	6
Impact of fatherhood on lifestyle	-	-	2	1	2	-	2	4	2	4	7
Reproductive decision-making	-	3	1	5	2	-	-	-	4	3	6
Route to older fatherhood	-	2	1	1	4	1	3	1	1	1	9

n = Instances within individual transcript where theme emerged

Appendix L:

Overall thematic framework

Recurrent themes	Thematic clusters	Super-ordinate themes
Anomalous life course	Transition to fatherhood	Doing fatherhood
Anticipating older fatherhood		
Becoming a father		
Family background		
Impact of fatherhood on lifestyle		
Reproductive decision-making		
Route to older fatherhood		
'Being there'	Paternal involvement	
Childcare		
Day-to-day fathering		
Engaged fatherhood		
Father-child relationship		
Involved fatherhood		
Shared interests		
Comparisons with other parents	Paternal approach	
Effective/Ineffective fathering		
Encouraging and nurturing		
Father-child communication 4		
Fathering approach		
Generational difference		
Influences		
Promoting educational activity		
Setting boundaries		
Values and beliefs		

Celebrity older fathers	Social attitudes	Social difference
Comparison with older mothers		
Demographic aspects		
Fathering in public		
Humorous comments		
Media representations		
Older motherhood		
Other people's perceptions		
Other people's reactions/comments		
Social acceptance		
Social judgement		
Societal attitudes		
Societal views		
Dissimilar lifestyle to social peers	A social phenomenon	
Relationships (with other fathers)		
Relationships (with other parents)		
Social norms		
Support network		

Appendix L (continued):

Recurrent themes	Thematic clusters	Super-ordinate themes
Age identity	Self-image	Physical self-image
Feedback on fathering		
Self-appraisal		
Self-awareness		
Self-conceptualisation		
Appearance	Physical fatherhood	
Comparison with other younger fathers		
'Grandfather' misunderstanding		
Health and fitness		
Physical capacity		
Physical participation		
Prospective concerns – health and fitness		

Benefits of age	The advantages of older fatherhood	Reflecting on older fatherhood
Benefits of experience		
Enjoying fatherhood		
Financial advantages		
Imagining younger fatherhood		
Older, older fathers		
Time available for fatherhood		
Age goals	Consequences of older fatherhood	
Aspirations		
Children's perceptions		
Consequences for children		
Paternal mortality		
Prospective concerns – when child is older		
Prospective grandfatherhood		
Regret		

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