

Title: A Cultural Analysis of Ageing: Baby Boomers and the Lived Experience
of Extended Youthfulness

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Abstract

The thesis examines how contemporary members of the so-called baby boom generation (born between 1946-1964) in the UK, Ireland and North America present themselves in relation to ageing. Focusing upon the resources or categories they draw upon to do so, in an in-depth, semi-structured, interview situation.

Much of the previous scholarly research into ageing has focused primarily upon issues relating to either social policy or demography, which, whilst being valid concerns, have tended to neglect broader cultural aspects relating to identity and representations of ageing. These representations currently serve to further distance middle from old age and death, reconfiguring the process of ageing around an extended period of youthfulness. This needs to be addressed, of which my research forms a part. Primarily by interrogating the production of aged subjectivities; to look for evidence of resistance to norms that construct ageing as an inevitable period of uniform decline; to demonstrate how this may be occurring and with what effects, such as for example, a paradoxical contribution to increased ageism.

While people inevitably grow older physiologically, how these processes are understood are neither universal, nor 'natural'. Rather, they are historically specific and are conceived in particular societies in culturally specific practices, ideas and philosophies.

I adopt a discursive approach to identity and ageing. Where the data is not treated as providing the 'answers' to questions of age and identity (Skeggs, 1997) but treated instead as material that requires further explanation and interpretation, and which is itself productive of aged/ageing identities. Viewed in this manner, close attention is paid to the variety of techniques through which the interviewees present themselves in relation to age. Such techniques include for example, the use of narrative, or the rhetorical use of notions of 'experience' or 'generation' as resources for the performance of (aged) identity (Scott, 1992).

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Introduction

'Hope I die before I get old' (Townshend, 1965)

'I hope that I get old before I die' (Flansburgh and Linnell, 1986)

'I hope I'm old before I die. I hope I live to relive the days gone by' (Uncredited, 1998)

Opening remarks

Given the fallibility and inevitable partiality of any presentation, I will endeavour to provide as much supporting information/evidence as possible regarding the accounts I have given, and leave the reader to judge their relevance and credibility, in the spirit of Hammersley's (1992) 'subtle realism'. This is a kind of middle way approach requiring the social researcher to be aware of the 'constructed nature of research, but avoids the wholesale application of constructivism to his or her own practice, which would result in a descent into nihilism' (Seale, 1999, p.26), where the distinction between research and fiction is completely collapsed. Research may differ from say for instance, journalism, in a commitment to a self - critical attitude, the sustained pursuit of (revisable) arguments of greater depth, that are not intended solely for entertainment or dramatic effect. One can be aware in a pragmatically useful way, that attempts to represent ideas, knowledge, social science concepts and the real, will always be mediated to an extent by pre-existing ideas and values that are also historically and culturally contingent, irrespective of our conscious awareness of them. If one wishes to pursue research, then it seems fair to suggest that some accounts are more plausible than others and that 'human communities in practice have created reasonably firm grounds on which plausibility can be judged, whether or not these grounds can be supported in some ultimate sense by means of philosophical reasoning' (Seale, 1999, pp.26-7). Viewed in this manner, one can admit, however fleetingly, that language - a research account in this instance, can refer to a 'real' world beyond the text, by which some accounts may be judged more plausible than others. If, following Popper (1963) one has searched for negative instances in one's (falsifiable) account and found none, and provided all data for inspection, and documented conscious decisions taken regarding the selection and presentation of that data, then whilst never proven in any absolute sense of referring to 'the' 'truth', it may be the best

approximation toward 'a' truth, from the authors current state of knowledge. This is analogous to Popper's observation that just because he had never seen a black swan, did not 'prove' the theory that all swans are white - the possibility existed that one day he may have seen one. Such accounts can then be open to scrutiny and critique by others, facilitating a position that allows one to continue the business of research, whilst enhancing methodological awareness of challenges posed by pure constructivism, without the need to resolve philosophical debates over relativism/absolutism before one begins. A reflexive attitude regarding making explicit the conscious decisions one has taken regarding choices in data selection, as well as making available empirical materials for inspection by peers, to enable the checking of non-conscious or differing accounts, will aid the quality and credibility of the research then produced and what I have aimed for here.

A clue to my initial thoughts on ageing and 'becoming old', would be to question why, in relation to the line from the first song quoted, did Pete Townshend of The Who profess to prefer death to being old at the time he wrote it and why was the song entitled 'My Generation'? Why were two North Americans from the band They Might Be Giants, able to refer to it in 1986 and expect their joke to be intelligible (involving no reference to generations and involving a single vocal accompanied by an accordion – in marked contrast to The Who's heavily amplified, original version) and why in 1998, with a further reference to the original (now iconic?) version, did Robbie Williams present us with the saccharine, but straight-faced 'Old before I die' (un-credited)? It is notable that each song exists in the public domain, the former being sufficiently 'established' as a well known cultural artefact, for it to be referenced both ironically in the second instance and with seeming sincerity in the latter case; that each expresses a (different) view on getting older; published at different historical time periods/cultural moments, by differently aged men 58, 44, 29, at the time of writing - Townshend being the oldest, Williams the youngest, and that only one of them relates his views on ageing to being a part of a generation. Each statement reveals something of the status of old age in Euro-American society - or the 'largely middle-class, North American/Northern European discourse of public and professional life' (Strathern, 1996, p.38) in addition to the author's relation to it. The fact that variations on a theme of the same song, sung differently, by members of different so-called generations, can be related to and is productive of, certain characteristics attributed to particular generations - the 'sixties generation' and 'baby boom generation' specifically and serve here as an opening vignette to the study: a cultural analysis of ageing: baby boomers and the lived experience of extended youthfulness. This research

will examine how contemporary members of these 'generations' present themselves in relation to ageing, focusing upon the resources or categories they draw upon in order to do so, in an interview situation.

Themes of the study

As I will be illustrating in the thesis, the desire to avoid being perceived as old, at all costs in some cases, pushes the 'problem' of negative and discriminatory associations with old age further into the future. In more extreme cases, such desires serve to increase sanctions against those who are already categorised as 'old', whether through choice or eventual necessity. One only has to think for a moment to find prominent members of this group, who exemplify such positions, where the Cher's (58) and Mick Jagger's (60) of the world are routinely praised and vilified (often in the same article) for their seeming agelessness. Thus we have the phenomena of journalists commenting on Cher's beauty and youthful appearance, quoting her feelings about getting older, where she comments that she is "not smarter, not anything. I'd love to lie, but I don't think there is anything good about it [And] It's not that horrendous, but if your asking me if I love it, no! Would I rather be 40, yes!"(Sony, 2002). These and related quotes are then reported under the sub-heading, 'If I could turn back time' star, Cher', punning on a title of one of her more recent songs (about going back in time to right wrongs viewed with 20:20 hindsight, rather than an endless return to a golden age) and serving to mock her, in her perceived attempts to do so. A jaundiced and weary eye may condemn such appropriation of the female body, whilst seeing nothing particularly new in such evaluations. However, without wishing to imply an equivalence, given the different historical trajectories and impacts of such gendered evaluations, we also have Mick Jagger described by freelance journalist Christian Hoard (24) as looking 'great for his age, but there's something a little ridiculous about him being waifishly thin and just trying to rock out all the time' (Hoard in Boucher, 2002). When the 'Rolling Stones launched their "No Security" tour a few year ago, it was instantly and widely nicknamed the "Social Security" tour – not just by nay sayers, but by people working on the tour' (Boucher, 2002). Throughout the study I will endeavour to be sensitive to the effects of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality, in relation to their intersections with age, and demonstrate their possible effects on the subjectivities of the people I have interviewed.

The above routine ageism, packaged as humour could perhaps seem more shocking if age were substituted by other categories on the Equal Opportunities list, deemed irrelevant and discriminatory when applying for a job, that in this instance requires the ability to sing, 'entertain' and get up on a stage. This is not to suggest that these categories are interchangeable, more to question why ageism seems less visible in terms of support for its resistance than the other 'isms', a point addressed in the conclusion. One could argue, as Boucher does - that it is only in the field of 'rock', with its associations with youth and rebellion emerging in the fifties, famed for its links with excess and 'generational antagonism', that ageism is most prevalent. If one compares it to other categories of artistic expression, such as, for example, those involved in the production of fine art, cinema, jazz, reggae, classical music, poetry, literature, folk and blues, where retirement is not enforced upon reaching a particular chronological point. Nor in such cases, is a career expected to end with the appearance of wrinkles, where 'artists' are often lauded for their 'elemental wisdom', craft and experience - this can tempt us to dismiss ageism as only applying to the select few working in youth oriented industries, or to those employed largely on the basis of their appearance (irrespective of any other talents they may possess) as models or Hollywood 'stars'.

The preceding argument might carry more weight, were it not still legal in this country to discriminate on the grounds of age in job advertisements until 2006 (despite earlier government manifesto promises to the contrary). A point after which the U.K. government will be compelled to have laws in place, tackling discrimination (including age in its categories) in line with a Directive from 'Article 13' of the Amsterdam Treaty, agreed by members of the European and Economic and Social Policy Council and approved in October 2000. There was an embarrassing situation for the U.K. government (an equal opportunities employer), involving a clash of policies between two different departments (March 2002), where members of the Department of Work and Pensions had (and still are) been actively campaigning to challenge ageism and abolish age selection criteria in the workplace, through:

challenging employers prejudices and perceptions on age and raising awareness of the business benefits of an age diverse workforce. The campaign aims to achieve a culture change and help employers prepare for legislation.

It has featured direct mailings to employers, regional and trade press articles and events (Age Positive, 2002):

and those of another prominent government department, which was involved in specifying age limits in its recruitment campaigns - rejecting any applicants below or over its age limits, irrespective of their

qualifications/relevant experience. This situation proved uncomfortable for Ian McCartney, the then minister in charge of the D.W.P., who stated that 'older workers bring commitment, hard work, knowledge and enthusiasm to their job' (McCartney, 2002) - a sentiment which had yet to translate into an inter-departmentally unified set of policies, regarding ageism being officially unacceptable. Not only is McCartney's statement a stereotype within the context of age, but is also a sentiment that is itself a form of ageism, given that one could also envisage younger workers bringing similar attributes to a job. Whilst the processes associated with ageing may affect a particular individual's ability to perform certain tasks associated with a specific job, this is by no means the case for all individuals of a particular age, nor does it take into account a person's adaptability to age - related 'constraints' (if indeed they are perceived as such). McCartney went on to claim that 'it is estimated that age discrimination may cost business up to £31billion a year' (McCartney, 2002). A cynic may be forgiven for imagining that it was the latter reason providing much of the impetus to 'combat ageism', rather than a sustained commitment to equal opportunities policies. This is not to naively suggest that changes in the law, regarding recruitment would fully address such a complex issue. More than one of my interviewees admitted to applying ageist selection procedures in the job recruitment campaigns in which they were involved in, knowing it was against the law to do so in their country – the Republic of Ireland, whilst simultaneously approving of anti-ageism strategies. Importantly, changes in the law at least begin to signal that discrimination on the grounds of age is unacceptable in the majority of circumstances, and may contribute towards raising the subject as being worthy of further reflection.

This thesis is also concerned with discrimination on the grounds of age. However, my intentions are to explore the issue through an analysis of the ways in which the baby boomers 'do' ageing. Chapter 1 provides a review of the relevant literature, which is organized to provide the context and further rationale for the statement of the thesis, which is to explore whether and how baby boomers are 'doing' ageing as extended youthfulness. This organisation leads to and justifies the aim of the thesis, in terms of providing a cultural analysis of ageing, through an examination of baby boomers lived experience of extended youthfulness. Chapter 2 is a discussion of methodological considerations regarding the methods employed in the study - a focus group and fifteen semi- structured interviews respectively, and the status of the information provided by them. The possible shift in the notion and representations of generation, related to ageing are then explored in Chapter 3. Here I endeavour to argue/demonstrate that particular subject positions may be produced in relation to particular

generational categories, which are further able to provide resources for identity, in this instance, that of the so-called baby boom generation. This group have been identified with holding particularly distinctive traits in common, often associated with their young adult years, whose earlier members reached adulthood in the 60's, with its ascribed characteristics of unified protests against perceived injustices, 'flower power' and so on. Generation is a key way in which extended youthfulness is performed (see chapter 4), whether as part of a 60's generation, or as a generation of separate individuals; where individuality is a characteristic of this generation, and generation is used to distinguish themselves from those above and below them, or, in some cases, from any other generation. The same grouping are also associated with the rise of individuality and self pre-occupation, who are additionally defined by their willingness to challenge norms that construct ageing as an inevitable and uniform period of decline, contributing toward the paradoxical effect of increased ageism, discussed in Chapter 5. I also examine in Chapter 1 ('The case for extended youthfulness') how baby boomers, who have been implicated in the reconstruction of the middle years of the life-span, from middle age to 'mid-life' and the extension of youthfulness, proposed by Featherstone and Hepworth (1989; 1990) - which now stretches from 35-60 and beyond - as a way of exploring age discrimination. And, how such discrimination is related to what is for some the increasing unacceptability of physiological indicators associated with old age; the belief in the malleability of age-related categories such as middle age, and the desire to remain non-old for the majority here.

To re-iterate - I am interested in ageing, particularly with regard to the baby boom generation; I have also mentioned a preoccupation for some with attempting to avoid being perceived as old, where striving to appear 'eternally youthful' may actually contribute toward more ageism, as increasing numbers of people try to efface bodily signs associated with ageing. Ageism is a way of doing the 'fear' of old age and the loss of individuality perceived to accompany it, as a feature of its unimaginability. This can lead to an othering process, involving not being able to readily identify with homogenised older people, if at all, however worthy a cause anti-ageism is claimed by some here to be. Bodily practices are a key site for the complex expression of the difficulties/limits/ambivalences in the relation to extended youthfulness.

A variety of factors have been proposed to account for the perceived rise in such age related desires and practices, with the so-called 'demographic shift' being implicated amongst them. Here, as relatively affluent 'first-world' societies populations are living to higher, healthier ages, with fewer children being born, we are witnessing a population or demographic shift, where:

People are living longer on the average than at any time in human history. Secondly, birth rates are tumbling across much of the planet. Because fewer children are dying, parents no longer need to raise large families as insurance against child mortality. These two factors – longer lives and smaller families – are shifting the balance of the generations (Kirkwood, 2001).

And also that 'over the next 30 years, the number of pensioners is expected to increase from 18.2% of the U.K. population to 22.3%. The proportion of the very old (over 80) is expected to rise much more quickly. At the same time the proportion of people aged less than 20 is expected to fall from 25.1% to 21.9%' (Booth, Cooper and Stein, 2002). One of the consequences of this shift (in addition to the more usual economic scare mongering that often accompanies such figures) may be an increased obsession with youth and aspects of youthfulness (including a youthful appearance), as 'real' youths literally become scarcer in relation to escalating numbers of people of advanced ages, where 'youth' becomes an increasingly valued commodity. There is evidence amongst those charged with being the creators of post-war youth culture, namely the baby boom generation, who 'are themselves approaching 'retirement age', confounding ideas of what it means to be 'old' (Gilleard and Higgs, 2000, p.9) as being the vanguards of such trends. Striving for an eternally youthful appearance, or at least retaining a youthful appearance for longer in adult life, is not confined to Hollywood stars or stadium rockers alone, however. This generation's size as a market and related cultural concerns attributed to this generation, can be aligned with a corresponding increase in the number of relatively affluent people willing to undergo a variety and increased availability of medical interventions to in order to realise ambitions connected with youthfulness. Furthermore, practices such as 'anti-ageing' cosmetic surgery and so on, are sought not only by the middle aged/third age population, but also by significant numbers of people in their twenties and thirties' (ibid. p.132). This is in addition to the dietary and exercise regimes participated in regularly by the many, at increasingly advanced ages.

Increases in longevity for those living in 'developed countries', can be linked to a corresponding increase in the number and effectiveness of anti-ageing treatments available. The relatively new phenomena of botox parties, now somewhat passé with the availability of such 'treatments' from larger

branches of Boots the Chemist (as of 24-05-02), or even less glamorously from the back of a van (Boseley and Morris, 2002). Or social gatherings where the substance ('botox'- a strain of botulinum nerve toxin/poison that induces paralysis in the facial muscles involved in frowning) is injected directly into the face, with the aim of evening out wrinkles in the skin, is being superseded by the substances hylaform and restylane, termed 'hyaluronic acid fillers', as they are claimed to be less likely to provoke allergic reactions. Fat taken from other parts of the recipient's body can also be used in the same manner, along with skin peels and lasers, which take exfoliation to new levels. Prescription only topical face creams which are claimed to 'actually work' at reducing lines and brown spots associated with aged skin are available, although presumably such claims are open to interpretation, given that increasing numbers of non-prescription face creams, targeted at 'older looking skin', which make similar claims. These are amongst the less invasive surgical procedures available today, with the more futuristic gene manipulation and telomere resetting (likened to a fuse within each cell, which once burned out stops the cell replacing itself and dies) claimed to be likely possibilities for realisation in the not-too-distant-future. Indeed the first ever 'anti-ageing' conference, showcasing the state of the art in this arena, took place in the U.K. (10-09-04) addressed to 'one of the fastest growing industries and a reflection of our obsession with keeping the end at bay. Yesterday, delegates from all over the world gathered at London's first anti-ageing conference to discuss ways of slowing the ravages of time' (Gillan, 2004). Evidently the market for technological applications associated with 'rejuvenation products' is on the increase, currently targeted mainly at women, that attempt to manipulate self-scrutiny and in some cases produce insecurity amongst those who feel, or care that they do not reach the standards they are implicitly asked to check for, of which the products promise to be a metaphorical, and in some cases literal, salve. If the people behind such products have anything to do with it, the interest and desire to extend the period of a youthful appearance, and/or reverse an 'aged' appearance – particularly in terms of the skin, is very likely to increase, doubtlessly with adaptations in strategy to court men also, should the market prove lucrative enough. Given the relatively recent successes in convincing younger men to use skin care products, this seems a more than likely outcome.

The anti-ageing business is gearing up to be very lucrative, with stock rising in the companies involved in this research, 'with more old people, more money and more techniques, the anti-ageing industry is exploding. There are no figures for the U.K., but in the U.S. the number of botox treatments

rose twenty five per cent last year and the number of microdermabrasion treatments by forty seven per cent. Treatments are becoming less stigmatised and more socially acceptable' (Browne, 2002), in a country where '2.8 million cosmetic operations were performed in 1998' (Gilleard and Higgs, 2000, p.144). Dr. Eileen Bradbury, quoted in Browne's (2002) article, a consultant psychologist in Cheshire, involved in advising on and assessing patient suitability for cosmetic surgery, has coined the term 'permayouth' to refer to those pursuing such practices - this refers to 'an inability to face ageing, and you're constantly trying to restore the difference between how you look and how you feel you should look', (Browne, 2002). An increasing number of her 'permayouth' referrals are men, prompting her to comment that 'male surgery has really taken off. Before it was isolated men with personality problems, but more men are getting divorced in middle age and want to look good again to find a partner' (ibid.). Dr. Patrick Bowler, quoted in *The Guardian* 07-05-02, founder of the British Association of Cosmetic Doctors, notes that 15 per cent of his clients in London, receiving such treatments are male and that some of his 'clients are in their 20's, wanting to preserve their looks; others are in their 60's, hoping to roll back the years' (Boseley and Morris, 2002, p.7). Whilst not wishing to suggest some kind of causal link between ageism and the rise in the number of people involved in these practices, the popularity of the latter, aligned with their increased accessibility and affordability will have social effects, particularly relating to increased pressure to 'look younger'. It can be argued that such treatments are rational responses to how growing old is currently viewed within Euro-American societies. This further suggests that the appearance of bodily signs associated with old age are unacceptable/fear inducing for an increasing number of people - a notion that a whole (inadequately regulated) industry seems increasingly keen to promote and exploit.

The desire for aspects associated with youthfulness is not confined to that of appearance alone. In Chapter 4 I discuss how the interviewees exhibit a variety of differing orientations toward youth and their bodies, where they demonstrate through their attitudes and behaviour a concern with being what could be described as attempting to remain 'non-old' for as long as possible, rather than for eternal youth. The state of being non-old involves an extension, retention, or reclamation of particular traits they associate with youthfulness, primarily focused upon health, vitality, having 'fun', being carefree and retaining an open-minded attitude towards the 'new'; whilst simultaneously retaining and developing aspects they associate with maturity, involving being more self-assured, stable (emotionally and financially) and confident. These attitudes and behaviours are associated with what

could be termed 'extended youthfulness', where the combination of traits comprising this category were used by many of the interviewees to distinguish themselves from earlier generations (usually their parents and grandparents) and in sum were associated with improving quality of life. These novel traits of resistance to growing old, in the same manner as parents and grandparents, are increasingly being associated with the baby boom generation, who have recently been portrayed as 'an increasing number of like-minded men and women who find the idea of shutting down with older age utterly ludicrous, who, in short, refuse to be withered by such a silly little thing' (D'Souza, 2004, p.60). This kind of rhetoric often describes 'older age' in dismissive tones, where 'shutting down' and associated adjectives such as 'silly' and 'withered', produce the category old as undesirable and without merit. Such representations are not uncommon and the trends they refer to, regarding baby boomer behaviour, particularly that of a nostalgic re-living of past or idealised youthful experience, have recently been identified as on the increase (Harkin and Huber, 2004). The category 'new-old', refers to the 'veritable tsunami of first-wave baby boomers excitedly planning their "gap years", riding their Harley Davidsons', head-bopping to Eric Clapton, behaving outrageously at the Chelsea Arts Club and generally living exactly the sort of life they wished they could have lived when young but either didn't dare to or couldn't afford' (D'Souza, 2004, p.60). Whilst it is not entirely clear how far this particular representation is an extrapolation of D'Souza's friends behaviour, given the number of people who frequent the Chelsea Arts Club, or who could afford Harley Davidsons, they do however reflect the content of many of the current representations of 60's baby boomers, which inevitably will further influence the category they seek to describe. This is not to argue who might possess the most 'accurate' representation of 'baby boomers', but to alert the reader to the availability and type of current representations of the category, and how they may be used as rhetorical devices for identifications and dis-identifications in the production of particular self-identities.

Rationale for the thesis

During my review of the relevant literature I reached a point where I felt it necessary to see if and how some of the claims being made about aged identities in late modernity (found in both the academic and popular discourses I had examined) were affecting those subjects without a related professional interest in society and culture. Primarily due to the fact that at the time I submitted my research proposal (May, 2000) it was still the case that the majority of research into ageing had

focused upon issues relating to either social policy or demography, whilst broader cultural concerns relating to lifestyle, beliefs, goals and values in later life, had largely been left to the popular press - a gap that needed to be addressed by sociologists and gerontologists (Morgan, 1998) of which this research would form a part. These issues have begun to receive more academic attention recently, perhaps reflecting and contributing to a perceived increased significance in cultural 'concerns' about ageing (Gullette, 1997; 2004; Jamieson, Harper and Victor, 1997; Phillipson, 1998; Biggs, 1999; Blaikie, 1999; Gilleard and Higgs, 2000), as well as Featherstone and Hepworth's long-term and continuing interest (1982; 1995; 1998; Hepworth, 2000) being amongst the most prominent examples. Rather than starting the research with an attempt at persuading social gerontologists to apply insights gained from cultural studies to their practice - characterised as being predominantly focused around the themes of 'need' and 'lack', where '[a]ttention paid to third age lifestyles is often seen as misguided, reflecting either an insensitivity to, or an ignorance of, the 'real' needs of pensioners' (Gilleard and Higgs, 2000, p.ix). I chose instead to begin from a position of being convinced of the insights afforded by a cultural studies approach, as a means of comprehending the variety and contradictory 'aged lifestyles' and practices in evidence today. ¹ With regard to 'old age' itself, I have argued that the focus upon the malleability of 'ageing', pushes the point at which one becomes 'old' (or the point at which whatever changes propel a person into being 'old', become no longer malleable) further into the future and does not deal sufficiently (if at all) with the final stage of life, where the majority of fears and prejudices associated with ageing come to settle. These go largely unchallenged - as those at this stage of the lifecourse have at present, only a small platform for their concerns,² whilst those who do, seem keen to avoid thinking about them at all, as it doesn't apply to them in their present situation - a point emphasised by the majority of my interviewees. Or, with regard to Gilleard and Higgs (2000) who admit that it would be 'disingenuous' to uncouple 'old age' from 'ageing' per se, as they regard it as a useful reference point, by which the variety of 'other' cultures of ageing with their differing representations, come to define and shape themselves *against* old age in their resistance to it. Whilst not denying that 'no organizations or institutions seek to portray old age to the individual as either an aspirational commodity to choose or a socially valued process to join' (ibid.p.4) I would argue

¹ See the introduction in Gilleard and Higgs (2000) for a discussion of the significance of the 'cultural turn' to the study of ageing, where culture is defined as 'the various and complex systems of meaning that constitute everyday life' (ibid. p.2), or, following Thompson (1990) the 'study of symbolic forms - that is meaningful actions, objects, and expressions of various kinds - in relation to the historically specific and socially structured contexts and processes within which and by means of which these symbolic forms are produced transmitted and received' (Thompson, 1990, p.136, in Gilleard and Higgs, 2000, p.2).

² The expansion of the use of the internet by elderly 'silver surfers' and the potential contained within virtual computer/human interfaces offers some hope for change here, although cost is an inhibiting factor. See chapters on aging and technology in Featherstone and Wernick (1995).

that this is precisely what needs to be challenged for a coherent anti-ageist strategy to have any chance of sustained success. Contra Gilleard and Higgs assertion that '[o]ld age lies sullen and unchanging – represented as the end of the social; a point in life after which further choices are irrelevant' (ibid.p. 4) I argue in the conclusion that such 'choices' are crucially relevant, by both the very old themselves and indeed the rest of the population, however 'irrelevant' it may seem to them at the moment. A point referred to in my discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's (1972) work on old age in Chapters 1, 5 and more explicitly in the conclusion.

Traditional associations with chronological ages may be being challenged at the moment, nevertheless such marks of distinction are still socially and culturally relevant. One's birth date is still routinely required for any number of transactions, whether it be on an application for insurance, a job or loan, or indeed on the birthday cards bought for friends and relatives. Social and cultural life is sliced up, either with reference to decades, as evidenced in the boom in television programmes on the 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's, (this format is recycled even faster, now that decades are further subdivided into individual years, with their associated cultural/political events). Or, with reference to age/birth cohorts: the 'old – old'; 'deep old age'; 'OAP's'; 'pensioners'; 'third agers'; 'seniors'; 'over-fifties'; 'baby boomers'; 'forty something's'; 'thirty something's'; 'Generation X'; 'twenty something's'; 'new-old' and finally by one of the interviewees here, 'extreme old age'; each categorised as having particular traits in common, whether it be popular cultural tastes, experiences, fashion sense, music collections and so on. Given these different categorisations amongst adult age groupings, it seems unlikely to find solidarity and commonalities between generations, diminishing the prospect of increased political action by and for older people. As Gilleard and Higgs (2000) remark, it 'is increasingly meaningless to consider 'age' as conferring some common social identity or to treat 'older people' as a distinct social group acting out of shared concerns and common interests' (Gilleard and Higgs, 2000, p.8). Lifestyle consumerism and wealth differentials are both implicated here, which will be further explored in my interviews with a cohort who arguably contain the most diversity in terms of the themes raised thus far, and for whom these issues may be the most pressing - namely the baby boom generation. This group have afforded deep insights into some of the effects of the lived experience of 'extended youthfulness'; 'agelessness'; 'permayouth', or those generally intending to remain 'eighteen until they die'; and provide important evidence for consideration of the kinds of associations with, and different

dimensions of, ageing generally and old age in particular - that are currently being produced and in some cases, resisted.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Overall framework for the thesis

In order to consider how ageing is currently being done or performed, it is appropriate to investigate a group of people for whom the issues presented in the introduction, may be the most pressing: namely the so-called baby boom generation. Before considering specific examples of generations however, I will briefly consider Hardy and Waite's (1997) framing of key ideas to understand individual biographies within the context of history. The concepts of generation, cohort and life course are proposed as models for explaining how ageing, through and within historical time, is linked to changes in the social structure, where each concept can be seen as an aspect of social organization that aims to illustrate and evaluate social change. History does not merely provide a setting in which lived experience happens - rather that each (history and social change) is bound up in the other. However, the duality evident in theories of generation (see Chapter 3), which attempt to stand outside history, in order to better learn its lessons, result in attempts to understand singular biography, selfhood or agency by separating them from the plurality of the social world. As the social world is never merely the sum of individual parts or selves, the difficulty arises in attempts at understanding how individual agents' actions and outlook are influenced and organised both by and within social structures, and how these links are expressed through time. I use 'generation' as a rhetorical device in order to examine a group and how they use the term, rather than applying pre-existing theories of generation as being definitive explanations for why people act in particular ways. Using definitions of generation, linked to predictions of social change by particular groups, also entails a consideration of the individualising aspects attributed by some theorists to social and cultural forces operating within late modernity, and will be discussed at the end of this chapter. These forces are implicated in the production of increasingly reflexive selfhood, whose subjects have particular relationships towards their bodies, revealed in some of their attempts to control and construct it in specific ways. The philosophical link between human embodiment, freedom and choice is explored in this regard and used to further situate the thesis. The following review of relevant literature provides the context and justification for the central question of the thesis: a cultural analysis of ageing: baby boomers and the lived experience of extended youthfulness.

Theorising the baby boom generation

The baby boom generation, specifically in North America, is defined as being

born between 1946 and 1964, they are members of one of the largest generations in U.S. history. To the extent seventy-five million people think alike, they define contemporary culture. To the extent they buy alike, they shape the economy. To the extent they are both preceded and followed by much smaller generations, they stand out in sharp contrast to those around them. It has been that way for the past four decades and it's likely to stay that way for the next six (Light, 1988, p.9).

In the U.K. population also, baby boomers have been represented in academic and popular discourse as the 'sixties generation'. They are said to represent an 'archetypal culturally distinctive cohort' in Norman Ryder's (1965) sense (see chapter 3 for an elaboration of some of the technical aspects of Ryder's position) within contemporary British history. In Britain in 1991, those born between 1946 – 1964 comprised 16.2 million people. This group, as an age cohort, is significantly larger than those preceding and following it (OPCS 1993). By sheer virtue of their size, this cohort's social and cultural impact is likely to be significant. This is especially so, as baby boomers are said to have an awareness of belonging to a generation in Karl Mannheim's (1952) sense [see chapter 3 for an elaboration of some of the technical aspects of Mannheim's position and those who apply it to baby boomers]. This group were targeted by marketing strategists as 'teenage consumers' and have experience of the youth cultures of the 50's and 60's with their perceived radicalism. These characteristics are in part a consequence of this generation's relatively advantageous labour market position.

Youthful identity was pursued by some of the 50's and 60's in a highly stylised manner, such as for instance the Teddy Boys, or Mods and Rockers, with particular tastes in music and clothes (Brake, 1985). In the 1960's, the highly visible beatniks, hippies and student radicals were drawn mainly from white (male), middle class backgrounds (Frith, 1984). The Second World War was attributed with disrupting previously embedded social patterns and standards of behaviour. In this period, there were literally more young people around than in living memory. Yet, as the first wave of baby boomers became teenagers there was near full employment. The pursuit of leisure, pleasure and spending, coupled with few adult responsibilities, became identified with being young in this period (Clarke et al, 1976). According to Murdock and McCron (1976), the middle class 'counter cultures' of the 1960's

further signalled the emergence of youth becoming a 'generation for itself', with a particular self-consciousness and style. Hippies were seen as an 'advanced guard', trying out possible cultural solutions to problems associated with 'post-war affluent society'. Some commentators around this time, such as Roszak (1970) for instance, went as far as to suggest that age differences were analytically more fundamentally important than social class, in that clashes between the 60's generation and the adult generation were unique and innovative. He claimed that most of what was 'new, provocative, and engaging, in politics, education, the arts, social relations (love, courtship, family, community) is the creation, either of youth, or those who address themselves primarily to the young' (Roszak, 1970, p.2). The British cultural studies perspective, however, argued for the importance of social class, reasoning that youth cultures were a collective response to their class position. They were an attempt to elaborate 'symbolic solutions' to concrete class positions. Thus youth cultures 'use their own area of power – their free time – to make a gesture against their lot. Their material situation is at one level accepted...but, at another level, rejected – deviant styles symbolise a refusal to accept dominant accounts of their position' (Frith, 1984, p.47). These accounts did not go unchallenged however. They were criticized in turn, for focusing too heavily upon male youth (McRobbie and Garber, 1976) and the spectacular, highly visible, sub-cultures, rather than the majority of what could be regarded as 'conventional' youths.

At a more general level, how variations in social structure produce differences in cohorts with regard to ageing raises questions as to whether cohorts age differently from one another, and if they do, how is this to be explained in relation to changes in social structure. Life course theory (Elder, 1995) attempts to answer these questions by focusing upon how 'age-graded trajectories', (such as the family or careers), are interrelated and influenced by changes within social and economic conditions, such as changes in demography, income and status in retirement; as well as more short-term transitions, such as the completion of education, or leaving the family home. The life course can thus be viewed as a series of changes in social roles that are linked to different points in the age structure. It is similar to a 'role' in that it is acted out in relation to the organizational limits imposed upon the taking up of opportunities within the context of culturally specific traditions and expectations. Research from this perspective examines the roles people occupy at a given time; when and how transitions are made to different positions of status and how these movements are organized relative to individual characteristics, or the contexts in which groups of people are embedded.

This approach stresses the dynamism of these multiple interconnections, and facilitates the study of differences across age cohorts by examining central tendencies. These include, for example, the average age of retirement and measures of dispersion. This approach allows a focus on central tendencies, in terms of 'timing distribution', while also enabling consideration of changes in the consistency with which cohort members make transitions in relation to measures of time. Behaviours and positions are viewed as being organized in time and space and can be analysed sequentially in terms of individual choices and socially determined rules of allocation. This has the opposite effect to that of cohort and generation analysis, in that it individualizes rather than collectivises behaviour over space and time. Whilst life course analysis was originally conceived to analyse the link between micro and macro levels, it has in practice focused predominantly upon individual ageing, without simultaneously attending to how these different behaviours are enmeshed in changing organisational structures. Methodologically this seems to be a complex problem. As Riley (1984) notes, if people were born and grew up in laboratories, then investigating ageing could be much simpler. As people age within particular societies at specific historical periods, then empirical analysis and theoretical elaboration is necessarily complex regarding age and explanations of its social significance.

The case for extended youthfulness

Baby boomers are fundamentally implicated in the reconstruction of the middle years of the lifespan (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1989), a process in which middle age and its markers have increasingly become defined as mid-life. This period now stretches from 35- 60 and beyond, resulting in the term 'middle aged' being applied at increasingly later chronological ages than before. The negative aspects of middle age, traditionally associated with the 'natural' and 'inevitable' signs of ageing, such as the appearance of wrinkles, weight gain, baldness, greying hair, stiffness of limbs and so on, were previously more significant. However, since as early as the eighteenth century, those with the means to do so began to take an interest in their health and developments in medicine as a means to prolong their youthfulness (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1990). In the 1920's and 1930's, people 'flocked to the seaside, watched their diets, swallowed pills, sweated in Turkish baths and invented taxing physical activities, partly to ensure that they aged in a moral way' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1990, p.269). As the physical signs associated with ageing began to be viewed as an index of a personal

moral character, those who visibly aged 'prematurely', could be seen as being morally lax and therefore held accountable for not pursuing whatever techniques were available to retain or enhance their youthful appearance.

This trend has continued up to the present day. The physiological indicators of ageing, which become more noticeable in middle age, are increasingly being challenged. For the majority of those living in the west reaching their mid-thirties, there is still usually a long time to live before their eventual demise. The reconstruction of mid-life can thus be viewed as an attempt to put an ever-increasing distance between the middle years and death. Evidence for the reconstruction of middle age comes from the increased number of books portraying this period of life as a time to 'take stock and for self-development' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1989). The mid-life 'crisis' has also gained increased recognition. The female menopause is now publicly reinterpreted as a 'prelude to personal and sexual liberation and portrayed as a fresh beginning' (Pilcher, 1995, p.91), while the male menopause is recognised as a period of psychological and social change for men, both of which developments Hepworth (1987) views as being expressions of the emergence of the new middle-age/mid-life. Such changes have also been taken as evidence of the emergence of a postmodern life course (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991; and Woodward, 1991), whereby traditional life course transitions and chronological boundaries become blurred and what were previously discrete periods of life become integrated. Predetermined definitions of childhood, middle age and old age are seen to be malleable, as changes in working practices, the economy, retirement and so on break down more rigid definitions of these stages of life. Attempts at the replacement of 'ageist' stereotypes by gerontologists, with more positive, lively and empowered images of later life - in combination with the 'discovery' that (some) older people had hitherto untapped sources of wealth, have resulted in a re-branding of old age by marketing strategists. A retiree lifestyle, involving increased leisure, consumption and choice, in combination with the promotion of a commodified youthfulness, to be attained through body- work regimes and techniques of the self, is held to mask signs traditionally associated with old age and further erode, traditional lifecourse transitions.

A postmodern lifecourse can be viewed as a 'simulated life-span', containing the potential and (in certain marketing literature) promise of improving later life, through expanding mid-life into a timeless

future. It is not only the meanings given to physiological changes that have altered, but that images of retirement have also altered (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1995) evidenced in their analysis of a magazine aimed at those of, or approaching retirement age. Here, they argue, images of passivity and inaction are gradually replaced with more 'positive', lively depictions, where mid-life is portrayed as an active phase of increased leisure, consumption and choice. These images serve to further distance middle from old age, reconfigured around an extended period of youthfulness. Further evidence that the mid-life phase is undergoing reconstruction can be found in the popularisation of the term the 'Third Age', found in the title - 'University of the Third Age', or 'U3A', of which there are 212 'universities' in Britain alone. These institutions do not offer paper qualifications, but function as 'self-help communities', where teachers and students share knowledge with one another. As the baby boomer cohort enters middle age, they may bring with them the tastes and values of their youth, which are able to challenge the previous meanings of what being middle aged was for the preceding generation. As the political climate altered in the 60's and 70's, concerns developed with the 'oppression of people based upon their age, which may have contributed toward a questioning of the 'naturalness' of age divisions and an awareness of the possibility of changing the ways in which age relations are organized' (Pilcher, 1995, p.30), a theme that was highlighted in the cult film 'Harold and Maude' (Ashby, 1971). Whether and how these changes manifest themselves as a form of denial and 'escape from history', or as an incitement to challenge what has been regarded as 'western societies dominant obligations' (Katz, 1995, p.70) will be addressed in the analysis of interviews later in this thesis.

Differentials in experience

This blurring of age boundaries is , however, made more complex by the intersection and stratification of differences in gender, class, ethnicity, nationality and so on. In such a scenario, how the ageing body is experienced through time is problematised, producing a variety of possible effects. Indeed, some commentators suggest that the likelihood of 'experiencing the ageing body in a meaningfully temporal, open and unalienated way are slim' (Katz, 1995, p.70). And whilst arguing for the recognition of a reconstruction of mid-life, Featherstone and Hepworth (1989) themselves acknowledge that more traditional images of middle age have not been left behind. In short there are a lot of contrasting experiences of middle age, and it seems likely that there are some whose lives are

relatively untouched by the reconstructions. For example, The Carnegie Enquiry found that as a social category, women are more likely to have restricted access to a third age lifestyle than men. This is mainly due to financial restrictions encountered through a combination of low paid work, interrupted employment histories and different access to pension funds. Main (1988) identifies middle age as time when women come back into the labour market after child-rearing, typically into part-time work, or from part - to full-time work, rather than enjoying 'early retirement'. Bernard and Meade (1993) raise the issue of the separation of work from leisure based activities for women in midlife, in that domestic work is enmeshed in leisure activities, such as gardening, cooking and voluntary work. According to their findings, women are more likely to feel guilty than men regarding participating in leisure-based activities, usually putting the needs of others before their own, and facing social constraints regarding the 'acceptability' of going out to pubs alone, based upon constructs of acceptable female sexuality and behaviour. Fears regarding male violence and the smaller number of women holding driving licenses than men, also place restrictions on travelling, particularly at night, further curtailing leisure pursuits. In these findings, gender inequalities are not 'diluted' in mid-life, as on average a retired man has 92 hours leisure time per week, compared to 75 for women, given that women still do the majority of domestic work in retired couples. It will be interesting to see how and if differentials in access to active retiree lifestyles are productive of the subjective experience of mid-life as encountered by this cohort.

Those individuals who face redundancy in their forties and fifties, who then in some instances manage to find other work (usually part-time, or at a much lower rate of pay than their previous job, or become unemployed), long before the official retirement age, also face financial hardship. To these people the leisured third age is largely meaningless and can be a source of frustration or bitterness. Schuller (1987) has argued that these changes have led to a more ambiguous chronological definition of when a cohort begins retirement, as members experience the transition at increasingly different ages. As employment for older individuals is reduced, those entering retirement, do so increasingly after periods of sickness or unemployment (Laczko, 1989). These individuals are then more likely to only have a state pension in retirement, thus the leisured 'option' is also denied them. As members of ethnic minority communities are over-represented in unskilled/semi-skilled manual work, they are also more likely to face unemployment and redundancy (Abercrombie et al, 1994), and they may then face

additional, disproportionate restrictions on enjoying the advantages the new middle age is said to offer.

There is evidence to suggest that the mid-lifers are being targeted as a new consumer market (Sawchuck, 1995) and associated lifestyle traits are evident in images that emphasise youthfulness and activity and a further distancing from old age in specialist lifestyle magazines, holiday brochures, radio and television programmes and so on (Hepworth and Featherstone, 1995). These images and target marketing strategies point to the extension of mid-life beyond the chronological retirement ages, which had previously signalled that old age had officially arrived. The above evidence suggests however, that the prospect of enjoying these leisured lifestyles in middle age is heavily dependant upon financial resources, time and health, which are in turn dependent upon the accumulation of these resources in earlier life. In contrast to the more positive accounts outlined above, there are also more negative scenarios proposed. For Gullette (1997), for instance, there is a 'decline narrative' or ideology at work regarding mid-life, and reconstructions of positive ageing at an individual level are insufficient to resist what she feels is an all-pervasive ageism at large at the structural level. She writes that we:

do not need more peppy messages, tactics that don't admit our own awful internal corroborations of the culture's middle- ageism, that offer private solutions and ignore systemic problems. What all the right tools might be to unlock the collective will to resist, we cannot know yet. But surely it is worth trying next to bind midlife phenomena tightly to age ideology, material conditions, and a serious politics of liberation (Gullette, 1995, p.17).

How and if ageism is being produced and/or resisted, forms a section in chapter five.

The ageing body

Biological ageing creates problems for the view that ageing is a social construct. This is not to deny however that there have been remarkable changes in biological ageing over the last century in so-called first world countries. What it means to be old in contemporary western society is changing more rapidly than ever before. The last century saw an increase in average life expectancy of almost fifty per cent, 'from 52-79 for women and from 49- 74 for men' (Hutton, 2000, p. 27). It is not only the case that people are living longer, but that they are also reaching more advanced ages in a more healthy and active manner. If old age is defined as a period of degenerative illness and infirmity, then this last stage of life appears to be shortening, for example, in the U.S. surveys have shown that from 1982 to 1989 that the 'probability of an eighty-five year old remaining free from disabilities rose by nearly 30

per cent' (Ibid.). As total life expectancy increases, the categories of 'youth' and 'middle age' can also be perceived as malleable, as membership of each category's upper age limits continue to increase. People in their eighties are now taking part in activities which were previously the preserve of the recently retired, such as further education, travel, sport, starting new businesses and so on. What it means to be sixty, seventy or eighty is changing, along with the attitudes held both by and towards these people.

The relations between chronology and biology are also less and less fixed. Whilst a person may have a chronological age of seventy or eighty, their biological age, as measured against the average of the rest of the population at that age (or compared to the average levels for younger ages), may be higher or lower, in terms of hormone levels, muscle, skin elasticity, bone mass, cholesterol levels and so on. It appears that there is a whole industry gearing up to promote and popularise the notion that one's biological age can be slowed down, or even reversed. For example, the *Palm Springs Life Extension Institute* claims that by restoring an individual's hormones to the level of a young adult, they can 'help you avoid age-related illnesses, reverse your biological age, extend your life expectancy, and significantly improve the quality of your additional years' (Chein, 1999). The hormones in question are, according to Hutton (2000), melatonin, released by the pineal gland in response to light and darkness. Acting as an antioxidant, it is currently used to treat jet lag. As the brain releases melatonin, it has a general effect on the body, whose overall benefit (and safety) has yet to be demonstrated. Human growth hormone can increase muscle mass, strength and vigour, but can also raise blood pressure to dangerously high levels and increase the risk of heart disease and cancer. DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone) is similar in composition to testosterone and oestrogen and it is claimed, protects men (but not women) from heart disease, helping them retain lean tissue and increasing 'well-being'. Artificial replacement of hormones may also lead to heart rhythm irregularities, 'prostate cancer and masculinising effects on women' (Hutton, 2000, p. 27). Unsurprisingly these negative effects are conspicuous by their absence from the Palm Springs literature. This raises the issue of the susceptibility of those desperate to remain 'young' to exploitation by less than scrupulous 'experts'.

If one adopts the 'right' lifestyle, eats the 'right' nutrition, takes the 'right' exercise and takes part in bio-medical advances then it may be the case that journalistic claims that 'how well we age is largely

up to us' (Ibid. p.27), contain an element of plausibility. Obviously such claims presuppose a healthy body to begin with, the desire to participate in the first instance and the necessary financial means in order to do so. If such objections are put to one side, then it does seem to be the case that claims regarding what may be technically possible in relation to increased longevity are not as extravagant as they initially appear. A BBC *Horizon* special, entitled *Life and Death in the 21st Century* (2000) asked whether science would soon offer us the chance to live for hundreds of years. An eighty-five year old Texan (who also happens to be an oil billionaire) featured in the programme, is spending money on a variety of treatments in an attempt to extend his lifespan, confident that a 'breakthrough' is around the corner. One such possible breakthrough concerned a drug in development called *telomerase*, which is able to reverse the process whereby cells stop replacing themselves and effectively die. The rate at which this happens is different between individuals is analogous with a fuse. Once this 'fuse' has burned away over an allotted lifespan, or finite number of cell divisions, it will stop signalling the cell to which it is attached to continue dividing in order to replace itself. Previously it was thought that it is an inevitability that this process occurs and an inescapable fact of human mortality. In the case of particular types of cell however, scientists have been able to rebuild and lengthen the fuse, giving the cell a new lease of life. Leutwyler (1998) reports in *The Scientific American* that telomerase - an enzyme discovered only a decade ago in a single-celled protozoan — may well be the elixir of youth. This chemical acts in immortal cancer cells, sperm and ovum to repair telomeres, the strands of DNA that tie up the ends of chromosomes. And now it seems that activating telomerase in sundry other cells grants them a longer lease on life as well. The finding, which was published in the January 16 issue of *Science*, finally proves what was a highly controversial model linking telomeres to cellular ageing. More important, it opens up new avenues for research into diseases that occur when cells grow old, including macular degeneration in the eye and arteriosclerosis, and those that arise when cells do not age at all, such as cancer (Leutwyler, 1998).

By artificially lengthening a cell's telomere, controlled experiments with identical untreated cells have shown that the manipulated cells lived much longer than usual and appear to be able to do so indefinitely. Such research may one day be able to help those children suffering from an accelerated form of ageing, whose cellular age is far in excess of their chronological age. Thus a three year old child may have the cellular activity more normally associated with a person in late middle age, resulting in a vastly reduced lifespan, (also demonstrating a natural case of differences in biological

and chronological forms of ageing). Unfortunately for these individuals and their families such large-scale re-engineering is still only speculative. Currently, one of many problems in that whilst such research holds much promise for halting the spread of cancer by inhibiting the production of telomerase, artificially resetting a telomere, in order to prevent wrinkles for instance, may actually increase the risk of cancer, as cell division may become too rapid and out of control. If such problems were overcome, as well as the possibility of lengthening total lifespan, or reversing the disease that causes telomeres to shorten at a greatly accelerated rate, it may also become possible to manipulate cellular life-span in vivo, producing children with a much higher capacity for longevity. This all still remains to be seen. What is certain is that research into these areas is continuing apace; patents are being applied for and the stock in participating companies has risen dramatically since these discoveries were made. A further certainty is that drinking from the fountain of youth will come with a hefty price tag. A proven method for extending the lifespan (of rats) that is cheap and relatively straightforward is that of calorie restriction (U.S. News.com, Shute, 1997). It was found that by reducing rats' daily intake by forty per cent that they lived thirty per cent longer than the control group with less incidence of chronic disease. This calorific deprivation has the effect of lowering the temperature of metabolism by one degree Celsius, reducing the number of free radicals that are thought to demolish cellular fats, proteins and DNA. There do not appear to have been any controlled studies to date however to see how such a technique might affect human lifespan.

From this and other research, it appears that biological ageing is actually a number of processes, 'involving genes, hormones, molecules, immune system responses, environmental insults, and ordinary mistakes' (Shute, 1997). As humans only need to live to age thirty in order to reproduce and rear children, it is 'remarkable' that those in the so-called first world live as long as they now do. In biological terms, ageing is not a disease as such but a cycle or process intrinsic to all elements in the universe. Studying the ageing process to see why it is that as we grow older and we become more susceptible to certain diseases will help us to have a healthier and more independent later life. However, one has to (perhaps cynically) question whether such preventative methods will be as enthusiastically investigated and championed by trans-national biotechnology companies, as those methods that extend life, once a person has already become relatively unwell. There is a huge amount of money to be made from expensive treatments for long drawn-out illnesses, such as cancers, heart disease and so on and relatively little incentive for keeping people well, without recourse to such

treatments in the first instance. Perhaps the biggest inequality of the next century will centre around issues of who can or cannot afford to prolong life (an inequality that was previously more noticeable between societies and cultures, rather than within the so-called 'first world') and if people will be prepared to pay to extend their lives, irrespective of the 'quality' of existence this may entail.

Ageing and resources

Sociological approaches to ageing and notions of generation have tended to extend and/or critique resources models, which can be viewed as competition between discrete groups over resources. Claims over who is entitled to what, could be viewed at one extreme as increasing numbers of older voters taking services away from younger voters (Longman, 1987) and at the other extreme younger people pragmatically considering the expense and use to them of the welfare state (Thomson, 1989) judging older people in terms of their 'contribution' to society (see chapter five). What is important to note is that the various conceptualisations of the term 'generation' are not normally linked and are 'disassociated' depending upon the research field. For instance, the sociology of the family and political sociology may both adopt one definition and ignore the others. However 'a single individual accumulates these different and interacting generational identities. Therefore, the different meanings of the term need to be reunified' (Arber, 2000, p.5) when examining a concept such as the baby boom generation, in order to account for its social, economic, philosophical and ethical aspects. Interestingly, the conflicts facing the first wave of baby boomers, who were young adults in the 1960's, clashing with the previous generations values, may now involve three generations, between the young, mid-lifers and retirees. The setting for the conflict in the 1960's was the cultural and political spheres, whereas it is now argued by some that it has now shifted to the economic sphere, by Preston (1984) in the U.S. and Laslett and Fishkin (1992) in the U.K. These 'issues are no longer the refutation of generational and gender hierarchies inside the family or in universities and workplaces, but instead focus upon the sharing of public resources between separate cohorts before, during and after the working life. Therefore the risk of conflict comes from generational inequity in welfare contributions, as well as in the distribution of benefits' (Arber, 2000, p.1). This can also be viewed as a more 'politicised ageism' (Arber & Ginn, 1991) where the elderly may be scapegoated, in the sense that they may be perceived as consuming a level of scarce resources that are unsustainable by the younger population. The thesis that Western states can no longer afford the higher cost of pensions and health care for

increasing numbers of pensioners have been refuted however, as 'European societies, in whatever context, do not show signs of generational conflict' (Arber, 2000, p.18). This assertion is supported by Mullan (2000) who argues that the so-called demographic time bomb is largely 'imaginary' and fictitious, and also that 'apocalyptic views about too many elderly causing a threat to the viability of western economies must, for the moment, be suspended' (Phillipson, 1998, p.98). The question of the state being able to afford increases in pensioner numbers in relation to those in employment, is also raised outside academic circles (as governments seek to justify decreases in public spending) which could still lead to hostility between the generations, particularly if it is politically expedient to do so. In the aforementioned context, I was sensitive to whether any of the respondents had encountered forms of ageism that they attribute to this process and how it manifests itself, given that those members of the so-called 'Generation X', following the baby boomers, are much smaller in number, when viewed as a cohort of working age.

These potentially conflicting interests are amongst the necessary, but not sufficient [see further discussion in conclusion] conditions for organized unrest. They also illustrate that while people inevitably grow older physiologically, how these processes are understood are neither universal, nor 'natural'. Rather, they are historically specific and are 'conceived and articulated in particular societies into culturally specific sets of ideas, philosophies, attitudes and practices' (Prout and James 1990, p.1). The following points drawn from the sociological literature are of particular relevance with regard to the 'reconstruction' of ageing related to resources, and can be summarised as follows: Firstly, within contemporary Euro - American societies, biomedicine, such as for example, research into hormone replacement, cellular and genetic manipulation; in conjunction with the cosmetics industry (including cosmetic surgery), dietary habits, fitness regimes and so on, are able to challenge the physiological indicators of ageing. Secondly, 'middle age' is reconstructed as 'mid - life', as witnessed in the proliferation of texts portraying this period of life as an opportunity to 'take stock' and a time for 'self development'. Thirdly, the notion of a 'mid - life crisis has begun to gain popular currency. Male menopause is now recognised as a period of psychological and social change for men (Hepworth, 1987), while the female menopause is publicly reinterpreted as a new beginning and prelude to 'personal and sexual liberation' (Greer, 1992, 1999; and Pilcher, 1995). Fourthly, images of retirement (the state sanctioned marker of old age) are also changing (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1995) from passivity and inaction, to more 'positive', lively depictions of 'lifestyles', involving activity, leisure,

consumption and choice. In combination these representations serve to further distance middle from old age and death, reconfiguring the process of ageing around an extended period of youthfulness. The research presented here will attempt to explore whether and how these processes inform understandings of ageing. However, a significant number of people's lives will be relatively untouched by these reconstructions, especially if they do not have the financial resources to participate in these activities (Schuller, 1987; Laczko, 1989).

Gilleard and Higgs' (2000) assertion that retirees have more money and greater disposable incomes than ever before, 'in many cases they are better off in retirement than they were for much of their working lives. In short, people have more resources through which to shape their retirement, enabling a greater engagement with contemporary lifestyle culture' (Gilleard and Higgs, 2000, p.9) is a position that seems overly optimistic, particularly if one considers those due to retire within the next ten years or so. It is a position which might more accurately reflect the trajectory of a number of those recently (largely male) retirees, who may remember Harold Macmillan's (1957) infamous comment in Bedford on 20-07-57, where he charged the assembled listeners to 'be frank about it: most of our people have never had it so good' (TheTimes, 1957), many of whom have enjoyed uninterrupted employment and relatively unhindered career/salary progression, confirming the then Prime Minister's assertion. Such affluence may be a temporary blip on British history's radar, given the worries expressed by some of the people I interviewed, regarding their retirement prospects in relation to the costs of long term care and the so-called 'pensions crisis' (Inman, 2002). This situation may have been precipitated by a variety of factors: periods of unemployment; reduction in company pensions; inadequate pension provision; divorce and the private personal pensions collapse. Thus the endless summers of relentless golfing holidays, cruises, and gardening opportunities, marketed as the ideal retiree lifestyle and reflected in the aspirations of some, may be disappearing on the horizon for the many, rather like the Shangri-la of the three day week before it. Mid-life social positions are inseparable from class, ethnicity and gender relations, which may also lead to differing expectations, possibilities and realizations of the mid-life experience, in addition to, and linked with, an individual's economic standing.

Beauvoir and Giddens – some philosophical reflections

The research investigates the relevance of Beauvoir's (1972) understandings of old age - particularly her concepts of facticity, freedom of choice and ethical responsibility and their development throughout her work. Giddens' (1991) notion of the reflexive project of the self, is also examined in relation to processes of individualization and the mobilisation of the body in chapters three to five. These theoretical considerations are illuminated by how they relate to the interviewees lived experience of ageing. The analysis in *Old Age* (1972) is especially useful here in that Beauvoir philosophically analyses the theme of old age independently of death, and argues that later life presents existential problems that cannot be reduced to death as an end point of existence. Social inequalities related to the old can produce for some a "body experienced as limiting", where even ontological, or Sartre's 'radical freedom', not just practical freedom, is limited as a person's future shortens.

In *Old Age* Beauvoir refers to what she calls 'facticity', that is the 'givens' or facts that are true in relation to a person, such as for instance, a person's chronological age. Crucially, the individual is free to choose how they respond to, or position themselves in relation to these facts. Beauvoir's notion of facticity is qualified, however, by the claim that there are not an infinite number of choices available to the individual in any given situation. For her, there is a tension between facticity and freedom of choice. Beauvoir's sense of existentialist freedom is linked to an emancipatory project and politics, in that she identifies that there are always some choices to be made in relation to specific givens, including the ultimate facticity of death and a person's individual relation to it. The possibility of choice introduces an ethical element into life, in that if we cannot face our own death and ageing process (which in her terms is to be in 'bad faith'), then we should at least recognise that denying our destiny may impact upon how we treat other, older people, particularly if this leads to making negative judgements about them, by not recognising ourselves in them. Such denials may be linked to associations of fear, disgust and guilt regarding ageing, and the physical signs of ageing and mortality, which may then be projected onto other old people, whose very presence can act as unwelcome reminders for some. This can in turn lead to unwarranted moral judgements and actions, such as, for instance, regarding older people as though they are deaf, invisible, stupid, worthless, a drain on the state, or morally lax for 'allowing' themselves to 'degenerate' so far.

Old Age (1972) was Beauvoir's second largest theoretical work after *The Second Sex* (1989) and focuses specifically upon aged, rather than feminine embodiment. Summarising and elaborating Penelope Deutscher's (1999; 2003) position, one can argue that Beauvoir's theoretical and autobiographical work is interconnected. *The Second Sex* in its concern with 'lived femininity' as connected to *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, while *Old Age* is connected to *Force of Circumstance*, *All Said and Done*, *Adieux: Farewell to Sartre*, and *A Very Easy Death*. All of the latter texts contain representations of ageing in relation to herself, her mother and Sartre. In her autobiographical material, Beauvoir is widely recognised as showing how a woman can live freely and independently, a project she conceived as an 'art of living,' where 'through her life, she wanted to prove woman could live as a subject', (Vintage, 1996, p. 107). In contrast to this position Deutscher (1999) has argued that Beauvoir's autobiographical work on old age fails to depict her later life as exemplary in this regard. This inconsistency is made yet more complex by the theoretical argument from *Old Age* itself, where a more sympathetic stance is taken towards ontological freedom.

Old Age draws heavily on the philosophical framework of *The Second Sex*. In both cases the 'Other' is formulated in two separate ways. The first way, is Other in relation to the Self, that is to (young adult) male subjectivity, considered as a norm of western society. This Self has difficulty accommodating those who are not the norm – women and aged individuals. The Otherness is not recognized as being the same as the norm, and the Self is unable or unwilling to 'recognize himself' in the Other, that is in an 'aged person,' or in 'that woman'. From Beauvoir's perspective, a person who refuses or fails to recognize himself or herself in 'that old man' or 'that old woman' is denying their destiny, since becoming an old person awaits us all individually, and the woman is a 'free autonomous being like all human creatures' (Beauvoir, 1988, p. 29). The point is that if the status of 'woman' or 'aged person' was not a depreciated category, then this recognition as 'like' or 'same' should always occur. Irrespective of whether this is an ideal model or not, Beauvoir's concern is to examine why the woman and/or the aged individual is not perceived as 'like' or 'same'.

Beauvoir's second sense of Otherness refers to how one acquires the identity of woman or agedness from other people, and employs the Sartrean ontological category of being-for-others. Here our knowledge of others is not inferred from their behaviour and we as individuals are not entirely formed by our self-determinations, or the facts about ourselves. Instead it derives from the "the look", given by someone else who catches us "in the act" of doing something embarrassing, such as, for instance, being caught unawares spying on someone through a keyhole. In this situation we define ourselves in their terms (usually unwillingly), and is exemplified in the famous line "hell is other people", from Sartre's *No Exit* (1943). Our aged being-for-others is a synthesis of the culturally specific meanings attached to physiological changes, which are usually negative in the western context:

[F]or the outsider is a dialectic relationship between my being as he defines it objectively and the awareness of myself that I acquire by means of him. Within me it is the Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider – who is old: and that Other is myself (Beauvoir, 1977, p.316).

This being-for-others can be experienced as a form of alienation, such as in the case of Beauvoir, who feels disgust at the sight of her own aged face in a mirror and displays an unwillingness to identify with it, given the marginal status of the aged Other. Her compulsion to look in the mirror to find herself, and the being-for-others she encounters there (the image others see) is never doubted as herself. The reflection she encounters is described in terms of a disease she would like to distance herself from; she 'is attacked by the pox of time for which there is no cure' (Beauvoir, 1965, p. 656). In taking a social constructionist view, Beauvoir explains the disgust a subject may feel at times toward their own ageing in terms of the process by which biological factors and their associated meanings are enmeshed in societal attitudes towards them as individuals. Such attitudes cannot be separated out from the individual's own sense of him or herself. Importantly, the individual's feelings of disgust or otherwise at their appearance, is dependent on the extent to which they, as a subject accept or resist the integration of physical ageing with societal attitudes. In this particular instance, Beauvoir's own disgust reflects her acceptance of the high premium western society places upon youth and beauty, particularly that of a woman.

Beauvoir argues that not only do women have to negotiate the high valuation placed on feminine youth and beauty, but they also have to deal with its sudden loss, in relation to that of men. The worth of men themselves is not valued in these terms to the same extent; 'woman is suddenly deprived of

her femininity; she is still relatively young when she loses the erotic attractiveness and the fertility which, in the view of society and in her own, provide the justification of her existence' (Beauvoir, 1988, p.587). There may be some compensation for those women who regarded childbearing, pregnancy and sexual relations as a burden, for which the menopause and turning fifty may bring some respite, where 'rid of her duties, she finds freedom at last' (Beauvoir, 1988 p.595). She will not however be rid of western societies devaluation of women over fifty. This may be increasingly challenged today, as increases in life expectancy and changing attitudes come to regard fifty as middle, rather than old age. Those 'who are 50-plus and enjoy a good standard of living and a reasonable state of health have started to speak up on their own behalf. They've begun by redefining middle age. Ten years ago, 40 was happily accepted as the mid-point of life (Taylor, 1999, p.16). Today, some of the 50-plus age group are beginning to reject definitions of 'appropriate behaviour' and gender roles applicable to the previous generation; they are 'not going to grow old in the same way (their) mother's did (Pollard, 1999, p.16). What remains to be seen, however, is whether this is 'putting off the inevitable', in relation to re-locating the negative practices associated with being old further and further into the future, or, if this will be the first generation to offer resistance and a re-definition of what it means to be old, right up to the end of their lives.

Given these possibilities, it seems strange that Beauvoir criticizes those who are engaged in denying their 'facticity', but her criticism can be explained by reference to her view that the self can be viewed as a work in progress, on its way to being something. As we move through life, we always have the possibility for reform, to imagine different ways to be, or reinterpret our facticity, as new desires, ambitions or projects occur to us, a possibility referred to by Beauvoir as "transcendence". In this instance, denials of facticity by some, in terms of the fact that they are, or will eventually become old, is viewed by Beauvoir as an act of 'bad faith'. The tension produced by the indeterminacy, between freedom and facticity, means that a person can never actually be anything fixed: when they try to do this, they are said to be in 'bad faith', for example, if a person were to fix themselves in a social role with its associated behaviours, or in terms of the job they do, or in terms of particular character trait. It would also be a form of bad faith if an individual ignored the restrictive elements of their existence, or the contexts in which all choices are made, by imagining that they had an infinite series of possibilities from which to choose. Thus there is always an uneasy tension between facticity and freedom of

choice. Those who deny the facticity of their age are advised to 'stop cheating - let us recognize ourselves in this old man or in that old woman' (Beauvoir, 1977, p. 12). Similarly it is also an act of bad faith if a person were to reduce themselves to the facticity of being a thing, such as, to stereotypical notions of what an old person is in western society. This echoes her critique of women 'who reduce themselves to a robotic, slick or passive stereotypes of femininity' (Deutscher, 1999, p. 8). If, as Beauvoir argues, old age is a social construction in the sense that physiological characteristics cannot be separated either from the (changing) meanings ascribed to them, or the societal responses to them, (whose negative associations can always be resisted, even if to some extent they impinge on freedom) and, if an individual should recognize themselves in old people, it seems to be a startling omission on Beauvoir's part that she does not effectively heed her own advice, in her failure to present exemplars in her autobiographical work.

It can be argued that *Old Age* is partly an attempt by Beauvoir to amend the hard-line stance she adopted in *The Second Sex*, regarding the ability of all existents to consciously affirm their freedom. This is reflected in her comment on the notion that 'merely feeling young is enough to be young' is a 'complete misunderstanding of the situation' (Beauvoir, 1977, p. 316). However Deutscher (1999) argues that Beauvoir's autobiographical work goes too far to the other extreme in constituting her own ageing as a real 'physical limit'. In *Force of Circumstance* she is captured by and unable to resist her ageing, as 'deep in that looking glass, old age is watching and waiting for me; and it's inevitable, one day [it] will get me. [It's] got me now' (Beauvoir, 1965, pp. 655-6). Here, the older she gets, the less power she feels she has to resist the negative connections associated with an aged appearance. Beauvoir also describes the strangeness of not being a 'body anymore', in relation to desirability by others and the supreme hurt of 'never feeling any new desires: they wither before they can be born' (Beauvoir, 1965, pp. 656-7). In *Old Age*, the loss of libido is described in extreme terms as a 'mutilation that brings other mutilations with it: sexuality, vitality and activity are indissolubly linked' (Beauvoir, 1977, p. 390). These examples suggest that Beauvoir herself feels that she encounters a limit, which runs counter to the existentialist Sartrean notion of freedom of consciousness. In *Old Age* there are examples of individuals who resist accepting the Otherness of old age, (or at least for a time), who may be viewed as being old in chronological terms, but who continue to feel and act in a youthful manner and still enjoy active sex lives. Generally speaking, from the evidence she gathers, she suggests that a 'woman's sexuality is less affected by age than men's' (Beauvoir, 1977, p. 386) in

terms of physiology (referring to impotence), but that women are more disadvantaged in terms of social norms, in terms of their 'condition as erotic objects' (Beauvoir, 1977, p. 357) where chastity 'is not imposed upon her by a physiological destiny but by her position as a relative being' (Beauvoir, 1977, p. 388). This latter view refers to Beauvoir's personal opinion that a woman's notion of desirability comes from her (male) partners gaze, which if favourable, allows her to 'easily' put up with 'her body's ageing. But at the first signs of coldness she feels her ugliness in all its horror, she is disgusted with her image and cannot bear to expose her poor person to others' (Beauvoir, 1977, pp. 388-9). The extreme language of 'horror', 'disgust' and reliance on her (male) partners 'gaze' may be more revealing of Beauvoir's relation to her own embodiment than that of women more generally.

One has to consider then, given that Beauvoir was obviously cognizant of these arguments, why it was that she experienced old age as 'happening' to her and why she claimed that she had 'fought always not to let them label me, but I have not been able to prevent the years from enmeshing me' (Beauvoir, 1965, p. 655). In stating that she cannot prevent the years from enmeshing her, Beauvoir illustrates both her personal response to aged, feminine embodiment, and the high value placed upon activity, beauty, youth and sexuality. As Beauvoir was very familiar with and employed the notion of existentialist freedom, whereby human beings absurdly exist without justification, in a situation or world in which they are "thrown", a situation that condemns them to assume responsibility for their free actions and the values they employ, in order to act in regard to choice, one would expect her to argue that it was her choice regarding how she viewed her aged appearance in the mirror, or to believe '[n]ever again a man' (Beauvoir, 1965, pp.656-7). Instead these are posed as real limits, which 'happen' to her, rather than as meanings she herself attributes to her body and sexual attractiveness. In *Force of Circumstance* she writes 'I loathe my appearance now: the eyebrows slipping down towards the eyes, the bags underneath, the excessive fullness of the cheeks, and that air of sadness around the mouth that wrinkles always bring' (Beauvoir, 1965, p. 656). This disgust at her wrinkled face offers no critique of the high status accorded to youth and physical beauty. It also appears that she found the aged female body more unappealing than that of aged males, as an 'old man's body, I said to myself...is after all less ghastly than an old woman's' (Beauvoir, 1984, p. 59).

Beauvoir's response to her situation, as an aged individual, is consistent with the view that prevailing societal attitudes regarding youth and beauty and being-for-others, are able to shape the lived experience of gendered aged-ness and femininity, which may in turn act as an impediment to freedom. Existents are argued to have some facility for resisting these attitudes, particularly in *The Second Sex*, where she incites women to resist prevalent attitudes toward their femininity. Beauvoir's response to her ageing as a 'fatality' does however reflect a particular notion of existentialist choice, that is, as a choice (or series of choices) that does not necessarily have to be conscious, or made at a particular time. Rather a series of choices are made throughout life, in terms of interpretations of the world, which contribute toward subjective experience; thus ageing in this instance may come to seem like a fatality. From the perspective of Beauvoir's earlier, stricter approach to freedom and choice, her older self can be argued to have made a poor choice, in that her experience of being old is non-exemplary in its passive acceptance of fate, which she seems to be helpless at resisting. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir criticizes those women who accept stereotypes of femininity, in an attempt to make them aware that they are stereotypes and should not allow them to be reduced to the level of a 'thing'. Furthermore, in the earlier work, it is a 'moral fault' if a person consents to (by not challenging) their othering, although there may be circumstances where it is 'inflicted upon the individual', (Beauvoir, 1988, p. 730). A woman who uncritically adopts 'without discussion the opinions and values recognized by their husband or their lover' is implicated 'in a deep complicity with the word of men', (Beauvoir, 1988, p. 730). Unlike a child, an adult western woman 'chooses' this complicity in a situation where there is a possibility of 'liberation', which is not taken. Such an inaction is a 'resignation of freedom', which 'implies dishonesty and which is a positive fault' (Beauvoir, 1988,p.730).

These positions taken toward women are not present in the analysis within *Old Age* for reasons I will go on to illustrate, as well as discussing some of the 'ethical' problems this may create. The concept of bad faith is used against those who treat the aged as Other (different), who neither identify themselves with the aged, nor associate 'humanness' with older people. When Beauvoir urges us to 'stop cheating', she refers to the economic, material and social circumstances of the elderly, arising from the general lack of recognition of ourselves in old people. *The Second Sex* criticizes both those who are in some way responsible for, or are not interested in, women's position in relation to their economic and social conditions, and women themselves in terms of whether or not they affirm their freedom, or are complicit in allowing these circumstances to prevail. *Old Age* deals specifically with a sustained

critique of the often inferior economic situation of the aged (that is gender blind, in that it fails to take account of the often harsher economic situation of the large number of aged women who live alone, who may previously have relied upon their partners income) and societal attitudes toward them, whilst largely abandoning a moral critique of old people themselves and their subjective dealings with their being-for-others, particularly in her own case. Deutscher (1999) goes on to argue that in the autobiographical *A Very Easy Death* and *Adieux: Farewell to Sartre*, both Beauvoir's mother and Sartre are also depicted as non-exemplary in their response to ageing and embody the 'state of the denial of facticity, of transcendence or more generally self-deceit' (Deutscher, 1999, p. 10). These representations of individual lives, both autobiographically and to a large extent the illustrations given in *Old Age*, demonstrate an abandoning of the notion of the 'exemplary', as no longer being of theoretical use.

In the later autobiographical work and *Old Age* itself, human responsibility is no longer assessed in terms of affirming individual freedom. This may be because death is an objective limit (although how a person responds to that limit is important) in a way that is not the case with femininity. As a person's horizons no longer appear to stretch into a limitless future, it may be tempting to regard old age as a loss of freedom, as is suggested in *Force of Circumstance*. It would be a moral fault from the perspective of the stricter notion of existentialist freedom employed in *The Second Sex* if a person failed to take responsibility for affirming the possibility of choice, however limited their expected lifespan may be. Indeed the existential ethics employed by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* imply that as long as the subject is conscious, they are able to affirm their freedom, irrespective of how long they have left to live. To do otherwise would be a denial of facticity or transcendence and an act of bad faith. This theoretical model is still available to Beauvoir in *Old Age*, but it appears that she is no longer as interested in making a moral judgement regarding how an individual deals with their own ageing process, as long as negative judgements are not made in regard to others. So, for instance, if a younger person fails to recognize themselves in an older person, the moral aspect becomes formulated in terms of the economic and social consequences for older people. A person may deny their own ageing in a number of different ways, but in *Old Age* Beauvoir is only interested in the ethical consequences of failing to recognize one's ageing in that of another. This is particularly significant for Beauvoir if the consequences are that it undermines solidarity with other, older people: in her example, if pressure were not applied to the French

government in relation to its economic policies on ageing. Importantly this position could be criticized for a tendency to recognize the Other as like. However, Beauvoir's intention is to criticize certain forms of appropriation of the Other. Her ethical stance is against displacing characteristics of oneself onto an other, such as, for instance, if an individual refused to recognize the fact that they too will probably become old and the consequences of denying that older person a reasonable economic standard of living.

The particular way we confront or avoid the situation of our own freedom or facticity is not necessarily bad in itself, indeed both may be necessary sometimes to enable us to continue with, or to enjoy life. Thus Beauvoir 'wastes no time in criticizing her mother for a harmless and necessary self-dishonesty about her own decay which impinge little on others' (Deutscher, 1999, pp. 11-12). Crucially for Beauvoir, techniques of avoidance are only open to criticism if they involve 'impoverishment of the Other'. This can manifest itself in many different ways -from a government's economic policy on the aged, to an individual's anger at another old person whose behaviour is annoying – this is a case in which an individual fails to recognize that they too may be in this situation one day. The major philosophical difference between *The Second Sex* and *Old Age* is that in the latter case, Beauvoir is far more sympathetic to those aged individuals who have been rendered Other, but who are in bad faith regarding how they may be denying this to themselves. It may be the case that for some, these denials are necessary in order to continue living. This is in direct contrast to *The Second Sex*, where those women who comply with gender norms and do not face up to the challenge of affirming their freedom are treated with little sympathy.

It is important however, to distinguish between types of freedom. In *The Second Sex*, women are as (ontologically) free as men, in that they are both existents, and there are always choices to be made regarding individual situations, even that of being the second sex. Women are not (practically) free however in the sense that they are born into a world in which they are the second sex historically, economically and culturally in terms of the conditioning or education they are likely to receive. This has concrete effects on a woman's subjectivity, sexuality, financial independence, physical movement and expression. There is a problem in *The Second Sex* regarding a woman's freedom to consciously respond to her lived situation and the possibilities it presents. Beauvoir maintains that this rests largely

with women themselves, in terms of how to separate their circumstances (whether they be economic, how they were regarded by others, or their actual embodiment), from the sphere of their conscious response to these factors, or the attitude adopted toward them. However, contra Sartre's position (1958) in *Being and Nothingness*, Beauvoir saw that historical, economic and social circumstances could not satisfactorily be separated from an individual's consciousness, in that it is partly formed by these circumstances, often producing particular psychological traits. For example, in *The Second Sex* a woman's 'docility' is enmeshed in and formed by the type of education she received (amongst other factors) as are shyness, excessive consciousness of physical appearance and so on. From the perspective that gender identity is partly a form of 'social indoctrination' which impacts upon character formation, forms of consciousness and expectations, it would have been difficult for Beauvoir to maintain that these material conditions were nothing more than the contexts in which an individual made free, conscious choices. In *The Second Sex*, both material conditions and choices merge together, but crucially it is in her focus upon old age that the consequences of this merging are fully considered. Importantly, she became more sensitive to how (aged) individuals are forced to negotiate circumstances that are imposed upon them. This necessarily involves employing a variety of interwoven techniques of denial, bad faith, acceptance, resistance, transcendence, passivity and so on.

But the whole concept of bad faith is thrown into question and begins to collapse as in the case of her mother's refusal to accept that she is dying (in trying to continue to pursue a healthy lifestyle). It may be seen as an act of bad faith, in her denial of her facticity, or an affirmation of her freedom. It becomes impossible to make a distinction between dishonestly refusing to accept one's facticity (in the case of her mother in *A Very Easy Death*, it is improbable that she did not know that her days were numbered), from a form of protest, which in a positive sense, refuses to be determined by facticity. The later autobiographical work thus illustrates how bad faith as a concept becomes indeterminate and begins to collapse. Even more radically, in '*The Age of Discretion*', the notion that age itself is a real limitation in psychological and physiological terms is addressed. This book contains an ethical stance in which bad faith is irrelevant to certain circumstances, where the narrator realizes that her aged body does in fact impose limits, which force her to realize that she is a being whose future is not infinite. The ethical stance put forward here also involves consciously avoiding thinking of these

realities; that is, to continue living, can demand denying facticity and result in living in permanent bad faith:

It was false teeth, sciatica, infirmity, intellectual barrenness, loneliness in a strange world we would no longer understand and that would carry on without us. Shall I succeed in not lifting my gaze to these horizons? (Beauvoir, 1984, p. 32).

Importantly this stance is accepted, rather than criticized by the narrator. If one mapped the ethical framework and moral tone of *Old Age* on to *The Second Sex*, whereby one is morally obliged to affirm the freedom of others without coupling it to critiques of those who do not apply it to themselves, it would have produced a more consistent position. It would involve a condemnation of women's socio-economic situation and a critique of those men who fail to recognize their like in women - without criticizing women per se for their situation in regard to affirming their freedom, unless this impinged upon others.

In the adoption of the approach to the study of old age outlined above, it may also be the case that something is lost, namely the capacity of Beauvoir to develop a critique of herself and her relation to her own ageing, which is conspicuous in its absence. Thus there is no critical reflection when she claims that she has 'lost her body' or that she will no longer be able to walk upon 'a mountain path', instead bodily weakness, now appears as a real physiological limit. This contradicts her earlier position that there are no physiological truths, rather that aged or feminine embodiment are to be understood in terms of complex social, physiological and economic circumstances, which produce conventional notions of old age or femininity. In *The Second Sex*, women's freedom is restricted by social constructions of femininity. In *Old Age*, aged people are restricted by social constructions of old age. What is missing is the condemnation of those who do not identify their freedoms and act upon them, that is present in *The Second Sex*. *Old Age* thus takes a more consistent critical approach at the expense of foregoing the notion of accountability for affirming freedom in all situations, which can now only be applied if an aged individuals dishonesty, in relation to their lived situation, hampers another's freedom. In Beauvoir's case, applying the ethics found in *Old Age* to her own situation, she is at liberty to react to her own ageing in a passive way, such as no longer feeling she can walk mountain paths, feel new desires and so on. The important problem is that, given her own, less-than-exemplary attitudes toward her

own ageing exist within the public domain, in print, then it can be argued that these same attitudes contribute toward re-enforcing negative and restrictive attitudes. Such attitudes thus impinge upon the freedom of other aged people, in ways which the ethics in *Old Age* and the later autobiographical work fail to adequately address.

It can also be convincingly argued however, that the philosophical shift in her position on freedom and existential choice, from the earlier to the later work, represents a growing sympathy and identification with those older people who do experience their body as a real limit in certain circumstances. Insisting on their ontological, radical freedom to choose, ignores the lived experience, of real, gendered, classed, differentiated bodies, who are the aged Other and are marginalized. Here the biological facts of being a woman in *The Second Sex* or aged in *Old Age* are simultaneously enmeshed within and mediated by aspects of social status, historical and psychological traits attributed to that Other subject position, aspects which cannot simply be separated out. 'One's living of the negative connotations of one's own embodiment leads to a less positive embodiment, an experience of one's embodiment as that which "cannot"'(Deutscher, 2003, p.290). If an individual's experience of their world is affected by their embodied social status in terms of "cannot", this alters ontological freedom, whereby social inequality produces embodied experience as limiting, restricting radical freedom in the process. This in turn affects moral responsibilities in such situations, in that it may seem unfair to criticize a person who decides their aged body prevents them from no longer being able to climb mountains. This realization contributes to Beauvoir's sympathy for those involved in negotiating a body that appears old, and allows her to focus her attention more on the social factors contributing to such marginalized positions. In *Old Age* she describes examples of some aged people who are still able to enjoy fulfilling creative lives, but also acknowledges that for some, old age and socially mediated aged embodiment, can restrict the options towards the end of life. For those who are no longer able to feel new desires or ideas, this later work will not imply they should have chosen otherwise.

The encroaching proximity of death in old age, does not mean that ageing is theorized by Beauvoir in terms of death however, or at least only 'insofar as mortality intertwines with a changing, aging embodiment. Our trajectory from birth to death represents an embodiment which is

both socially and temporally located, the site of perpetual alteration, and as such the site of a changing corporeal relation to futurity' (Deutscher, 2003, pp. 292-3). Death for Beauvoir, as for Sartre is 'unrealizable' as a limit, and her freedom in relation to it, infinite; however, unlike Sartre, this 'unrealizability' of death is likened to old age (Beauvoir, 1972, p.491), in that "like everybody else, I am incapable of an interior experience of [old age]: age is one of the things that cannot be realized" (Beauvoir, 1972, p.30). She wishes to question the different relationships to freedom, physiology, being-for-others and so on, in terms of the kind of body a person has and how others see that embodiment. Following this position, freedom can be formulated in two ways – firstly as a radical ontological freedom in which we are always free and secondly that of an effective or practical ethical freedom. The second sense of freedom comprises different levels of freedom, where an individual can be more or less free (Beauvoir, 1948). As people live 'in' time the relationship to ethical freedom varies in terms of an individual's qualitative relationship to their age. This distinction allows her to consider how aged embodiment affects ethical freedom, in terms of the physical restrictions which ageing may in some cases impose. A person may become hard of hearing, or find difficulty in walking, but these physical 'facts' should not be understood as separated off from other factors regarding how ageing is viewed, in terms of a social identities associated with the aged Other. The social identity of the aged Other can restrict access to employment, which in turn affects economic chances. A younger person may badly sprain their ankle for example, which restricts their ability to walk, yet this physical change is differently conceived than if it were to occur to a much older person: '[p]hysical change may be experienced as an impediment of activity, as it might not in other circumstances in which physical change is differently understood and differently valued'(Deutscher, 2003, p.297). Hence the pessimism evident in Beauvoir's analysis of freedom in *Old Age*: physical facts cannot be abstracted out of the context of a western society that regards older people in unfavorable social and economic terms. In this context she questions how meaningful it is to argue that an older person is radically free to choose how they wish to be. Sartre's radical ontological freedom relates to 'bodies' or 'the body', at the expense of a fuller consideration of different, individual bodies, and their relation to practical freedom. Beauvoir's analysis is more powerful in this regard, as it addresses the issue of social change that could facilitate and make possible, greater practical/ethical freedom, for all subjects and an enhanced relationship to the future. Irrespective of whether or not the distinction between ontological and practical freedom is blurred, or successfully kept coherently separate, is less

important as Deutscher argues (2003), then the potential that such a blurring opens up for analyzing how situated aspects of embodiment – social, economic, psychological, cultural, historical and subjective factors - combine to differentiate both mental and physical capabilities at different points in the life course.

Beauvoir's analysis of freedom in *Old Age* stresses a grounding of the concept in an individual's interest in the 'world' of which they form a part whilst simultaneously retaining the possibility of imagining it otherwise. Old age may be 'unrealizable' for some, but less so for others, partially depending upon the health of the person making the assertion: 'Seeing that my health is good, my body gives me no token of my age. I am sixty-three: and this truth remains foreign to me' (Beauvoir, 1972, p.30). This assertion may have been far less distant had her health been compromised. Beauvoir desires a philosophical account that could more adequately address such differentials, where such practical impingement of ethical freedom into ontological freedom is addressed. Stressing an equivalent radical freedom for all subjects, without considering their embodied differences, is less useful, when considering the subjects relation to time (and time left to live) from the perspective of a girl, a middle-aged women or a woman in her nineties. As human beings we do not exist as a neutral body, but as an aged, gendered, raced, classed body and so on, whose future is mediated by such factors in different ways. Beauvoir's later work, in *Old Age* particularly, attempts better to philosophically reconcile ontological and practical freedom than did Sartre, in her attention to embodied difference - enabling a richer account of the lived experience of old age for some, that resonates with and helps illuminate the interviewees accounts in the analysis chapters here.

It is pertinent to question how meaningful the concept of 'choice' is to the significant numbers of older people, who (if they are lucky) only have a dwindling state pension as a source of income. Beauvoir raised these issues over thirty years ago in *Old Age* (which is now significantly out of print) and we still live in a society that is only just beginning to recognize old age as a 'problem'. Despite some reservations regarding Beauvoir's published attitude towards her own ageing in her earlier autobiographical work, the issues raised in *Old Age* are increasingly pressing today. Taking Beauvoir's above views into consideration, choices made by and about anyone regarding their own and others ageing are important. This includes those made by those already deemed to be 'old' people

themselves, who as Gilleard and Higgs (2000) assert, are not 'irrelevant', as one's attitude towards one's own old age is as important as at any other stage of the life course. Neither should old age necessarily be 'represented as the end of the social' (ibid.), since this marginalizes old people, and only serves to make them 'seem' irrelevant, particularly if they are valued purely in terms of appearance, or their productive capacity in the workplace. If the notion of 'contribution' is widened to include the invoking of emotions and feelings, then many old people are able to contribute widely, in terms of their relationships with partners, family members and others they come into close contact with in their day-to-day lives.

Giddens' (1991) concepts of individualization and reflexivity refer to changes in institutional relations in late modernity and provide a useful analysis against which to consider the value of Beauvoir's thinking on old age today. The changes Giddens identifies are due in part to de-industrialization, the reduction of spending on the welfare state, the decline of traditional family forms, the erosion of class based frames of reference, increases in the cultural significance of mass media and finally, the decline in the hegemonic status of religion and science. All these factors combine, he suggests, to produce a sense of disorder and insecurity and a lack of continuity and stability in social processes and relationships. These individualising tendencies at an institutional level lead to a focus on self-identity, whereupon the individual is increasingly compelled to make decisions based on a seemingly infinite and puzzling diversity of options and multiple choices. The modern reflexive project of the self thus involves sustaining a biographical narrative that must be continually revised through a series of lifestyle choices, which in turn reflexively mobilises the body, as individuals seek to construct and control their lives. As biomedicine begins to provide more choices regarding concealing/delaying/reversing the ageing process and living to healthier older ages, both old age and death may be pushed further and further into the future for those with the means and the will to do so. A possible consequence of this may be increased sanctions against those who do not, or are unable to choose such interventions, whose 'facticity' remains relatively un-malleable.

The erosion of traditional certainties and meaning systems found in pre-modern societies, has led to instability and insecurity in the high modern context of heightened reflexivity, regarding establishing stable self-identities. Self-identity for Giddens is no longer seen as an unchanging core residing within

the individual, but is constantly negotiated and re-ordered, through asking questions in the light of new (and often conflicting) information and choices, where the self becomes a 'reflexively organized project'. His concept of 'lifestyle' describes the sets of practices that are chosen in order to realise a particular narrative relating to self-identity. Thus in order for an individual to feel that they are an active elderly person, they can choose to follow certain regimes in order to become one, such as taking up hiking and following a healthy diet, going to the gym for regular workouts and so on.

Reflexively mobilising the body in such a manner appears to allow some stability against the individualising forces of modernity (Giddens, 1990) summarised by Shilling (1993), through the creation of a dependable sense of self. However, changes in technology and expert knowledge that increasingly question the limits of the body (threatening the foundation of building a stable sense of self through the body also) as it becomes increasingly possible to alter, stabilise or reverse aspects of the ageing process - making the body seem less of a 'natural' given and more susceptible to reconstruction. The sense of the unfinishedness of the body can, in affluent societies, lead to a perception that the body can increasingly be subject to control, provided one takes the 'right' advice and follows the 'correct' regime. At the same time the often conflicting nature of this advice, which can seem to change on a daily basis and the unending supplies of new exercise regimes, diets to follow and so on, leads to greater uncertainty in high modernity in terms of how bodies should be controlled and constructed. Currently incurable diseases and the creation of new ones – AIDS and so-called 'superbugs' being contemporary examples, challenge this sense of control. In late modernity, Giddens (1991) argues that death becomes even more disturbing, as it effectively mocks the attempts at reflexive control of the body and casts doubt over the whole enterprise of body-work and active lifestyles. In a cultural context where control is of paramount importance and providence is preferably banished, death represents the ultimate uncertainty and a profound loss of control of the body. The repression of existential questions in late modernity and the sense of personal meaninglessness engendered by endless lifestyle choices focused around the body, can potentially give rise to new social movements of life politics (Giddens, 1991), organized around specific moral dilemmas. In this context, there is potential for groups of baby boomers who may wish to resist ageist practices and age based stereotypes.

The limit for the project of individualization and selfhood is still death however, of which those born after the Second World War in the west probably have little direct experience. The lack of direct confrontation with death, where death is institutionally screened out and sanitized (see my discussion of Lasch, 1979, in the introduction to chapter 5) and disease, famine and war currently pose no direct threats to the majority of Euro-American citizens (at the time of the interviews, prior to the war on/with Iraq, the more amorphous threat of 'terrorism' had yet to be fully established, although one interviewee from the U.S. expressed concern, regarding events following the destruction of the world trade centre), then old age and signs of decay may have become harder to accept than previously and may even have replaced death as the effective limit to existential freedom – the freedom to choose not to become old. Such a denial of one's destiny has profound implications regarding ageism. If ageism is to be tackled in relation to chronological markers of difference, then it may be incumbent on us to recognise ourselves in other, older people, in order to foster mutual respect within and between generations, as well as a broadening of the notion of 'contribution' from the merely financial.

Bringing it all together

This study will address itself to the points of convergence and contradictions raised by these perspectives, as they pertain to the production of aged/ageing identities. Whilst there are clear resonances with respect to the issue of choice in each, Beauvoir maintains some notion of facticity, as well as sensitivity to the material, economic or other constraints that may limit the range of options open to the individual. It is precisely these issues that are currently open to contestation and which are likely to be challenged and redefined by the baby boomers. Giddens (1990, 1991) himself a member of the baby boom generation, offers an analysis of the body, which acquires a potent relevance in relation to age. In the first instance, ageing processes may compel the individual to be reflexive regarding the 'inevitable' degeneration of the body, as this too becomes a site of options and choices. However, as the possibility of changing, delaying or reversing what used to be seen as a 'natural' biological process is raised, notions of biological and chronological ageing may begin to diverge. For some, the status of facticity may be called into question.

In the light of these issues, this research aims to explore the variety of ways in which baby boomers (born between 1946 – 1964), some of whom were young adults in the sixties, may be resisting,

redefining and reconstructing what it means to be middle aged and old today. The study will both deploy and critique concepts of 'ageing', 'generation', 'facticity', 'emancipation', 'reflexivity', 'choice' and 'lifestyle' as they are defined in academic and popular discourse, as well as during the course of interviews with 'baby boomers' themselves.

Chapter Two: Methods and Methodology

Introduction

Throughout the thesis, a discursive approach to identity and age/ageing is adopted. Here, discourse refers to particular ways of, not only describing the world, but also to scientific and technical vocabularies through which talking about, and thinking with such discourses, has the power to materially alter aspects of the social world which they describe. Discourse in this sense, are open to challenges from competing discourses and exhibit change through time. For example, in the case of contemporary technical discourses within the field of bio-medicine, surrounding notions of healthiness - these are reflexively able to mobilise some bodies to do certain things, in this instance to remain active and adopt 'healthy' lifestyles to increasingly advanced ages – preserving and increasing levels of 'youthful' healthiness hitherto unseen, in comparison with the early part of the last century. From a Foucauldian perspective, it is not possible to metaphorically stand outside discourse and that social occurrences are constructed from within discourses, which are able to make some things unthinkable or unsayable. So with regard to ageing for instance, a particular discourse within bio-medicine promotes the idea that re-setting telomere strands, that are theorised as governing cellular lifespan, could, if re-engineered, halt or even reverse the ageing process. Whilst there have been any number of notions of eternal youth, stretching back to biblical times, this particular discourse of ageing would have been unthinkable and unsayable before the conceptualisation and discovery of DNA. With this conception of discourse in mind, a qualitative approach was adopted through which to facilitate the production of historically and culturally specific narratives, related to the richness of the experience of ageing. This involved a single focus group as a pilot study, where themes generated from a review of relevant literature (see chapter 3) were used in conjunction with photographs of different aspects of ageing, in order to stimulate discussion and to generate further themes. These themes were then used to develop an interview schedule.

The data collected from fifteen, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, does not provide the 'answers' to the questions of age and identity, but is instead treated as material that requires further explanation and interpretation and which is itself productive of aged/ageing identities (Skeggs, 1997). Endeavours to explain/understand, invariably change the 'world' they seek to describe (Lawler, 2000) in a mutually constitutive fashion, where 'understandings' seep out into popular culture and everyday speech. As such, I pay particular attention to the variety of techniques through which the interviewees present themselves in relation to age. Such techniques include, for example, the use of narrative (Ricoeur, 1991a, 1991b) and the rhetorical use of the notions of 'experience' (Scott, 1992); generation; healthiness; activity; old age; choice and the body – through which I analyse how these are used as resources for the production and performance of identity, in the interview context.

Research Design

My interest in cultural understandings of ageing as a topic for investigation began as an undergraduate, while on a course focused around consumer cultural lifestyles and the production of selfhood. Whilst researching for an essay and later dissertation related to this course, I discovered that although there was a large body of existing literature related to the categories of gender and ethnicity, there was very little related to cultural understandings of age and ageing, where the research focus appeared to be more policy oriented. Initially I was curious as to why this might be and suspected that the ubiquity of ageing, that it 'happens' to all of us, might have something to do with its relative lack of visibility as a research topic. That ageing 'happens' to differently to different people, with differing effects and is historically and culturally specific, struck me as worthy of investigation, particularly given what appeared to be newly emerging discourses on ageing at that time. These discourses were often framed in terms of forecasts related to difficulties concerning scarcity of resources, posed by an increasing ratio of larger numbers of older people to younger people, popularly referred to as the demographic time bomb. This rhetoric often presented older people as a threat and burden to economically active younger people, generating fear concerning what were often predicted as dire economic consequences. These fears related to perceived difficulties involved in sustaining increased numbers of older people - presenting an antagonistic relation between the categories young and old. Around the same time, I also became aware of what seemed to be an increase in popular media and

advertisements relating to products, procedures and practices that claimed to be able to efface, or in some cases reverse, physiological signs associated with older age.

Rather than investigate the 'truth' or falsity of such claims, I was more interested in how these changing representations of older people might be producing what could be regarded as negative effects, in that they could conceivably contribute to increased hostility and discrimination against those categorised as old, by both birth date and/or physical appearance. I was also interested in the extent to which there was an awareness of these issues (if indeed there was any at all) and what effects they might be having, particularly in terms of how these representations may be being negotiated or resisted. My intention was to try and facilitate an understanding of how contemporary aged identities were being constructed and how ageism is produced and might be resisted.

Since an earlier dissertation (part of which contained an analysis of particular visual images of ageing, which I felt were evidence of different or new representations of ageing) I had continued to collect such images and had formed a small archive. I knew I wanted to do some form of cultural analysis, as preferable to a 'realist' analysis, as I believed it to be a means of producing a richer account of how identity is performed and produced by culture. In that such a method would facilitate both examining and producing some of the contemporary discourses around ageing that were available for identity production, which would be useful as a means of comprehending their variety and also how representations of ageing might be changing. I also wished to examine the effects that certain metaphors, narratives, images and language have on the ways the world is viewed, which may de-limit how we are able to view ageing – ignoring some possibilities, while focusing upon others. Such as, for instance, that the physical body may be caught up in metaphors of growth and decline, where the chronological age at which they are sensibly applied may vary. A cultural analysis offered a means of producing and analysing how such phenomena might be operating.

During reading for the literature review and through news reports and websites concerned with ageing, I became aware of quite specific claims being made regarding the so-called baby boom generation whose earliest members were getting close to retirement age (the institutional marker of

old age), whose members of this category were claimed to have particular traits in common. These traits were attributed to their being young adults in the 1960's, characterised as a time of the emergence of organised collective unrest against perceived injustices and negative discrimination. Where civil rights movements, particularly focused around equal rights for women and ethnic minorities, along with anti-war sentiments and so on, had gained in prominence. These characteristics, also associated with youthful rebellion and a perceived counter culture, were presented as reasons for why the older members of this 'generation' would challenge conventional notions of old age and offer resistance to negative stereotypes of older age and homogenising ageism. As I was interested in the reception of demographic 'time-bomb' narratives, accompanied by practices that claimed to be able to efface signs associated with older age, this group of people seemed like a promising place to examine the production and consumption of novel narratives around old age, and possible sites of resistance to negative age discrimination. From a methodological point of view, they were clearly defined as a group based on birth year and birth rates. Whilst I did not regard this grouping as being able to say interesting things about ageing *because* they could be defined as baby boomers, rather that the grouping offered a plausible place to begin examining how notions of ageing were currently being produced, including that of feeling (or not feeling) part of a generation. In my review of the literature, baby boomers were often assigned particular traits and predicted to act in certain ways regarding their own ageing process. I wanted to pose some of the academic and popular representations of baby boomers, to members who could be defined as being members of that category – to see how these reported changes in practices related to ageing were affecting them, if at all. As I was not essentialising what a baby boomer 'really' was (as defined by birth date) in order for someone to say something interesting about baby boomers, I included one member in both the focus group and individual interviews who was too young to technically belong to the category - the rest of the subject's birth dates fell between 1946-1964. So, baby boomers were interesting because they represent a particular configuration and because of what they might have to say about that configuration. To reiterate, my theoretical sample consisted of the category members of the baby boom generation, defined by birth date - this allowed me to compare differences within the sample, such as for instance, in terms of differing ages, gender, nationality and so on. I did not want to sample in terms of age as such, but in terms of generation and what that might mean. This facilitated my then being able to look at *how* age, gender, ethnicity and so on are routinely defined in the sample, as the *topic* of my research.

As I had no ideological commitment to any particular methodological form of analysis, I pragmatically selected methods that I believed would yield and produce the most promising data, in terms of the best descriptions and explanatory power related to the topic I wished to investigate. Given that I had an interest in examining contemporary cultural narratives around ageing and the production of aged subjectivity, a method was required that would facilitate the production of a wide variety of such narratives, which could feasibly be conducted by one person (myself) in an allotted time frame decided by funding constraints (three years). Given that some areas of social reality cannot be measured or quantified (or if they could be, may still be inappropriate to do so, in terms of what a specific piece of research aimed to investigate) such as in this case, relating to how identities are constituted - some form of qualitative analysis seemed appropriate. As I already had a number of visual images that I thought represented some of these narratives, I decided to try and incorporate them into the study in some way. I also wished to involve people in the study, not necessarily connected with academia, as a possible means of gathering and creating a community of (possibly new) stories in Ken Plummer's (1995) sense (see discussion of Plummer's work on stories later in this chapter) and hoped to facilitate this in some small way, by asking my interviewees to reflect upon their own ageing process. In-depth interviewing of some type suggested itself as a means of producing such narratives around ageing and older age. My intention being to systematically examine how the interviewees were drawing on wider cultural narratives regarding generation for instance, and to then analyse how such narratives related them to culture and history, in terms of how they may provide frameworks for what is possible to know, that are able to synthesise their life stories. As a standard interviewing style tends to generate a list of points in answer to questions, I aimed instead to develop questions and an interviewing style that would produce longer, narrative type responses. In allowing interviewees to speak at length and almost forget themselves, gives the interview a more conversational quality, producing a less domineering and relational interview, reflecting the participant's ways of organising meaning. Such a method does not assume objectivity, but privileges positionality and subjectivity, which I felt would be the most productively useful in terms of creating personal experience narratives of 'getting old', 'feeling part of a generation', or not and so on. This method seemed like a useful way of representing and analysing identity in multiple guises and different contexts. From here, my next task was to find a means of generating topics for some form of interview schedule focused around narratives on ageing, that could plausibly be argued to have some relevance to the research subjects

lived experience. A focus group organised around a discussion of a wide variety of images of ageing (see appendix 3) from those I had been collecting, in addition to the photographs provided by the focus group members themselves, seemed an interesting way of doing this. It also had the advantage of being a form of pilot study for the later individual interviews.

Members of the focus group were chosen on the basis of their birth date (1946-1964), initially through friends of friends from diverse ethnic backgrounds, class positions and sexual orientations. Whilst I did not intend to take whatever the participants said as being representative of particular subject positions (as I approached subject positions as the starting point, rather than the end of the analysis) I did aim to access as broad a range of opinions as possible. Although my methodological approach stressed not taking experience as foundation for knowledge of particular subject positions (as anyone can potentially say something interesting about being old, black, gay, class positions and so on) I still aimed to get as wide a spread of opinions as I could, hence asking a diverse, rather than a homogenous range of people. This yielded four participants. I also attempted to recruit participants from the local area in which I was living, which contained a significantly ethnically diverse population, in one of the less financially prosperous areas of the inner city, which generated a further three participants. All were white and largely middle class, judged in terms of occupation. As I was not in a position to offer a significant financial incentive to the prospective participants, I chose to cover any transport costs incurred for attending the meeting and offer a bottle of wine to thank them for participating. Had I been in a position to offer a larger financial incentive for attending, it may potentially have generated larger numbers of willing participants, with the possibly of a greater diversity amongst them. Judging by the relative homogeneity of people who did agree to take part, this suggests that there are differences in terms of class and ethnicity between those who might feel enfranchised in some way by participating, and those who did not. As for 'reasons' as to why this might be, is a matter for speculation. Suffice it to say that I attempted to bring my appeal for participants, to the attention of as diverse a range of people as my resources allowed.

In terms of the visual images I had collected, rather than analyse and deconstruct the images themselves as I had done in an earlier dissertation, I chose instead to utilise them as a form of stimulus material, as aids to provoke discussion regarding the variety of contemporary subject

positions surrounding ageing today. As I wished to involve the participants in the research process, in a more collaborative sense, in terms of both attempting to foster Plummer's (1995) sense of community focused around stories and also to enhance the validity of the relevance of the topics chosen from which to construct an interview schedule - the participants own photographs were also used, which formed the initial discussion, of over half the meetings allotted time. The topics generated from the focus group discussion that the participants' thought should be included, were then combined with what I thought were relevant topics to be investigated from my review of the relevant literature (see appendix 5), from which I then went on to construct the interview schedule itself.

The selection of the individual interviewees was again based upon birth date, which could be used to categorise them as baby boomers. One third of the participants came from the original focus group and a further three from advertising in the local area around South East London and through friends. Despite my best efforts, this again produced white, largely middle class respondents. I had decided that some form of semi-structured, in-depth interview schedule offered the most productive overall means of both producing and exploring contemporary narratives related to ageing. Again I wished to try and facilitate the involvement of the interviewees in the enterprise and asked them to bring a photograph of an 'older person they found interesting', and for them to begin the interview by saying something about their selection, in terms of why they found it interesting, as a means of settling them and starting the flow of conversation. This technique was not as initially successful in generating long responses - partly I suspected because it was the first question, also that they were on their own and not in a group as before, and also that they were anticipating further questions - being understandably nervous in some cases. Far more elaborated responses were forthcoming from each participant as the interview progressed, partly as a result of their becoming more settled and partly due to the design of the interview schedule and the interviewing procedure I consciously adopted.

As my object or topic of investigation was analysing stories of *how* my participants were constituted as particular kinds of subjects, through certain experiences related to ageing, produced through cultural analysis techniques - I chose and adapted Wengraf's (2001) methods and interviewing strategies to aid the design and conduct of the interviews, as a means of producing long narrative style answers (see 'the interviews' section of this chapter for a methodological discussion of Wengraf).

Narrative responses are useful for analysing change through a lifespan – feeling part of a generation in a person's youth for example, then it losing its significance in later life. They also facilitate comparisons between macro phenomena, such as for example, discourses surrounding the 60's or baby boomers, with individual narrative accounts. After a certain number of interviews, where each interviewee is posed the same questions, it is expected that the content of the responses will start to sound familiar, in that no substantially new or different narratives will emerge. This 'saturation' happened after I had conducted nine interviews. As my target group were Euro-American baby boomers, it was in the spirit of looking for new, diverse and potentially challenging narratives to the claims already made, that an opportunity came for me to visit Ireland (see indexing and coding section). Ireland was potentially interesting in terms of possibly providing such new narratives, in that it was the only Euro-American country that did not have a post-war baby boom, as its birth rate had remained relatively stable, being the only Euro-American country with above-replacement rate fertility, for a variety of cultural and historical reasons (see 'theoretical sampling and the Irish' section). Claims made about Euro-American baby boomers, conceived in terms of belonging to the category 'Euro-American and being born between 1946-1964' might, I suspected, have different conventional cultural associations in Ireland. Again, this was not to essentialise the subject position Irish, explaining particular experiences because some of the interviewees were Irish nationals and living in Ireland, but to search for negative instances of my sample in the hope of gathering different narratives, to improve the validity of any claims I might make in my analysis. I interviewed a further six people in Ireland, who were unknown to me prior to the interviews, before I decided that saturation of the theoretical sample had been reached, in that no significantly different narratives were emerging. All these were friends of friends. Whilst my own friends in Ireland were from different ethnic and class backgrounds, the willing participants they were able to put me in touch with, were once again white and largely middle class, if judged in terms of their occupations and educational backgrounds.

All of the interviews were transcribed by myself (see discussion in the section entitled 'transcription') then entered into the NVIVO software qualitative data analysis package. My theoretical notions of the production of subjectivity and the related instrumental theories for examining them, aimed for particular kinds of textual production, focused around long narrative style answers and stories of personal experience. The particular methodological notions of 'experience', 'narrative' and 'stories' informed how I approached the analysis of lived experience related to aged subjectivity (see the discussion

under the heading 'methodology'). Briefly, my analytical intention was to show how different resources were, or were not used to constitute (aged) subjectivity. I was not after my respondents' perceptions as such (as people assign multiple meanings to their perceptions) or for direct access to their experiences, but how experience provides a resource for identity. Following Skeggs (1997) we don't have experiences, but can examine how subjectivity is constituted through particular experiences - these are shot through with age, class, race and gender differences, that both effect and produce particular experiences of agedness, and also how these responses are actively constructed narratives with me, the interviewer – with the aim of showing how this takes place. So, for example, I might identify a discourse on 'the 60's', then one on 'generation' and another on 'ageing', and instead of listing them, I would try to show how they map onto each other and constitute a particular subject position.

As I read through my transcripts, the software enabled me to code themes that emerged from the data, by a process of constant comparison. I endeavoured to provide evidence of the choices I made in gathering and interpreting the data, along with continually subjecting emerging themes and theories to searches for negative instances, or contradictory examples, in an attempt to provide coherent and plausible accounts of each instance of the category under scrutiny. This facilitated more robust theory building in terms of its explanatory power and plausibility, regarding how those of my theoretical sample - baby boomers born between 1946-1964 in the UK, Ireland and North America, present themselves in relation to ageing. I looked at how aged subjectivity is constituted in contemporary Euro-American society, by analysing different resources or categories they drew upon to do so, regarding the production of identity. This was performed alongside an engagement with and enhancement of, pre-existing theories related to personhood, the production of subjectivity, embodiment and the body – their effects and the tensions between them, in an in-depth, semi-structured interview situation. More specifically it also led to a critical examination of Mannheim's theory of generation; Featherstone and Wernick's claims about baby boomers; Beauvoir's notions of facticity, subjectivity, situatedness, bad faith, freedom and ethical responsibility; Giddens ideas on the modern reflexive project of the self and Lasch's theory of the narcissistic personality - all approached via Scott's theories of experience and Rorty, Skeggs, Lawler, Plummer and Wengraf's ideas on narrative, analysed through experience.

In sum, my research was designed in terms of analysing data from a non-realist approach, where the interviewees answers were not viewed as 'facts' describing an external reality, or internal experience (feelings and meanings), but instead viewed the interviewees' as accessing various stories through which to describe their world. I then analysed how they and myself use culturally rich methods together, to generate plausible accounts of the world. This privileged a different, narrated reality, where the situated or locally produced nature of accounts was foremost. Such a cultural analysis of lived experience was more appropriate than a realist approach, in that it offered a richer insight into how people 'do' or perform aged identities. The methods and methodologies I adopted are elaborated throughout the rest of this chapter.

Methods

The focus group

I initially began by asking friends and acquaintances if they knew of anyone (not known to me) who could be categorised as belonging to the baby boom generation (specified as being born between 1946-1964), who might be interested in taking part in a focus group in London. Those that did were asked to initially contact these people and explain that the focus group's purpose was to discuss visual images of ageing, with the intention of developing questions in the group, that would go on to inform a semi structured interview at a later date. Travelling expenses would be reimbursed and a bottle of wine given (paid for from the appropriate ESRC budget) to thank them for attending. Those people who were interested, were asked if it was o.k. if I contact them by telephone to explain the nature of the study in a little more detail. This was a standard, brief explanation that I had written in advance saying that I was interested in holding a discussion on cultural representations of ageing, generations and later life. In order to facilitate discussion I asked them to bring a photograph of an older person they found interesting (and be prepared to explain why), as well as explaining that I would provide a set of photographs that depict aspects of ageing that I find interesting and would ask them to comment upon them. This process was an adaptation of the 'photo-elicitation' method, which 'involves using photographs to invoke comments, memory and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview' (Banks, 2001, p.7). I used this method in both the later individual interviews and the focus group itself, as it allowed the participants 'an object on which they could focus their discussion of their culture and

experiences' (Gold, 1991, p. 21), as they related to ageing and generation. More of which will be said shortly.

Initially I aimed to get eight people split equally between the genders, spread reasonably evenly across the age range, who were also asked to suggest others who may wish to participate in the larger interview, to create a 'snowball' effect. Those who were still interested, were sent written details including directions and a consent form for them to sign and bring to the meeting regarding ethical guidelines and their agreeing to be taped, in order to ensure confidentiality and privacy. In the event this method only produced four respondents. I also put up posters (see appendix 1a) in various locations: launderettes, hairdressers, fast food outlets, off-licenses and supermarkets in South East London, more specifically in Brockley; the Lewisham leisure centre; coffee shops in New Cross; Goldsmiths main building and all college departments; as well as electronic posters on The Goldsmiths Student/Staff notice boards and Tate Modern's electronic bulletin board, to advertise for participants. This generated a further three participants.

The focus group finally took place on Monday the 9th of April in Deptford Town Hall at 6.30pm. This was after two changes of venue (to try and accommodate a person with a broken leg, as Deptford Town Hall has no disabled access) and numerous changes of dates and times to meet - in order to adapt to their participants schedules. Five of those who originally agreed to attend changed their minds after further consideration. Reasons for declining included the following: one person (male) felt it was too sensitive a topic to discuss publicly, whilst another person felt uncomfortable talking about it in a group (but agreed to an individual interview) as she felt she was too youthful in attitude to be of any use to me in relation to discussing old age, despite my reassurances to the contrary. One person was going to be in the U.S. on the dates I was proposing, whilst two others were non-specifically 'busy'.

Of those (seven) who said they would definitely attend on the day, all showed up (including the woman with the broken leg, even though she was aware that she'd have to climb two flights of stairs) possibly due to my 'scorched earth' recruitment techniques, or (more likely) that they felt some

sympathy for the research. Ages ranged from 35 at the time of the interviews – June 2001 – February 2002 (eleven months too young to 'officially' belong in a baby boomer sample as demographically defined - but I wanted a spread of ages and was also fearful at the time that I wouldn't get enough people to attend) to 55. Of the seven who attended only one was male. Those who responded to my initial requests were overwhelmingly female - nine women to three men, two of whom later declined. With the exception of one person, all were unknown to me before this meeting and all were strangers to one another. Even though my methodology does not make any claim toward representativeness, it would have been useful to have more males in the group, as any claims regarding the production of aged, male subjectivity, would probably have benefited from a few being present. In any event, a very lively and productive discussion ensued, with the participants willingly extending the discussion far beyond the scheduled two hours.

The session began with a brief introduction from myself relating to the lack of research into the cultural meanings people attach to notions of generation and ageing, as well as an explanation of the purpose of the group. More specifically that I would be using their ideas about generation and ageing to develop questions for the final, individual interviews - in order to make them relevant to the participants, as well as an attempt to rectify any omissions on my part regarding topics I may not have considered before. I promised them a fuller summary of my research interests at the end of the session (which I did, as well as mailing them a standard summary the next day). The original checklist I compiled for myself, in order to conduct the focus group can be seen in appendix 2.

The participants then introduced themselves to one other, then took it in turn to say who the photograph they had brought with them was of and what they found interesting about it in relation to generation and ageing. This seemed a useful way to proceed, as it enabled them to focus on the issues at hand before coming to the group (as I had primed them before that they would be asked to do this, see appendix 1b) and served to get them talking/listening to one another as well as considering different aspects of the themes. Six of the seven photographs were of relatives of the participants, the other being from a collection of fine art photos. All these commentaries were taped after obtaining earlier consent - and provoked 'polite' listening rather than active discussion at this stage.

Once each person had taken their turn, they were asked to write down three basic topics that they felt should be included in an interview concerning ageing and generations on a piece of flip chart paper. After they had completed this, they were asked to select three or four sheets of photos from those provided by myself (see appendix 3 for a brief description of these) that I had selected in terms of their plausibly representing themes I had identified from the literature review (these descriptions were not identified to the participants) and write down any topics relating to ageing and generation (however loosely connected) that they suggested to them. The images originated in advertisements, brochures, newspapers, magazine articles and from electronic sources. They were asked not to think too long about it and reassured that it was not a test of any kind. My original intention was to then put each person's sheet of paper up on the flip chart and describe the accompanying photograph, before asking for further suggestions in a 'brainstorming' fashion. It became apparent that this was going to be difficult, as each person's handwriting (legibility and size) would not be immediately obvious, so each person read out what they had written, whilst displaying the accompanying photo. This provoked a lively discussion, with some very interesting contributions, which were too numerous for me to write down at the time (fortunately I captured the proceedings on cassette tape), I was faced with letting the discussion continue, with each person taking their turn, or intervening and asking for short topics only which I would have been able to write down. As what was being said, was relevant and interesting, I decided to let it continue this way, as each person seemed far more keen to have a discussion, than stick to robotically shouting out words or topic headings to put on a flip chart. I feel sure that this on-the-fly method generated far more themes than would have been the case had I stuck to the letter of my originally intended method, which after all, was the whole purpose of the exercise.

As a result everyone had their say by the end of the session, with most of them wishing to continue for beyond the two and a half hours already spent. Originally (if I had kept with the original flip chart idea) once each photo was exhausted from the brainstorming session, they would have been asked to divide into two groups, and take half of the sheets each. They would then have decided category headings that similar points would be grouped under and transferred onto new sheets of paper. These would then be put back on the flip chart, in order to see if anyone had anything else to add to the new categories. The session was to conclude with each person writing down on ballot papers five topics

that they felt 'I should be sure to include' in my interviews, following a focus group method devised by Morgan (1998). As things turned out, the method I decided spontaneously to adopt, still considered the photo's I provided and produced a large amount of ideas from each person present. I am also certain that each person got more out of it, than if I had gone with the original flip chart method, as the contributions became far more animated and involved, once I'd abandoned my more inflexible, original plan.

Ideally, I would have finished the session by getting their 'top five' topics there and then. Instead, due to the fact that I was running out of time and the building was going to close, I chose to let each person describe what they got from the photo's they had looked at, with discussion from the others on each point. I asked them to think that night about which five topics I should be sure to include in my interviews, and that I would e-mail them for their answers the next morning. This I duly did and received five replies, ranging from 'essential' topics to include to fully formed questions that some of them would like to see included. All commented on how much they had enjoyed taking part – but this may have been influenced by the 'complimentary' wine they consumed later that night. Of the two who did not reply due to lack of internet access, one replied by letter, whilst the other failed to respond to both postal and telephone requests. Given that this person's verbal contributions were on tape, along with the flip charts of their initial themes, (and they had signed a release form) I felt that I could still develop questions from their contributions (see appendix 4). In addition, the tapes also provided a rich supplementary resource and acted as reminders to me of what they (the group as a whole) considered important, when I came to develop interview questions from them.

Each person received refreshments during the session, the price of a travel card on London transport and a bottle of wine for their trouble. All expressed a desire to take part in the individual interviews, once I had developed the questions. Whilst the session did not go exactly to plan, the end result was an extensive list of topics which they considered important; a wealth of supplementary information on the tapes created by the discussion (which I may not have got if I had stuck to the original planned method) and participants who thought it worthwhile enough to continue with the individual interviews and actively recruit other participants.

From here I listened to the tapes in conjunction with the topics/questions provided by them on paper/e-mail, in order to develop a preliminary interview schedule - their chosen themes were then combined with my own from the literature review (see appendix 5). The final draft of the questions actually used in the individual interviews, which represent a further consideration and combination of all the themes identified, can be seen in appendix 6. Three sheets of photographs were not selected for discussion (due to the odd number of participants) but themes identified from them were discussed toward the end of the session as a group and incorporated into the final questions.

Photographs and signs of ageing

In relation to the photographs used in the focus group discussion, my aim was to find as many different representations of ageing and old age as possible, in an attempt to provide material resources which would stimulate those taking part into articulating a diverse range of the current subject positions related to ageing, that are available today. This approach did not view the participants as passive containers of information, which was waiting to be extracted, but instead introduced photographs into the group discussions and individual interviews in order to try and provoke 'a kind of chain reaction: the photographs effectively exercise agency, causing people to do and think things they had forgotten, or to see things they had always known in a new way' (Banks, 2001, p.95). An overarching concern of the thesis relates to the effects certain metaphors, narratives, images and language have upon the ways in which we see the world, which may de-limit how we are able to view ageing, ignoring some possibilities, whilst focusing upon others. The physical body is caught up in metaphors of growth and decline, whilst the chronological ages at which such metaphors may be intelligibly applied vary. What counts as 'old' at one time and place is not set in stone. What constitutes 'oldness' in contemporary Euro-American culture is not simply a matter of being a particular age, but the meanings that are associated with these numerical figures. As life spans are still expanding on average, what constitutes being old today will undoubtedly change in the future.

How a person looks (physical appearance) is also intimately bound up with how we perceive ageing (both our own ageing and that of others). Whether a person is deemed to be 'old' or not, is partially judged by a series of signs, which correspond to a particular set of cultural norms regarding what 'old' looks like. Thus, one's skin tone, wrinkles, hair (colour, style, amount), posture, musculature, height,

weight, mode of dress, all contribute to our judgements and discriminations. Given that a lot of the signs that contribute to our assessments are visual, it seemed reasonable to surmise that a consideration of visual prompts would be a useful way to reveal some of the metaphors, narratives and discourses that are both available to them and used by them, that make ageing intelligible. In this sense the use of photo-elicitation 'can be a highly productive research tool [which can] yield insights and understandings that might otherwise be missed or not discernible by other methods' (Banks, 2001, p.99), hence its utility within this study.

The actual photographs used were laminated, retaining their original copy in some cases, with the intention being to provide as little directive information as possible over how one might 'read' the image. I was not concerned with analysing or deconstructing the representations themselves, rather that they provide stimulus for discussion. Evidence of this discussion appears in the form of the interpretations/themes chosen by the group (see appendix 4). The descriptions supplied in appendix 3 did not accompany the photo's and merely represent what they suggested to me as a means to group them, rather than what they may have suggested to the participants. Obviously the fact that I had chosen these photographs, from a potentially vast number of possible other images I could have used, then grouped and framed them - will have been influential in some way, regarding what was suggested to them, in terms of their interpretations. Hence my trying to make my social and intellectual locations, motivations and objectives clear to both the reader and the members of the focus group at the time it took place. As all images contain an element of 'observer bias' in terms of how they are perceived, given that there is a multiplicity of ways of interpreting any image, then a notion of 'bias' seems a rather redundant term. The multiple meanings related to photographic images can be viewed as new forms of information, which can be manipulated and are dependent to an extent upon the contexts in which they are received/used. Whilst social context enables certain readings, it may also render other meanings less likely, if not impossible. Each time we view and interpret a cultural object – in this instance a photograph, we are involved in negotiating a 'sea of choices already made' (Bolton, 1992, p. 281), highlighting the dangers of accepting images as 'true' likenesses. We are not therefore, justified in thinking that 'seeing is believing', if vision is taken as providing unmediated and transparent access, to the apparently self-evident 'truth' of something. Photographs have been used to convey metaphors, such as, for instance, the juxtaposition of human skin with heavily worn fabric to capture the 'look' of age, or the comparison of a close-up of a child and old

person holding hands. Photographs enable reflexive comparisons between then and now, where in a photograph album, different styles of dress can be compared inter-generationally, or over one's own biography. Photographic images can thus be used as both sources of meaning or resources from which to suggest particular readings, or indeed, readings far removed from the photographer's original intent.

As images are culturally produced or manufactured, then they are ultimately open to contestation when presented as forms of evidence. It is the inherent inconclusiveness in the reading of photographic images of ageing, which do not merely reflect an unmediated social reality, but 'suggest the ambiguity of ageing, both in terms of the range of identities exposed and of the expectations and relationships hinted at' (Blaikie, 1999, p.133). Where, importantly for my purposes in the focus group, it is the very ambiguity of the photographic image that was useful in provoking and stimulating discussion, both at an intellectual level and a personal, biographical level. Having said all this, I did still attempt to provide as many different varieties of representations of ageing as I could find; the participants were able to select which ones appealed to them, as well as bringing and discussing their own photographs. Given that my intention was to use the photographs as prompts for discussion about the breadth of discourses associated with ageing, rather than reveal the 'truth' of the meaning of a particular image, this seemed like a reasonable strategy to adopt - particularly in view of the fact that it was the themes suggested to and by them from the photographs, rather than my own interpretations, that formed the basis of the final interview questions. I could always have used more representations, or used more focus groups who only provided their own photo's (providing none of my own), but this would have been too time consuming and ultimately I did want to focus on both my own and their interests. As images are an important cultural resource in terms of how we conceptualise ageing, the focus groups consideration of some of them, provided insights into the significance of notions of extended youthfulness, demography, lifestyle, generational identifications and the concept of age itself, amongst other themes¹. Taken in their entirety, the themes generated in

¹ It transpired that in the individual interviews, in response to my request to 'bring a photograph of an older person you find interesting' - the photographs discussed (some chose not to bring one) did not provide as great a deal of stimulus for discussion as I had originally hoped. This may be in part due to the questions asked of them being too vague - "can you tell me a little about the photo you brought in with you and why you find it interesting", or that the interviewees simply found photographs un-stimulating, given their ubiquitous nature in everyday life. I also suspect that the fact that it was the opening question, may have been too intimidating in some cases, given the (deliberate) lack of guidance on my part of how they 'should' respond. As the interviews got underway with some more direct questions being posed, these appeared far more effective in settling them, as precursors for the more unstructured, longer narrative provoking questions that followed. The photographs did however prove effective for some, in allowing them to begin talking. Hence I shifted my

the group were used in conjunction with, and to adapt previous themes from my original survey of the literature, in order to create the penultimate and final interview schedule (see appendix 5 and 6).

The interviews

One of my objectives in the individual interviews was to elicit long narrative style answers, particularly those surrounding life events and critical incidents related to an awareness of ageing or generations and their experiences, feelings and meanings associated with these categories. I therefore adapted aspects of Wengraf's (2001) model for developing some of my questions and interviewing technique, in order to facilitate the greater likelihood of such responses and to guide the interviewee back to giving narrative style responses where required.

Here, narrative refers to the notion that within Western societies, an adult will 'normally' have a culturally developed sense of what is required of them if asked to provide a story of an aspect of their lives. This 'sense', like many of our assumptions, thoughts and feelings may organize lives at both the individual and societal level, but are difficult to access directly, given that they may operate at a largely non-conscious level. The less knowledge, thoughts and feelings are controversial or contested, the more unlikely it is that an interviewee will be aware of and able to articulate them. If an interviewee is asked for their explicit knowledge, then the interviewer only has access to notions consciously experienced as controversial and capable of rapid articulation by the subject. An individual may express thoughts that could be informed by implicitly ageist assumptions for example, yet be consciously unaware that their thoughts have been influenced in this way. Additionally, individuals have conscious control over their presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) in relation to their explicit knowledge. Narrative responses are useful in terms of what they assume and therefore do not focus upon – 'narrative conveys tacit and unconscious assumptions and norms of the individual or of a cultural group' (Wengraf, 2001, p.5). They are also able to convey the narrator's explicit assumptions/norms – such as when an interviewee engages in explicit evaluative theorising in relation to conveying the point of their story in relation to concrete events. Narratives are valuable to social theory questions for their ability to 'present to the researcher embedded and tacit assumptions,

focus relating to a discussion of the visual - from the specific images used in the study to a less direct consideration in chapter 5 on embodiment, relating to the physical signs of ageing.

meanings, reasoning's and patterns of action and inaction' (Wengraf, 2001, p.116). There are different types of 'textual production' that are more or less likely to be elicited depending upon the phrasing of the interview questions. Thus questions can be designed to elicit narratives, descriptions or arguments, depending upon the type of data aimed for by the interviewer. All these factors, in combination, are relevant to my theoretical aims – primarily because I am interested in how it is possible for the interviewee to talk about ageing/generations in particular culturally/historically specific ways and the resources they are able to draw upon to do this. Indicators of these elements came through as they talked about their own experience of ageing and generation, which I was then able to analyse to show how these explanations/interpretations contribute toward the production of aged identities themselves.

My overarching concern when designing the interview questions was thinking about the type of response I wished to elicit from the questions. The type of text (in the sense of any vocal response in the interview) aimed at was largely narrative, as opposed to descriptive or argumentative. This is primarily because I am interested in examining basic assumptions and values regarding (aged) selves/others and context, as well as resources/discourses for identity production and techniques of the self. Narratives are expressive of these structures in that they can reveal things in their 'assumptions and asides' whilst relating their narrative, that are not revealed in their responses to direct questioning, or sometimes run counter to their expressed 'experience'. My theoretical notion of the subjectivity of the interviewee and the related instrumental theories for examining them, have determined which type of textual production (or combination of) I have aimed for. Keeping the aforementioned processes and points in mind, I designed an interview schedule that aimed to elicit both narrative style and descriptive (in the follow-ups) responses to topics discussed in the focus group and in line with the overall aims of the thesis. Those participating were informed at the start of the interview that there were no right/wrong responses; that they could talk as generally as they wished and that all their answers would be of value.

By keeping my initial interview question deliberately vague concerning asking them to talk about the photo of an older person they found interesting and why - the interviewees were allowed to decide what was relevant to them and also to hopefully make them feel at ease speaking to me. The

remaining questions (see appendix six) contained open-ended questions based around different themes, aimed at inducing narrative, combined with related, more focused, follow-up questions, in order to facilitate reflection and expansion upon their responses. Once questions had been posed, they were followed by a minimal amount of intervention from myself. These (minimal) interventions included elements such as 'non-directional support' and 'active listening', involving adopting techniques such as an attentive listening posture; eye contact - particularly when they are speaking; mirroring emotions; using their words for things when I made interventions; non-verbal sounds that indicate listening, such as 'hmn' and 'aah' and so on. These were used to encourage them to speak at length, without feeling a need to rush – hopefully giving them the time and space to let their thoughts and opinions emerge and develop. The questions themselves where narratives were required, were phrased in such a way as to point strongly towards a narrative response, so for instance, if an interviewee raised the topic 'relief at no longer being considered attractive' - a narrative pointed question might be 'you said you felt relief when considered unattractive. Can you remember how this came about? Can you tell me more details regarding how this happened and so on, all designed to exert pressure for more story. Once the interviewee appeared to have told their story, I found it important to ask them for more story, rather than directing them on what to say next. This was to try and allow the interviewee to complete their narration and provide an 'ending'. The ending helps make sense of what was said before, so I avoided interrupting silences and waited for them to explicitly signal that they had finished. If there was a prolonged silence, then I asked them if there was anything else that occurred to them, before moving to the next question. As I did not interview the same people multiple times, I asked related follow up questions (not necessarily pointed at narrative) once the interviewee has finished their particular narration. In cases where these strategies were to of no avail regarding receiving non-narrative answers, this was still a rich source for analysis in terms of the decisions people take over how they choose to answer a question - or indeed that some things may be un-narrativisable. Arguments, descriptions and so on, which are non-narrativisable, are also useful in terms of considering the production of aged subjectivity.

More generally, my objectives for the overall design were that the questions were presented in everyday language, rather than a specific technical vocabulary and that I endeavoured not to give away both the central research questions and individual theory questions, for fear of 'contaminating the interview'. Within the context of the semi-structured interview, regarding their answers to questions

and my follow-ups, I tried to remain flexible and alert - calling for a degree of improvisation, in order to balance what they wished to say, with gentle pushes back to the questions topic, if they strayed too far from it. I asked ten open - ended questions, with twenty-three follow-up questions. The length of the entire interviews varied from approximately fifty to 100 minutes. A useful starting point was to select the topics generated in the focus group that most closely matched my central research question and the related theory questions as outlined at the end of the 'theoretical and critical perspectives section'. Ideally were posed at the most opportune moment in the interview. The remaining topics from the focus group were used to generate further questions and follow-ups (see appendix 6). I showed these to friends in order to see if they thought they were necessary and sufficient for answering the theory questions/categories I had placed them under: ageing; generations; oldness; mid-life; retirement; roles; ageism and extended youthfulness and if they should be modified, left out, or moved under another heading. This helped determine a logical sequence. As I wished to avoid 'tipping off' the interviewee as to what the theoretical point of the interviews might be, I endeavoured to separate interview questions that closely relate to specific theory questions from one another. Thus questions that logically have a relation to one another were separated out and not posed together. Each interviewee was told what my aims and interests were relating to the interview, once it had finished. Those who asked for more detail at the start of the interview were told that I would be happy to discuss anything about it, once it had finished, which I duly did, both after the interview and in some cases by e-mail correspondance.

The interviewees

In terms of the individual interviews, I interviewed fifteen people in total at which point I felt that no significantly new data was forthcoming and 'saturation' of the category had been reached - all of which have been recorded onto cassette tape and transcribed into NVIVO – qualitative data analysis software. Indexed and coded segments of these transcripts appear in the main body of the analysis chapters that follow (chapters 3-5), retrieved using NVIVO, along with accompanying descriptions of the interviewee and setting where relevant.

The interviewees (brief biographical descriptions of whom appear at the end of this chapter) comprise nine women and six men, spread across the age range of those whose birth year falls

between 1946 and 1964 (once again the respondent who was 'officially' eleven months two young for the sample did participate, as she expressed a desire to do so after the focus group). Five of the interviewees came from the original focus group, with the other two original members failing to respond to a further request to take part. The woman who had previously been on holiday in the U.S. at the time of the focus group took part, but the woman who felt uncomfortable talking in a group, but originally agreed to an interview declined again, this time saying she would be of 'no use' to me, as she did not 'identify' with older people. The remaining nine participants, all of whom I had not met before the day of the interview, were contacted through friends. None of my efforts at recruiting from the (significantly multi-ethnic) local population around Brockley and Lewisham in South East London amounted to anything (see appendix 1b). Whilst not wishing to make any claims regarding this being a 'representative sample', or expecting my respondents to speak on behalf of particular subject positions, it is worth noting that all of the respondents were white. Of the four black friends or colleagues I approached, all declined, for unspecified reasons. Of the fifteen people interviewed, eight described their ethnic origin as being from the U.K., a further six described their ethnic origin as Irish (one of whom held U.S. and Canadian passports), with the final person describing herself as a U.S. citizen.

Indexing and coding

The focus group also simultaneously served the function of providing an additional and more credible initial indexing/coding scheme, than one generated solely from my (necessarily selective - in terms of my values, assumptions and theoretical preferences) reading around the subject in hand. All forms of coding can be viewed as attempts to 'fix meaning', in attempts to promote one viewpoint, whilst excluding others. Following Seale (1999), I would argue that provided this is done within a 'fallibilistic framework', where one makes clear to the reader what assumptions and preferences have been used and why, in order to facilitate access to potentially different judgements/readings, is desirable in terms of the 'quality' of the research produced. What is less desirable are coding schemes which 'fix meanings' too early, in that they hinder the analysis, by blocking creative thought, thus the 'early stages of coding are therefore more appropriately called 'indexing', acting as signposts to interesting bits of data, rather than representing some final argument about meaning' (Seale, 1999, p. 154). Themes extracted from my literature review, combined with those chosen by members of the

focus group following their 'photo-elicitation' discussion, are a form of indexing, in that they heuristically aided my thinking and provided categories that I was then able to use the NVIVO program to retrieve. Relevant data segments that were signposted in this way provided the basis for a transition to a more precise coding, as more stable and regularly occurring phenomena (my ideas about the properties of the category) were identified, along with the different contexts in which they occurred.

These phenomena were then subjected to more observation in terms of how the properties interact, using rigorous comparison, in order to sharpen their definition in relation to the other phenomena described – this led to the emergence of more clearly defined concepts. Such 'constant comparison' made the research more theoretically 'saturated' (the point at which no additional data were forthcoming, that could meaningfully be used to develop aspects of the category under consideration) and relevant, beyond a simple 'common-sense' reporting of the participant's categories, in line with some of the principles of grounded theorising (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Silverman, 1998). This type of method facilitated both theory building and its testing on the data gathered.

A further aspect of Glaser and Strauss' grounded theorising which I found useful, was their notion of 'theoretical sampling', in order to aid theory construction, both in terms of the development of theoretical categories from the data provided by the interviewees and choosing the interview subjects themselves. This form of sampling involved my searching for negative instances - where one chooses to study (in this instance) interviewees, who may challenge and expose the limits of one's existing theoretical notions, creating the potential for adapting theory to accommodate any new phenomena which might emerge:

Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory...the basic question in theoretical sampling (in either substantive or formal theory) is: *what* groups or subgroups does one turn to *next* in data collection? And for *what* theoretical purpose? In short, how does the sociologist select multiple comparison groups? The possibility of multiple comparisons is infinite, and so groups must be chosen according to theoretical criteria. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp. 45-47 in Seale, 1999, p.92).

In this instance, I had arrived at a point after two dissertations on cultural understandings of ageing, where I wished to examine the effects of some of the claims made about it in various texts, on actual people. A further review of the literature suggested that the notion of generations, baby boomers in particular, might be a profitable group to study, as it was a term that occurred often in the literature on ageing and had the advantage of being clearly defined. Once identified, via the criteria of birth date; birth and death rates; geographical location and ascribed characteristics, one could compare claims made about them, on them as it were.

Theoretical sampling and the Irish

It was in the spirit of a search for negative instances of the sample, after interviewing a number of my target group, where their replies were beginning to echo one another and I was having difficulty in getting more participants, that a fortuitous opportunity came up for me to visit friends in Ireland. Part of what intrigued me and prompted me to go related to the research, was the fact that here was a population of people with more than a fair claim to the title 'Euro-American', both in terms of Strathern's (1996) earlier definition of today's Ireland and (admittedly rather different to her definition) in terms of the country's strong connections with North America, via population migration and the E.U. - whose links are partially (and not un-controversially) credited with bringing 'Ireland into the modern world' (Ardagh, 1995, p.31). This is especially so since the late 1950's, in terms of 'freedoms' from 'isolation, poverty, inadequate education, [and] puritan morality', (ibid. p.31). Whilst the economy and infrastructure have improved markedly in the past thirty to forty years, the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' is a relatively recent phenomena, due in part to EU membership (1973); the opening up of markets; high amounts of aid and overseas investment by hi-tech industries. Much of the latter's profits go back to the companies outside of Ireland and its history of underdevelopment prior to then, both by British under-investment in industry up to the 1920's and costly protectionism, post-independence up to the 1950's, have meant that the economic progress is uneven, leaving many untouched by it and is 'still one of the three poorest countries of the EU' (ibid. pp.68-9). Its GDP has continued to rise since the late eighties however and if this continues, coupled with low inflation, then the gap with its EU neighbours is predicted to narrow (ibid. p.69).

Not only did Ireland confound notions of Euro--Americaness, it had not, unlike the rest of the 'developed' industrialised world, experienced a baby boom after the Second World War. Vital statistics from the Central Statistics Office Ireland (2002) show the number of births rising from 63,565 in 1950, to 64,382 in 1970, with the birth rate (expressed as a percentage per 1,000 of the estimated population) rising from 21.4 in 1950 to 21.9 in 1970, whilst the death rate fell from 12.7 to 11.4 over the same period. 'In 1950 the total fertility rate, which measures the expected number of births per woman aged 15-44, was well over 2.1 (the population replacement rate) in all the countries of Western Europe and North America. Today only Ireland continues to experience above-replacement fertility, while in West Germany and Denmark total fertility has fallen to the unprecedented level of 1.4' (Johnson et al, 1989, p.255). This should be balanced however, against the fact that at the beginning of Ireland's Famine in the 1840's, the country was amongst the most densely populated in Europe. 'Today the Republic is the most sparsely inhabited nation of the EU by far: 51 inhabitants per square km, Greece coming next with 76' (Ardagh 1995: 17) due to a combination of Famine deaths and emigration. It should also be noted that as Ireland remained neutral during the Second World War, or 'the Emergency'- it not being 'their' war, it did not suffer bombing or loss of life through combat – reasons often cited for the start of the baby boom in the U.K. and elsewhere, after the war. It did however, suffer hardship through food shortages and many migrated to work in U.K. munitions factories during the war.² The idea of a baby boom conceived in terms of births and conventional cultural associations does not apply here, as the number of births remained relatively level in the time period under consideration in this study, 1946-1964.

Similarly, the popular cultural associations with the so-called 'sixties generation' seemed to carry different connotations for some of the Irish interviewees (if it has any special relevance at all) in marked contrast to some of the U.K. interviewees. A variety of factors may be implicated here: the moral climate (heavily influenced by the Catholic church) being un-conducive to such activities as the stereotypical 'free love'- as 'Ireland continued to outlaw birth control, (1979 with restrictions, 1993 almost unrestricted), abortion, (still illegal) homosexuality (illegal until 1993), even divorce (legalized 1997), long after other Western European countries had come to accept them' (Ardagh, 1995, p.179) - 'accept' being a relative term here. Barriers to outside influence were shaken in the early 60's

² I have also been told in informal discussion, regarding friend's relatives, that more men volunteered for active military service from the south at this time, than were conscripted from Ulster - although I have been unable to find a citation for this to date.

however, as 'Ireland opened up to the world; modern consumerism arrived, young people returned home from more liberal societies, and the English 'permissive' revolution of the sixties made its impact, especially via TV programmes' (Ardagh, 1995, p.181). None of the Irish people I interviewed however, drew upon the popularly ascribed 'permissive' characteristics of peace, love and anti-authoritarianism³ in their references to this decade, suggesting a greatly reduced or delayed impact, of its associations, if indeed it had any relevance at all, when viewed as a resource for identity production. In sum, these factors facilitated my going to Ireland, as the people I interviewed there could be reasonably argued to lay fair claim to being constituted as a 'negative instance' of my theoretical sample. This was not in terms of essentialising their Irishness, as a means of explaining possible differences related to ageing and generation; but that their different spatial, ethnic and geographical situatedness, might plausibly provide different angles to the responses I had already gathered and aid theoretical development of the categories I had found whilst coding.

This kind of theoretical sampling could well be infinite, given the problem of induction mentioned earlier in Popper's example of the swans. One person can only interview so many people in the time allowed, so a line was pragmatically drawn at a point judged 'adequate' on 'the basis of how widely and diversely the analyst [me] chose [my] groups for saturating categories according to the type of theory [I] wished to develop' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, pp.61-63 in Seale, 1999, p.93). This can be opposed to an 'inadequate' sample, easily identified 'since the theory associated with it is usually thin and not well integrated, and has too many obvious unexplained exceptions' (ibid. p.93). After six interviews of people (previously unknown to me) in Ireland, I felt that I was hearing similar accounts both to the other Irish people I had already interviewed, as well as those of the other nine U.K. residents I had interviewed prior to then. So I ceased my inquiry at this point, as I felt that continuing with more interviews did not look likely to provide significantly 'new' material and I felt that the category had become sufficiently 'saturated'.

³ Somewhat ironically, the lack of such people then, being compensated for now to some extent, by the movement into the more remote areas of Ireland by groups of largely U.K. citizens (some of my friends amongst them), who can lay fair claim to the title 'hippie' today. See Pete McCarthy (2000), for a fuller and significantly funnier account of this phenomenon.

Transcription

One might assume that transcribing is a relatively straightforward affair, merely typing up the words from the tape recording – in practice this is far from the case. Converting 'sound-data' (speech) to 'visual-data' (words on a page) is not a transparent process, but involves mediation in the decisions taken regarding what should be included in the written re-presentation.

In my first transcription (Liz), I attempted to be as faithful as possible in recording all of our utterances – hence the number of 'uhmns' and 'aahs' from myself. I also tried to convey, through punctuation, the rhythms of her speech, as well as inserting pauses and 'notes on voice' in brackets, to try and convey stresses placed on meaning. I also noted the parts of the text where I was unable to hear what Liz was saying – as she spoke very softly sometimes and the tape/microphone I was using simply couldn't pick it up (Liz's interview was the worst example of this – I interviewed a further three people, with varying degrees of the same problem before abandoning it for a mini disc recorder and decent quality microphone, which solved the problem. It can also record for four hours non-stop, so it also avoids the six-second loss encountered whilst a tape auto-reverses). It was tempting to guess as what I couldn't catch, but ultimately unethical and very frustrating. This raises the question of power relations, as it was still my decision to not 'guess', as it was my decision to choose punctuation styles, stresses, the inclusion of swear words and so on, in order to try and capture emotional responses and the flow of speech – the interviewee may have chosen otherwise.

In Liz's interview I did try and capture the times where each of us interrupted the other, as well as all my uhmns and aahs – not only to convey our individual style of language use, but also to indicate how such interventions were used by myself to try and encourage Liz to say more. How the researcher places themselves in the text is thus a theoretical decision. It would be almost impossible to completely convey all that was communicated between us, as even videotape would not capture our subjective interpretations, so such transcription 'problems' are effectively insoluble. As a brief aside, the 'loss' of data from interview to transcription (in terms of selection and simplification), can be partially avoided by de-briefing oneself immediately after an interview, by recording one's thoughts and feelings on how it all went and responses to what was said, which I duly did. Additionally, I performed a similar process during and after my first listening to the tape, before transcription, in the form of note

taking, regarding anything seemingly relevant that occurred to me – also continued during the transcription itself. This 'data' also became part of my initial analysis and provided another valuable source of information that I was able to subsequently draw upon.

Once one accepts the impossibility of including everything in the transcription, it then becomes a conscious decision regarding the level at which one wishes to represent the interaction – involving theoretical requirements and practical considerations regarding time and resources. Thus 'the mode of transcription adopted should reflect and be sensitive to an investigator's general theoretical model of relations between meaning and speech, selectively focus on aspects of speech that bear directly on the specific aims of the study, and take into consideration the limitations of the basic data and of resources available for analysis' (Mishler, 1986,p.49). My own theoretical concerns were to try to both elicit and represent the cultural resources a person draws upon, that are implicated in the production of aged subjectivity. Hence the interviews after Liz's did not include all my more non-verbal utterances, but still included most of those of the interviewees. I felt that this type of my own responses were of little value to the reader in terms of my theoretical aims, yet those of the interviewees gave a less clinical feel to their speech, which I felt conveyed some of their individual character. Arguably this was not completely 'necessary' relating to my research aims, but I felt it was less homogenising and more in line with my valuing their way of speaking. I did not ask any of the interviewees if they were happy with this (they may have preferred a more academic, "proper" style), highlighting power relations and issues relating to the validation of knowledge production.

An aesthetic and ethical evaluation aside, my final decision regarding the level of data to use was a pragmatic one. If I felt that something said did not 'hang' on a specific level of detail, then I did not provide it. These 'assessments' became slightly easier, the more transcriptions I made. This was less down to laziness on my part and more down to a slight feeling of confidence about what I needed – how justified this was is obviously open to question. This can be judged by anyone wishing to listen to the recordings, whilst comparing them to the transcripts I made (anonymised copies of which I can provide on CD Rom upon request - see e-mail address on title page).

Ethics

Informed, signed consent was obtained from all the participants prior to the recording of the data. This is and will continue to be kept secure, strictly confidential and anonymous. All participants have been instructed that they are able to have a copy of the relevant tapes/transcripts on request and will be kept fully informed of my findings. Goldsmiths ethical guidelines have been complied with fully, as specified in the (Mode A) postgraduate research training programme, as have the ESRC's guidelines, see para's 5.33 – 5.37 of their 'guidance notes'.

Methodology

Experience

'Experience' is not taken as a foundation for knowledge, as 'it is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience' (Scott, 1992, p.26). I do not wish to rely on aged experience as such, implying that it is due to a particular subject position, that of being 'old' in this instance – primarily because this has the effect of essentialising that position. Being able to articulate a particular experience does not 'speak' for itself, but is in need of further explanation and analysis (Skeggs, 1997). Certain things may not be subjectively capable of being experienced and claims to knowledge and truth based upon experience may render these things invisible. So, for instance, a person may not experience themselves as 'being old', or 'looking old', or indeed being worried about feeling old at all, yet this does not preclude their age, appearance, gender position and so on, from having an effect upon shaping who they are. In the case of skin colour for example, to further emphasise the point - one may have white skin, but not experience oneself as 'having a colour', yet this does not mean that such non- experience is unimportant in shaping that particular sense of self. Not experiencing one's 'whiteness' in many different contexts may be a major characteristic of the subject position white. Not experiencing one's 'agedness', may be a defining characteristic of being a relatively young looking, adult, middle class male – related in each instance, to being unaware of racism and ageism and the advantages that being white or youthful looking may confer in particular circumstances.

If it is the case that things we are unaware of are capable of shaping our experiences as much as things we are not aware of (of which there are compelling grounds for believing), then this has implications for the research strategy adopted. It is insufficient to merely describe what an interviewee says; the researcher must also attempt to make connections between things that may not be 'subjectively knowable' to the person being interviewed. From this perspective, it is not imperative that one's research subjects represent an extensive range of all possible subject positions, for them to be able to say something about being working class, black, homosexual, gendered, disabled and so on, or to be able to make relevant points about a variety of associated 'isms'. Similarly, just because an interviewee may experience 'being old', does not automatically lead them to critical awareness, relating to political challenges and their 'right' to speak - as they may still do so without challenging the hierarchical structures in which they are situated. Experience(s) as a category don't just happen or contribute to a pre-given, historically and culturally contingent, individualised self (Abercrombie et al 1986; and Lury, 1997), but are more profitably viewed as a process of 'becoming' a certain kind of subject, or producing the very 'idea of a self'.

A research project undertaken from this angle, examines how an 'old' person for instance, relies upon particular experiences to prove to (or constitute) themselves that they are an 'aged' kind of self and the contexts in which this occurs. What in the contemporary Euro-American context leads two people, who may be the same chronological age, to be seen as old/young/middle aged? This will depend to a certain extent on the relational ages of the other people involved in making the definitions, who will draw upon the cultural meanings they associate with certain bodily signs, or the particular place a person happens to be in order to make their assessments – thus, to labour the point somewhat - a 'middle-aged' person may be 'old' at a party where battalions of DJ's play non-stop hardcore techno for three days, or 'young' at an afternoon tea dance in a more genteel setting. Following Skeggs (1997) experience is the question that needs explaining, rather than the answer – a middle-aged person doesn't 'have' these experiences, but that they are constituted 'by' such experiences. Thus one does not approach a group of older people expecting them to give answers to the question of getting older, instead one can examine their experiences in terms of how and in what changing circumstances their subjectivity is constituted and how in turn they feel about themselves.

If one were to rely on experience as a means to both explain and provide evidence of difference, then this would say very little about power relations and how 'difference' functions. To do so would be to leave the categories of middle-aged, generation and so on uncritically examined, as the defining characteristics of these categories are negotiable and constantly shifting. An analysis of the practices, behaviours and representations, that constitute an individual as being sensibly defined as belonging to a certain category, would not seek to confirm their membership, but reveal some of the ways in which power relations produce actual categories, whatever the category happens to be. Following Scott (1992) experience is an interpretation, simultaneously requiring further interpretation. Experience thus provides a starting, rather than an end point for analysis. It is not a 'raw' or unmediated receptacle for 'truth', knowledge or authenticity; instead it can be used to reveal the production of individual selfhood and how such productions are enmeshed with difference, whether it be by age, gender, race, class and so on, or combinations of all of them.

Narrative

One of the ways in which experience relates to narrative, is in the '*ways in which* the self and its relation with others is 'storied' – the ways in which what we know as experience is an interpretive process' (Lawler, 2000, pp.12-13). Experience as a category also refers to past events, which can never be recalled in exactly the same manner in which they occurred. The process of remembering the past alters that experience into something else, as past experiences are re-interpreted through the subject's awareness and comprehension of their social world in their present - a process Ian Hacking (1994,1995) refers to as 'memero-politics'. How experiences produce subjectivity in the form of personal narratives is linked to knowledge of broader historically and culturally contingent, social narratives, not originating within the individual (Somers and Gibson, 1994). These social narratives form a 'synthesising' function of the disparate elements of individual life histories/stories, providing a coherent framework, or emplotment function of past, present and future events (Ricoeur, 1991a). These personal narratives have an ontological function (Somers and Gibson, 1994) in that they provide a framework for 'being', in terms of the stories people relate about themselves, to themselves and others, which are in turn mutually constitutive of the wider social narratives - emplotting lives in time and space. Thus stories about resisting getting old, or belonging to a generational category, provide a framework for an individual's relation to their own ageing process and their sense of history.

Given the historically and culturally contingent nature of different narratives (both social and personal) regarding ageing in these instances, it becomes apparent that they also permit what can be known and said at any one time and place. So it would not make a great deal of sense to talk about extending life-spans up to one hundred and twenty or more, through genetic and cellular manipulation, in the late eighteen hundreds for example. Some of the narratives surrounding technology (a current form of 'expert knowledge') that today promise to achieve such ends in the near future, simply did not exist then and would have been effectively unintelligible. So, in addition to forming an ontological category regarding 'being-in-the-world', narratives also provided an epistemological means of comprehending the world. Like experience, personal narratives provide no unmediated access to the 'truth' of a life. The researchers job therefore is not to provide an account of what getting old is 'really like', adding to the list of other expert knowledge; but to analyse the effects of the connections between the stories (social and personal narratives) surrounding ageing that the interviewee's draw upon, including expert knowledge, and to relate them to their understandings of ageing. So, for example, in the case of the 'sixties generation', a person who was in their late teens at the end of this decade, may make claims regarding what the sixties were 'really like'. This may have the effect of providing them with a legitimating sense of authority (given that they were 'actually there'), from which to make pronouncements about a 'younger generations' different behaviour and how they have 'got it wrong' in their assessment of the period (see chapter 3 for evidence of this).

Stories

Ken Plummer's (1995) work will also be instructive here, in that he argues that the world is becoming increasingly cluttered with stories⁴ (to do with the sexual in his case), where talk about sex or ageing (for my purposes) is becoming increasingly evident. One can examine the newly emerging narratives on age and the socio-historical conditions that may have given rise to them – in this instance, the emergence of the so-called baby boom generation as harbingers of significant social change, which then leads to the telling of new stories about ageing. Plummer's aim is to help create a sociology of the 'narrative turn'; which will supplement cultural studies' fascination with texts, narrative structure,

⁴ Stories may differ from narratives in that narratives are produced through a mode of analysis, via a particular interview technique. Stories are a looser, lay-term and may involve extra elements and be more open-ended. Following Ricoeur, (1991a) narratives always have discursive points of closure and are internally focused, where the meaning of the entire narrative makes sense in relation to itself. A story may not have such closure, but it will have a conclusion. Plummer (1995) wants to open up stories to make them possible at different times, evident in his notion of stories 'waiting in the wings' of history to happen - something which would not make sense in relation to narratives. For Fraser (1999) certain things, such as bisexuality for example, may not be 'narrativisable', but they are 'storyable'.

genre, metaphor and so on, with questions regarding the social and political role that stories play. This leads to an examination of the social processes through which narratives are constructed and consumed and where they are not told, along with the political changes that stories may encourage.

The move from limited, oral face to face exchanges, such as everyday talk, epic poems, songs and so on, through to today's highly technologically mediated interactions are, in their totality, able to provide a huge landscape within which new narratives can emerge and existing narratives about particular topics can be transformed in a mutually constitutive manner. So, for example, contemporary fashion spreads that depict older people as high fashion models, who appear vibrant and sexually alluring, can provoke new identifications (and dis-identifications) with ageing and new narratives related to it. The steady rise in attention paid to ageing, whether it be on television, or radio, in numerous magazine articles, international consciousness raising campaigns, media figures challenging age based stereotypes, academic and popular discourse on ageing and so on, all provide and mutually influence/constitute narratives on ageing - along with how we think, feel and act with regard to it. Practices (techniques of the self) can be provoked by these new narratives, such as, for instance, 'coming out' as an older person, where one publicly acknowledges one's age and experience of ageing in a 'positive manner' - as evidenced by the number of public confessions on talk shows, in magazines and so on; or working on the body, in order to be perceived as being non-old. Our intimate experiences (of ageing in this instance) 'once hardly noticed, now has to be slotted into the ceaseless narrating of life' (Plummer, 1995, p.4). These stories about ageing can be taken as signs of truth and are often presented as facts that presume to tell us something about our aged identities. They may well help us deepen our understanding about our relation with ageing, particularly if they are not viewed as revealing the 'truth' about aged experience and the resources they draw upon to do so, but are seen instead as issues and topics to be investigated in their own right. Similarly, the interviewer must be reflexively aware that they are a part of the interview process, in that what they write will not be a reflection of aged life, but will play an active part in its construction. The very fact that I the interviewer, or they the interviewee have chosen to ask about/talk about their aged experience, raises questions about why either of us would wish to do this now and how they are able to produce such stories, in terms of the resources they are able/not able to draw upon. In the same vein - if my sympathetic responses as an interviewer actively encourages them to tell a certain story and how much of their story is a performance of a story that they have told themselves numerous

times before, can in turn perform work in the social order – regarding how they may influence it and their role in the political process. Questions can then be raised about the relation of the transcribed interview to the actual life being discussed. How I write the stories – in their voice or mine, can influence how others, who may read it at a later date, will interpret them.

All of the above is food for thought when one comes to analyse what has been said (or left unsaid) in the interviews - in relation to the social work they are able to perform within cultures, which go beyond and exceed the text. Viewed in this manner, the production and consumption of stories is an 'empirical social process', where a 'stream of joint actions', are staged within local contexts. These are inextricably linked to broader, 'negotiated social worlds' – thus '[t]exts are connected to lives, actions, contexts and society. It is not a question of 'hyper-realities' and 'simulacra' but of practical activities, daily doings and contested truths' (Plummer, 1995, p.24).

Our whole cultural life can be seen as an amalgamation of different stories we tell about ourselves (Geertz, 1975), from when we get up in a morning through to our dreams at night (Hardy, 1975). Plummer's (1995) central thesis is that in late modernity, stories - sexual, age-related, or otherwise, are gaining in prominence. So, for example, in the case of this thesis, stories about ageing might include why it is that the experience of old age is not generally discussed; why in certain circumstances it might be considered rude to ask an adult's age, or why there are negative sanctions if one looks older than one's chronological age and vice versa. We can examine what these stories are, why people are telling them and where they might be heading. In the case of personal experience narratives regarding ageing, one might ask where (if) they talk about their aged experience; how the story comes to be told and the role they may be playing in contemporary life. These stories are gendered and relational (particularly in terms of where and if they talk about their aged experience) and will have features in common with other stories with different foci, in that they are a part of the wider discourses and ideologies that are abroad in a society, such as the accent on 'health' for example. Thus there could be scientific age stories for instance, that narrate aged experience in a technological rhetoric, or historical aged experience stories, that place ageing in terms of historical narratives regarding generational boundaries and so on. We can ask what role these personal narratives/stories perform, both in the individual's life and in the world at large. As Plummer (1995)

comments, in order for stories to be 'successful' there needs to be a social world that offers some form of a 'community of support' to receive them (such as for instance the women's movement, gay movement, or people reflecting upon age), which may only just be beginning to happen with regard to ageing. Conversely, the less there is a community of support, the less well developed these stories will be - '[t]hey may be waiting in the wings for their time, their voice, their audience' (Plummer, 1995, p.16). Hopefully this work will contribute in some small way to the community of support for issues surrounding cultural understandings of ageing and generation.

Stories can perform political tasks in terms of what can be said, how it is said, who is able to say it and who is able to hear it. New stories regarding ageing may be emerging - such as, for instance, challenges posed to the 'tyranny' of being compelled to remain eternally flawless, youthful and beautiful in appearance, which may change our intimate lives and communities when we hear them. This outlines Plummer's wider project of 'intimate citizenship', which refers to a 'cluster of emerging concerns over the rights to choose what we do with our bodies, our feelings, our identities, our relationships, our genders, our eroticisms and our representations' (Plummer, 1995, p.17). Additionally, a sociology of stories needs to consider the stress placed on the individual here, as obviously not everyone is able to make the same kinds of choices. In this sense the world of stories exceeds that of a focus on narrative alone. If one aims to understand the role of aged stories in social life, then one must also consider the socio-political terrain that generate particular stories, whilst suppressing and in some cases silencing others.

These techniques will be discussed and illustrated with examples from my interview data in the chapters that follow. In sum the research aims to 'strike a balance between empirical investigations of embodied and material differences, power relations and inequalities, and critical reflections on how knowledge is produced' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p.97). Whilst being informed by developments in social and cultural theory, this research will not entirely abandon notions of humanism/scientific rationality, given that the material 'reality' of aged peoples lives are subject to effects beyond that of language alone. Striking this balance will be an ongoing struggle in the thesis.

Given my interest in the production of (the relatively under researched) aged subjectivity, my initial concern was to find a means of accessing and identifying some of the contemporary resources/discourses available for this, by those Euro-American baby-boomers, who were targeted in the study, via my review of the relevant literature. The focus group (used as a form of pilot study) was an interesting way of achieving this, in its possibility of generating a number of these resources,⁵ in addition to seeing how they affected those without a professional interest in society and culture. Both my own research 'desires', in combination with those of the focus group, were documented and combined into producing an interview schedule - as a novel way of considering them further (as such desires are subject to change and contradiction) that were then re-posed to other 'baby boomers' in individual interviews, before being re-analysed again - forming the substance of chapters three to six. A cultural studies approach is useful for comprehending the variety and contradictory aged lifestyles and practices in evidence today. It is to the kinds of contemporary discourses revealed in narratives, stories and experiences related to generation and ageing, that I now to turn to in the next chapter; by examining the practices, behaviours and representations that constitute someone as sensibly belonging to a particular category – baby boomers in this instance and how power relations are productive of such categories. In this sense I examine how the interviewees draw upon wider cultural narratives, regarding generations, in order to relate themselves to history and culture and how these provide frameworks for what it is both possible to know, that synthesise the different elements of their life histories. Stories about belonging, or not belonging to a generation are historically and culturally contingent and permit what it is possible to know and say about them.

The people in the study⁶

Liz: Aged 58. Describes herself as having had four careers (so far), as a dress designer in 'swinging London'; an owner and manager of a printing business; a small- holder; a secretary and currently works as a production assistant. She has completed numerous business courses, has an advanced city and guilds in production methods and textile techniques, has used computers for over twenty

⁵ This is opposed to using focus groups in a more conventional sense in terms of marketing techniques, often aimed at identifying lifestyle groups and their (often conflicting) desires, in order to sell them something. Whether it be toothpaste, or party policy in the case of former President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair's previous election strategies – where such strategies were targeted at (largely suburban middle class) swing voters whims. See BBC2's 'The Century of the Self', broadcast on 07-04-02 for an interesting commentary on this phenomena.

⁶ All names are pseudonyms apart from my own at the end of the list; some biographical details have been changed to protect confidentiality. The ages supplied were accurate in September 2004.

years and has just completed a BSc. She is dyslexic and describes her ethnic origin as 'White European'.

Emma: Aged 38. Has taught English in other European countries and also has had a variety of administrative/secretarial jobs. She has an Institute of Linguistics Diploma (RSA), a TEFL certificate and describes her ethnic origin as 'White European'.

John: Aged 54 approx. Is a lecturer in a higher education establishment in Ireland. He holds a BSc., a B. Comm. and an M.B.A. and describes himself as 'White-UK/Irish'.

Tony: Aged 49. Is a lecturer in Ireland and also a charity director. He has a BSc., an M.B.A. and an M.M.11 and is also 'White-UK/Irish'.

Monica: Aged 41. A lecturer in higher education – she both teaches and has worked in marketing in Ireland. Her ethnic origin is 'White-UK/Irish'.

Katherine: Aged 46. Is a freelance sub- editor, working in publishing in London. She has a B.A. (Hons.) in History and describes herself as 'White-UK/Irish'.

Jack: Aged 40. Run's his own landscaping business and is a professional musician (plays trumpet). He has a B.A. Hons. in Photography, Film and Television and is 'White European'.

Ben: Aged 41. A lecturer in marketing in Ireland, who holds a B.Comm, an M.B.A. and a PhD. He describes his ethnic origin as 'White-UK/Irish'.

Susan: Aged 43. Is a full time clerical officer in Yorkshire. She has a BA (Hons) in Business Studies and describes herself as 'White-UK/Irish'.

Tim: Aged 58. Is a civil servant and animal rights activist. He describes his ethnic origin as 'White European'.

Sadie: Aged 48. Is a full-time student. She has a B.A. in Social Policy and Environmental Studies and prior to that worked in administrative positions. She describes herself as 'White-UK/Irish'.

David: Aged 47. Is a university administrator. He has a law degree and describes himself as 'White-UK/Irish'.

Barbara: Aged 51. Is a language teacher and writer. She has a B.A. in Media Studies and describes her ethnic origin as 'White-UK/Irish/Canadian'.

Amanda: Aged 52. Is a lecturer; researcher and administrator. She has an M.A. an M.S.c. and an M.B.A. She describes her ethnic origin as 'White-other' and is a U.S. citizen.

Rhona: Aged 51. A part-time health education tutor and full-time parent. She has a science degree and describes her ethnic origin as 'White-UK/Irish'.

Neil: Aged 40. A full time PhD student and freelance interviewer with the Policy Studies Institute. I have a B.A. (Hons.) in Sociology and an M.A. in Cultural Studies. My ethnic origin is 'White-UK/Irish'.

Chapter Three: Generations

Introduction

As I noted in chapter two, the interviewees were selected on the basis that they represent a particular configuration in relation to ageing – the so-called baby boom generation. This group have been characterised as belonging 'to a generation that has been at the forefront of cultural attention throughout their lives, if for no other reason than its size and importance as a market' (Featherstone and Wernick, 1995, p. 13). The members of this 'generation' are further claimed by Featherstone and Wernick (1995) to be conscious of being in a generation in 'Mannheim's sense' (ibid.p.13), in that they possess the collective historical experience of radicalism and the 'counter culture' during the sixties, which arguably provides them with a relative sense of unity. Features attributed to this generation are that they are 'socially critical, narcissistically self-absorbed, and self-defined as forever young' (ibid.p.13). Furthermore, it is claimed that the generation that 'invented youth' (York, 1999, p.16) are 'saying no to beige cardi-hood' (Pollard, 1999, p. 16) and that the 'trade off for our youth is confidence' (Coon, 1999, p. 17). These ascribed generational characteristics are predicted to inspire collective social change regarding how ageing is perceived, whether it be by being 'socially critical' in terms of rejecting negative stereotypes of older people ('beige cardi-hood'), or more organised political activism (Gray Panthers, Age Concern, amongst others) against age discrimination in employment, pensioners rights and so on. Such representations highlight the concerns of the thesis as a whole, regarding how ageing, becoming old and, in this chapter, the notion of 'generation' are being produced in a variety of different ways. In this chapter, I explore how the interviewees *themselves* understand the concept of 'generation', and how they use it to constitute themselves *in terms* of generation (or not). An important feature of asking the interviewees to reflect upon questions of generation is that it also implicitly facilitates their reflecting upon my own selection of them as a group. It has been useful, to use age based cohort definitions of generation however, as a means of identifying whom to approach to interview - in this case members of the Euro-American baby boom, who comprise a demographic population bulge in terms of birth date, born between 1946 and 1964 and also useful in terms of asking them to reflect upon the assumptions that informed that selection. They are interesting, in other words, not only because they represent a particular configuration in relation to ageing, but because of what they have to say *about* that configuration.

As Featherstone and Wernick (1995) claim that members of the baby boom generation are 'self consciously' aware of their generational membership in 'Mannheim's sense', regarding their experience of a 'relatively unifying' historical period (the 60's) it becomes pertinent to supply a summary of particular theoretical issues related to concepts of 'generation', in order to situate the interviewees responses in a broader context. Concepts of generation are problematic for a variety reasons, particularly given the blurring of boundaries where one generation ends and another begins. Andrew Achenbaum (1986) has argued that the meaning of generation is shot through with ambiguity, as it can equally refer to a chronological grouping, or those who experienced a monumental historical event, or the parents (but not the children) of a particular age range. Once this is acknowledged, who belongs and does not belong is thrown into question; does a person's age or experience, financial means, values, birth order, hopes and fears and so on, determine belonging or not? Jane Pilcher (1995) notes that 'despite the notion of generation (meaning cohort) being a popular folk model conceptualisation of the differences in experiences, opportunities, and, often 'worldviews' of people of various ages, contemporary sociologists have been rather inattentive towards it', (Pilcher 1995: 22). This 'inattent[on]' may be related to the complexity of attempting to specify links between the individual and social change, in particular ways - of which the technical distinction between cohort and generation, is but one aspect of the interchangeable meanings surrounding notions of generation. Confusingly, the concept of generation can be taken to mean both the process of bringing into being – in this instance in terms of human reproduction, referring to the average time between two generations of a species; or, to all the people of approximately the same age – particularly when they are thought to share similar attitudes and ways of perceiving the world. Two classic studies of generation and social change by Karl Mannheim (1952) and Norman Ryder (1965) discussed in Hardy (1997) develop these different aspects.

Ryder (1965) used the demographically inspired term 'birth 'cohort', rather than generation, as an analytic device to study social change. Cohort referred to 'age homogenous groupings' or those people born in the same, or closely related group of ages, who experience social events, war for example, and changes at roughly the same chronological age. This concept did not rely upon notions of shared generational consciousness, but linked agency and social change to cohort succession and

replacement. This emphasised the equality of exposure in 'person – years' to social phenomena, instead of trying to analyse the complexities of how the different perspectives of succeeding cohorts lead to actions which then eventually lead to social change at the structural level. The advantage of the cohort group to studying social change, were that having clear 'age-homogeneous' boundaries facilitated explanations of social change without recourse to an assumed shared consciousness and purpose, which he argued, seldom occurred and when they did, did not account for the majority of the generational grouping. By contrast a sense of shared consciousness and purpose was integral to Mannheim's (1952) account of generations and provides the context for the unifying 'sense' of generation that Featherstone and Wernick (1995) claim the baby boomers experience.

In 'The Problem of Generations' (1927/1952) as Hardy (1997) summarises it, Karl Mannheim focused upon trying to discover a link between social change and biological 'generational', rather than individual 'replacement'. He proposed a concept of generation as 'historical units', unlike what he termed the earlier "positivist" and "romantic-historical" traditions conception of generations as 'quantifiable natural facts' (Hardy, 1997, p.3). Such earlier conceptions of generation were analogous with the life cycle of a living organism, which went through collective changes mirrored in the flow of births and deaths, where change was reflected in the period of an individual lifespan. This facilitated an "externalised concept of time", whereby the rate at which one generation was replaced by another, could be 'accurately' measured by time. The length of a generation proceeded at roughly a '30 – year rhythm', and was periodised in terms of the activities often undertaken in a single lifespan, '30 years for development, education and training; 30 years to work in positions that allowed decision making and direction; and a subsequent withdrawal from positions of power' (ibid. p.4). This 30-year pattern was more akin to the composition of families, structured in terms of parents, children and grandparents, than it was to society, where continual births overlapped 'adjacent kinship structures'.

Mannheim wished to develop a link between the biological fact that births occur continuously year on year, (which overlap generational divisions within a single family), and how this led to social change. In an attempt to find a more useful link, Mannheim employed Dilthey's (1927/1997) concept of 'contemporaneity'. This acknowledged that whilst contemporaries live in the same time period, and different generations can co-exist simultaneously, their subjective experience of the same event is not

necessarily experienced in the same manner. There is a sense that different generations inhabit different worlds in terms of their subjective experiences. Individual biographies are shaped by historical experience, which creates 'different stratifications of human consciousness' (Hardy, 1997, p.4) A dialectical process interprets individual experience in the light of historical events, permitting the revision of history as new experiences arise.

Mannheim theorised that as each generation is born and comes into being, there also arises the potential for a shared consciousness, which could promote unified action. This is the 'sense' that Featherstone and Wernick (1995) referred to regarding 'greying baby boomers', who as a result of collectively being made consciously aware that they are indeed a generation, through being marketed to as a group and experiencing the 'radical' sixties, that these experiences would constitute them as a unified group, containing the potential to collectively create social change. Whilst each generation may share a similar location in time and space, they do not necessarily form a 'generation as actuality'. In order for a generation to facilitate social change, it must also form a shared consciousness, in terms of the early development of similar cultural orientations, if it is to develop the impetus to "participate in a common destiny"(Mannheim, 1927/1952). These orientations develop early in life and do not necessarily have to be conscious to the individual, nor do they promote identical responses to the same historical events. Viewed in this way, historical "generational unit[s]" can act as an "actual" generation, but could also respond to other generational units in an antagonistic manner, allowing different, sometimes opposing generational units to exist in the same period (Hardy, 1997).

A generation, (defined as being born in the same year), creates the potential for (but does not guarantee) a shared experience of historical events in a particular society, which may potentially lead to the more potent sharing of 'behavioural consciousness' that is the 'generation as actuality', whose conscious experience is formed through occupying similar historical locations within a society (Hardy, 1997). The form of consciousness characterising a generation as actuality is resistant to change. Mannheim believed such a consciousness would have a "limited elasticity", in that whilst an individual may change their social location (permitting another perspective on events and possible modification of beliefs) the same individual would never be able to take a "fresh look" at those same events with "new" eyes – this "fresh" perspective being the preserve of new societal members only, who are in turn

subject to unconscious forces. It is the shared consciousness, most forcefully exhibited by the generation as actuality, which Mannheim believed linked generations to social change. These links are extremely complex, which Hardy (1997) proposes as a reason why Mannheim did not pursue the issue in his later work.

Rather than attempt to specify yet more complex links between individuals, generations and social change, or attempting to reinstate a true and all encompassing definition of what a generation is and how it may be used to predict social change - I will instead consider how and if the interviewees, who can be categorised as belonging to the baby boom generation, conceptualise generation in a variety of ways. I will consider whether and how there is a unified sense of 'belonging' in Mannheim's (1952) 'sense', partially characterised by Featherstone and Wernick (1995) as being 'socially critical', and how and if the interviewees conceive of generation in terms of social change, given the predictions concerning their older members in particular, resistance and challenges to current forms of retiree lifestyles and behaviour (Pollard, 1999; DeSouza, 2004; Harkin, 2004). Social change is only one of the ways in which the interviewees deploy the notion of generation. I also propose showing how notions of generation are important as resources for the identity production of the interviewees here, particularly insofar as it offers them something to define themselves in relation to. With the above in mind, a number of themes emerged relating both to how this group of people *do* generation, and how they constitute themselves as *part* of a generation or not. The following sections are organised around four main themes: periodicity – defining themselves through and against generation; the rise of individualism; popular culture and generational groupings; and challenging the homogenisation of the 60's.

1. Periodicity – defining themselves through and against generation

A number of the interviewees were notable for defining themselves through generation, viewed in terms of its periodicity. Here, periodicity is constituted in terms of the interviewee's relation to a distinct period of time – the 60's, where particular things are remembered to have happened. In answer to the question "can you remember a time when you felt part of a generation?", Liz replied:

Liz: well, in the 60's obviously. Which was – really felt – we really felt that, you know, we can change the world. However, yes, I remember the Cuban crisis – I remember the, a fear of the bomb and all those things yeah.

The words 'obviously' and 'we' are instructive here, in the sense that Liz assumes that 'of course' she felt a part of a generation – 'the 60's', as a distinct period and that I would almost automatically be familiar with why this was the case. Her use of the word 'we' twice in the same sentence stresses the importance for her of the collective feeling of togetherness inherent in the 60's, a togetherness which relates to how 'we can change the world', through collective political action, which was something 'we really felt'. It also hints at a sense of possibility and hope, devoid of cynicism, that may seem naïve today. Her feeling of a collective belonging to a generation is also partly produced through characterising and remembering this period as one of instability, where the fear of Armageddon from the threat of nuclear attack and mass destruction on an unprecedented scale, further re-enforced her feelings of unity.

This sense of inclusivity is evident throughout Liz's sense of defining herself through generation, as a period of time where people acted together from a common sense of purpose. For her, the 60's were synonymous with:

Liz: the baby boomers. We were the, the bulge that was forcing change...consumer society had to change. And our parents had aspirations- we all had aspirations and it moved across classes. I think, I think it will change tremendously – I hope it will change tremendously as well, erm. And I resent very much the thought that we're going to be a burden on the state – I resent that very much.

The term 'baby boomers' is used to represent 'her' generation and is interchangeable with the term sixties generation (those who were teenagers/young adults from the mid to late sixties). This is also represented as a population 'bulge'¹, where larger numbers of young people than the generations preceding and following it are perceived as being able to do certain things, on the basis of their sheer weight in numbers. Specifically that she feels its members did and will hopefully continue to 'forc[e] change', illustrating not only the continuing significance of the notion of generation for Liz as something to partially define herself through, but also how she feels that her generation did force 'consumer society' to change, in line with what Liz believes was its collectively held aspirations. One of the defining features of the 60's generation was the increased sophistication in marketing techniques,

¹Demographic figures from the United Nations (1999) show that the population bulge in the U.K., North America, Australia and much of Western Europe began around the end of the Second World War in 1946 and continued to around 1964, before falling off dramatically. The term 'baby boomer' is also popularly associated with a single decade however, as 'when we think of the baby boomer generation, we usually think of the sixties. That is the decade that seems to have defined the boomers', (Chicowitz, 2002). This is how Liz applies the term.

which for the first time targeted them (initially in the U.S.) as 'teenage consumers' (Lury, 1996, p.195). Interestingly, the effect this has had on Liz, is for her not to view her aspirations and identifications with the sixties as being partially constructed or indeed created by these techniques, but instead to view the large number of teenagers of which she was a part, as being responsible for these changes, regarding demands that their desires be met. This is one of the factors Featherstone and Wernick (1995) referred to that is able to produce a sense of belonging to a generation in Mannheim's (1952) sense, as prerequisite for social change. Liz believes that 'her' generations' aspirations were collectively held and 'moved across classes' (Liz describes herself as coming from a working class family) which reveals not only a continuing sense of unity, but also an undiminished sense of optimism that as they reach retirement, they 'will' be a force to be reckoned with, regarding collectively forcing social change in 'their' favour. For some, notions of the sixties generation are still important as a source of identity, that has produced a collective sense of belonging, believed to unite individuals from different class backgrounds, regarding the perception of commonly held traits, that are reflected in remembered past actions and predicted to make changes in the future. In this instance, in terms of associations with previous collective political activism, that forced social change in their favour. Such is the strength of Liz's faith in 'her' generations' ability to effect political change in the future that it enables her to make the absolute claim that her generation 'will' change things 'tremendously', particularly with regard to their upcoming aspirations concerning retirement. This produces 'resent[ment]', regarding the thought that both her and her fellow generational members could be perceived as a 'burden on the state'².

The 'late 60's' as a distinct period of time, was regarded by some as their formative 'teenage' years, which were also used as a means to define themselves through:

Rhona: Well OK. I was born in '53, so when I was a teenager it was the late 60's and you know, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and so obviously that was the best generation [laughs]. Probably everybody says that to you. But erm, I mean I suppose – when I hear my kids listening to the Beatles or whatever, well I think, well that's our music and we were around when it was coming on the radio and er – I could think of erm – and those kind of

² Liz is alluding here to discourses surrounding the so-called 'demographic time bomb' (see Chapter 1) and its concomitant effects upon the health service and pensions – the accuracy of which has been challenged. Mullan (2000) argues that the demographic time bomb argument is being used as a scapegoat for unrelated changes in economy and society, motivated by desires to reduce the role of the state in the economy (relating to pension provision). Mullan identifies several other historic moments where demographic 'time bomb' situations have occurred and the economy has been relatively unaffected. Time bomb models are premised upon static growth (as such forecasters believe they cannot accurately predict growth) and fail to account for the fact that the majority of modern western economies have doubled their economic growth every twenty-five years. Taking all this into account, he argues that an ageing population and demographic trends do not hinder economic growth, which is instead influenced by other social factors.

teenage years, when you're just kind of becoming more aware of what's going on around you and er, what's going on in the world...

In this instance, the period is linked with two of the pioneers of globally consumed popular music, (part of what was going on around her and targeted at her) which, in a similar vein to Liz, also produced a sense of collective awareness. This is illustrated in her claim - 'that's our music' and that she was 'around when it was coming on the radio', for the first time. This possessiveness is in opposition to her children's subsequent appreciation of the same bands, who she does not constitute as belonging to this generation. Despite Rhona's reflexive laughter, there is a definite sense that the 60's were somehow superior to other generations, reflected in her joke regarding it being the 'best generation' and her assumption that 'probably everybody says that to you', which assumes that this is commonly shared knowledge³. The above interviewees define themselves through generation, as a period remembered for unifying people around a variety of common causes – fear of 'the bomb', political activism and a sense of superiority in comparison to other generations.

The attention to periodicity functions not only as a means for some of the interviewees to define themselves *through* a generation, but also *against* 'other' generations. Although Liz acknowledges that there are differences within 'every generation', for her there are important and very distinct demarcations between the generations preceding and following the 60's, which are still significant to her today. This is demonstrated in a narrative she tells about what she terms the attitudes of 'younger generations' toward sex. Liz is referring here to when she was working in clothing design, and her story relates to a younger female designer who was working for her, whom Liz describes as being of 'easy virtue':

Liz: her attitude to, er sex and men – was completely different – from the previous [60's] generation. And she assumed – that we'd all been on that. [Yet] they sort of, they built/come from it. So they were completely different, they were more freer than we were.

The younger woman as far as Liz could tell, believed that each of them would share similar views on sexual relationships, which for her were stereotypes of the behaviour that characterised the sixties, regarding so-called 'free love'. Irrespective of the 'accuracy' of such claims, Liz's narrative points toward a sense of self where generation is used to define herself both through and in opposition to

³ This is an assumption that does not appear in the interviewee's comments regarding subsequent generations, but can be found reiterated in many areas of popular culture – television and radio documentaries, print media, websites, discussion forums and so on.

different generations. In this instance, the way Liz perceives the (what are for her) marginal activities of her generation paved the way for a different, younger generation – of women in particular - to have 'completely different' attitudes toward sex than her generation, in that 'they were more freer than we were'. The words 'they' and 'we' illustrate once again the cohesive nature and importance of the concept for her sense of identity: she constitutes those who are not categorised as 'we' - as intrinsically different.

Another interviewee also defines herself as belonging to a generation, characterised in terms of sexual behaviour, but in opposition to earlier, different generations:

Katherine: 'I think that erm...I think in a way our generation who changed all the sexual boundaries have liberated them in older age'.

Katherine sees herself as being part of a different, 'seventies generation'. This is highlighted in her belief that even much older people than herself - her deceased father's partner for example, who had a 'string of boyfriends' in her late seventies - have also subsequently benefited from the more relaxed attitudes towards sex associated with the sixties, that are believed in this instance to have been put into practice in the seventies. In other words, Katherine is pointing to intergenerational influences, irrespective of which generation the events she refers to 'really' took place in. Katherine 'grew up as a teenager in the seventies' which she attributes to her 'end[ing] up with a lot of liberal ideas', which she felt that she was able to take for granted, thanks in part to social changes pioneered in the previous generation – acknowledged in her claim that she has 'lots of ex-hippie ideas I suppose, in lot's of way's'. Here, the notion of generation is used not only to differentiate Katherine from other generations, but also to recognise their inter-relatedness.

Katherine lives in a housing co-op which had previously been a commune and was very familiar with notions of the sixties and its associated idealism and the difficulties in sustaining it over the years – where members came and went for example, making consensus decision implementation harder to achieve as newer members' values diverged from those of the original occupants. Whilst Katherine may hold some of the values associated with the sixties close to her heart, she remarks that people are often 'surprised' when they find out how 'conservative' she is, particularly in regard to helping bring up two teenage boys from her partner's previous relationship, where she has little time for some of the

more 'experimental' child rearing practices associated with the sixties. In terms of her child rearing responsibilities, for example, she claims that she deliberately does not identify with her adopted sons' generation in order to be 'friends' with them. Instead, she finds another use for the concept of generation, in order:

Katherine: to maintain this sort of – I'm older than you, therefore I will have the say, sort of thing. I mean they're, they are older now, it doesn't apply, but I think, to live in the generations that [in her household] – it wouldn't have worked if it had been – we're all gonna be friends.

The concept of generation can still be useful in terms of its exclusivity, for asserting authority over younger people, by asserting the right to authority in terms of being older and perhaps wiser, which also has an effect in terms of producing notions of difference in terms of age. Limits exist as to how far such authority can be exercised however, as suggested in Katherine's remark that 'it doesn't apply' to her children now that they have become older, implying that age based notions of generation become less useful as a mark of difference in order to legitimate authority, once adulthood is reached.

The concept of different older and younger generations also provide a way of using generation as something to define themselves against in other way's, evidenced in the invocation of 'natural limits':

Katherine: its natural to grow old and die and make way for the new generation.

And also:

Tony: there's something very natural about generations handing over to the next generation. We start messing around with that and I think we're playing God.

Generation is also sometimes constituted as a means of assuming authority and exercising legitimate control over others, which is complicated by the age related categories of child and adult. There is an implied sense that an older generation exercising authority and control over another should be limited, regarding each of the interviewee's use of the term 'natural', relating to notions of generational succession. The concept of generation is used again here to define themselves against an intrinsically different, younger generation, who should not be held in thrall to older people's power and control forever, particularly if the older generation were 'unnaturally' unwilling to hand things 'over to the next generation', with their implied different ways of doing things. The way generation is deployed *against* other generations is still able to produce a sense of unity, evident in the use of the terms 'older' and 'younger'.

An interviewee defined himself in relation to a generation in another, different way in that he perceived it had 'failed' itself in certain ways:

Tim: Well I think, I think there's this corny old thing about people who lived through the 60's thought they were going to change the world, you know by sticking flowers in rifle ends and all that kind of thing you know, but...Its not worked out like that and I think I've been slightly disappointed – I'm kind of disappointed in my generation then, I'm probably disappointed that my generation – well the people born at the same time as me, my generation didn't alter the world and they also didn't bring up kids who would be even wanting to alter the world.

Another specific aspect popularly associated with the 60's, was that of political activism, which in Tim's youth gave him hope that he and his fellow generational members could 'change the world'- to the extent that their collective actions would influence people 'of all generations' to 'feel the same way'. From the vantage point of being an adult looking back on his youth, his generational affiliation, and what he believed it stood for, has been shaken. This is primarily because the idealism he felt characterised it, has not born fruit in the way he would have liked. There is also a sense of disappointment that the values he associates with the 60's generation do not appear to him to have been transmitted to their children. This has not provoked him to forgo defining himself through this generation however, or to reject its idealism, but has altered his relation to it, in different ways :

Tim: [T]his idea of being able to change things has not got passed on – its as though we now seem to think, you know something happens, well what can you do about it – I can't do anything! And yet I don't think that, I think individually you can do something, even though people round about me – my generation might not feel the same way, I still feel in a way that I can do something that hopefully will change things. I'm gonna be a very disappointed person I can see [laughs].

Tim rejects certain aspects of his association with generation and the 60's, on the basis of a disappointment regarding the non-transmission of its perceived cultural values. Although he believes the unifying political idealism that inspired action for change has dissipated, to the extent that he no longer believes such aspirations are collectively held anymore, this has not diminished his own idealism regarding social change per se. Even though he feels it might be more difficult to achieve than in the past, his idealism is still expressed through his notion of generation relating to the 60's - evident in his repeated use of the possessive 'my generation'. The awareness of a dissipation of what he previously regarded as a unified sense of belonging to a generation, identified with commonly held aims and values, is relevant to the following section.

2. The rise of individualism

This section marks a change in awareness regarding the feeling of belonging to a generation, where feelings of common purpose and shared values give way to separate individuals using generation as a category by which to define themselves *against*, as *individuals*. In the North American context, the shared sense of optimism and idealism associated with the 60's also appears to have changed, particularly with regard to the advent of the Vietnam War. Post Second World War middle-America is characterised here by a certain attitude and feeling which is described as a:

Amanda: chicken in every pot – very optimistic, but positive, good times and that was juxtaposed to what had gone before – they were good times. [And] it sounds rather sweeping but that sort of post war America – growing up in the fifties, the middle class stuff – erm 60's – this is all very much shattered then by Vietnam, but that time was a formative period for me, was one of this sort of 'can do' attitude, and very real sort of – full of positivity, both in my own little micro domestic life and also in the larger society.

Initially, this description of the 60's sounds similar to that of the previous one. However, the third person narrative implies an extra level of remove from the subject, signifying a subtle change in attitude. The optimism posited here as characterising 'larger society' was 'shattered' by political and economic events, relating to the effects of the Vietnam War, where each morning in high school, the Principal would:

Amanda: literally read out all the names of all the former students who'd been killed and it was very, very depressing – peoples brothers and sisters who, you know – were in the class – it was very traumatic. So that's er harsh awakening.

This event is described as a 'harsh awakening', that signified a change in awareness, regarding the sense of 'optimism' which Amanda implies was somewhat taken-for-granted by her and her fellow 60's classmates after the end of the Second World War. The absence in the narrative of the unifying 'we' and reference to 'they were good times' - past tense, point to a change in her relation to the 60's. The 'harsh awakening' signifies a change regarding the unifying optimism she previously felt, which is 'shattered' by the experience of the Vietnam War, heralding a more fragmentary, individualistic relation to her generation.

Although Amanda initially felt strongly identified with a generation – ‘its very much the baby boomers’, and was aware she led ‘a very good life’ as a young person in the U.S., in comparison with her parents who were from ‘quite modest backgrounds’ – her suspicion is that in retrospect, the optimism associated with this era could actually be ‘clichéd rhythms, caricatures and stereotypes’, which may be ‘lessening’. Her currently more sceptical view on the concept of generation can be seen when she ponders on whether generations ‘stem from marketing segments’:

Amanda: certainly in the States there's a lot of talk about Generation X and you know different ideas around that concept, but I don't know if that's the media having to find things to write about.

Amanda's suggestion that media representations and marketing strategies may affect how people view themselves as individuals leads her to assert that:

Amanda: I think that sort of banding [branding?] people is obviously erm a way to slice the cake that can be very misleading – in terms of you know – generalisations are hazardous at the best of times.

This new-found scepticism regarding the ‘reality’ of the existence of generations, relates to her awareness of how marketing techniques may produce stereotypes, associated with a rise in a sense of a less unified individuality, that is mirrored to an extent in the transition of her own relation to generation, from a unified sense of optimistic belonging, to a reflexive scepticism of how such unity may be produced. This transition is further reflected in her implication that there is not a ‘natural’ ‘banding’ of generations, so much as a an ‘artificial’ ‘branding’!

Barbara's comments reflect a particularly ambiguous relation to generation, regarding her answer to the question of whether she remembered feeling part of a generation or not:

Barbara: Erm, yeah I've never erm [laughs], never really fit in [laughs]; no the – because I – the 60's, I didn't er, I didn't – well to an extent I wore granny glasses – but I didn't really feel it was my time.

Although Barbara says she has no sense of belonging to a generation – ‘I didn't really feel it was my time’, where the ‘I’ stresses her individuality and not ‘fit[ing] in’ with others – she does however mention the 60's, unprompted by me, producing a synonymous connection between the two terms. She goes on to say that:

Barbara: Though I guess reminiscing with friends now maybe, about little tiny things, not big things.

Viewed retrospectively when discussing the time of her youth with her friends, Barbara does identify with smaller elements she associates with that period, that may have partially constituted her identity through generation, however this only occurs in specific circumstances with other friends, who are implied to hold similar memories in their shared reminiscing, and therefore likely to be of a similar age to herself. Upon further reflection, she identifies this period as:

Barbara: – the 60's I guess I did – I couldn't help but be affected by it and it was er, I guess, the whole changes and everything. Erm, the freedom and the fact of responsibility and the clothes and the music and the colours [laughs].

Despite initially not wishing to identify herself with a generation to me, such was the level of changes going on in the 60's, in terms of her sense of an increase in freedoms and concomitant responsibilities (regarding the potential for creating change), combined to make her feel as though she was almost helpless to resist identifying with it at that time. Interestingly, her desire to distance herself from the 60's, which she appears not to have done when reminiscing with her similarly aged friends, may have been affected by talking to me, whom she may have perceived to be from a 'different' generation. This is hinted at in her response to a question regarding whether she felt the notion of generation was a useful concept or not, where she replied that:

Barbara: Erm, I don't think its useful, I think it's a good point of reference and its good for reminiscing and erm – for example, I can talk to people about 70's things and er, I'm always trying to keep in touch.

The notion of 'keep[ing] in touch' may be an important feature for some of the members of the sample, who were young adults in the 60's, who may be aware that repeatedly invoking how wonderful the 60's were, may have an alienating effect upon the younger members of society with whom they may wish to keep 'in touch' with. This is particularly so if they still wish to appear youthful in attitude themselves, in relation to those whom they interact with, who are younger than them. Thus when Barbara claims that the notion of generation is not that useful, she significantly adds:

Barbara: I think I may be a bit different.

The use of the singular I emphasises her individuality again, in her perceived sense of difference and distance from those others of a similar age to herself and what she feels is their remaining identification with the 60's. Barbara implies that these people are different from her, in that they haven't kept 'in touch' with social change regarding what she sees as different, '70's things', to the

same extent that she has, betraying their lack of youthfulness in comparison with that of her own, in the process.

Some of the interviewees identified the late 70's as the period that brought changes in attitudes towards generation, typified by the behaviour thought to characterise the punk movement:

Tim: Yeah, I don't know if it was the 60's in particular had a kind of a – a big idealism that kind of evaporated – probably when punk came along. But it kind of evaporated and went and now er, it might not be a generation thing – idealism might not necessarily be a generation thing. And then the funny thing is as you get older, you realise that no people – generations aren't in blocks, you know people are born and then they're dying all the time – there is no kind of solid block of people marching toward the edge of oblivion and going over – we're all doing it one at a time. Er, so its – I think you sort of realise that er, yeah – we are all individuals you know.

The erosion of a sense of collective generational identity – the 60's, thought to be characterised by idealism and social action is perceived to have changed, identified by the behaviour and attitudes believed to typify another group of intrinsically different people (punks). The rise of individualism is implicated here, in the stereotypes of characteristics of this group – a rejection of the idealism of the 60's as a self indulgent joke and the aggressive nihilism inherent in the 'no future' slogan. The awareness of this change in behaviour as no longer linked to a collective generation, but to a more differentiated group – identified more by a punk *attitude* than a *decade* - provokes a questioning of the usefulness of the concept of 'generation' to adequately explain individual behaviour over time, even if it previously constituted a sense of belonging in their youth. Whilst Tim allows for the possibility that there may be other, younger individuals who are every bit as idealistic as he remembers his youth to be, there is a sense that individuality has eroded notions of a collective generation almost into oblivion, that has diluted the level and potential for change Tim previously experienced. Younger people than Tim may be:

Tim: more idealistic than you. You might be more idealistic than them – but there's not the same expectation that overall there's perhaps going to be the same idealism you've had. Its very much a - I don't know if you'd call it a Chinese whispers thing – where you hope to influence another individual and they might influence somebody else. But I don't feel the same umph that there was in the 60's... Not that I felt it an awful lot then.

There is an evident tension between his current more individualised and less influential sense of self, and that of his youth, where he and the other more unified members of his generation, believed they had the power to change the world and influence others.

These interviewees seem to be implying that individualising forces preclude the very possibility of a shared generational consciousness, of which the 60's generation are perhaps the last reasonably coherent example. This is not to argue however, that differing notions of what constitutes a generation are no longer productive of identities, as they are still capable of rhetorically constituting individuals in a variety of different ways. The above examples illustrate how the interviewees' relations with the notion of generation have been in transition since the 60's, from shared optimism regarding generational potential, to scepticism regarding generational unity, that are quite different than those of the younger interviewees in the sample. Here, as will be elaborated in the next section, generational affiliation and an associated sense of optimism are largely absent from their accounts.

3. Popular culture and 'groupings'

The use of the term generation in the first section on periodicity, as an almost normative position, contrasts sharply with that of the younger interviewees use of the term. Individualism seems to be more entrenched here, often reflected in terms of personal style and associations with popular culture. Emma's sense of generation is far less directly important to her as a resource for identity and she seems somewhat surprised to be asked if she could remember a time when she felt part of a generation:

Emma: Fucking hell – what kind of question's that – I never even thought about it really!

She goes on to acknowledge that some other people may have a strong generational identity and may identify themselves by saying:

Emma: "Well I'm a child of the sixties", or er, whatever, or "I grew up in the fifties", but erm, I think the only – I'd say my identity, or if I was to sort of identify myself with er, specific period of time, it would be when I was a teenager, and in relation to the music scene...cos the people I er, hung out with were kind of interested in David Bowie and erm, that was like the culture of going to concerts and getting records and I don't know if that's got a particular label – that era, or generation, or whatever'.

There is a resonance with periodicity here, but in a different way, for although Emma does not identify with a generation as such herself, she is able to identify previous, but not subsequent generations defined in terms of decades. When she forces herself to think about a particular time period to identify with, it is in terms of the music she was interested in as a teenager. Unlike Rhona in the first section,

this is not related to a specific decade, for she is not able to put a name to it. Nor does the notion of generation have any current salience for her. Any related comments that she makes always involve the singular and exclusive 'I' that speaks, rather than the more inclusive 'we' that were identified in the examples in the first section. Emma is far more familiar with notions of a sixties generation, which highlights the production of the seemingly ubiquitous association between the term generation and 'the 60's', and illustrates how pervasive notions of the sixties still are. This simultaneously underscores the apparently waning significance of the term generation to subsequent members of society - which is configured in these instances in less rigid terms, that is not bounded by decades, but is more focused around 'groups' and their relation to popular culture.

One interviewee felt a sense of generational affiliation whilst a teenager at school, based mainly around clothing and adopted styles – 'the skinhead era' in her case. However, when she went to college, she:

Sadie: started dressing like a hippy, which was a bit late by then, but I – that seemed to suit more my inner feelings [laughs] than what I'd gone along with before. So I did feel part of it.

Initially her sense of belonging to a group at secondary school had no particular attachment to a chronological notion of generation, but at university she discovered that the ethos, or what she perceived to be the earlier content of hippiedom – in 'peace and the anti-war', suited her 'anti-nuclear' stance at university. This became important for her, as she felt:

Sadie: you need a certain sort of consciousness to start thinking along those lines and the earlier stuff [skinhead style] – it wasn't really thought out, it was just because it was easiest to be.

There is no mention of the 60's in Sadie's account, but the collective ethos she associated with the hippies of that period, is still influential as a style to adopt as an outer expression of some of her values at the time. Her identification with her idea of 60's hippies is constituted more in transitional terms, where a focus upon a particular style is subsequently abandoned in favour of another identity that more closely reflects her changing sense of self. This suggests that a more permanent sense of generational identification requires an additional, more fixed 'sort of consciousness' if it is to survive, which is precisely what the individualising forces appear to undermine. If a collective ethos is lacking during the period of a person's youth, then a generational identification is either never perceived in the first instance, or appears to peter out in later adulthood.

The looser notion of belonging to a group, rather than a generation as such, was relevant to one interviewee in her youth:

Susan: I don't personally feel that I'm in a group now as such, but in those days at college, I felt part of the late teens, early twenties type of age group, definitely yeah. That's the only time I can remember really – feeling a particular age band.

This sense of 'group' belonging was initially constituted for her by a sense of being 'young' and 'free', of having enough money to live on as she claims that - 'you did have grants in those days'. This sense of freedom involved her having 'no responsibilities', allowing her to be able to partake in the 'fashions', or 'whatever the going thing' was - suggesting the possibility of choosing from a variety of sub-cultural styles on offer, whilst she was still in higher education, with the scope for re-invention such a setting can facilitate. The chronological sense of group belonging is not as important as it once was for her:

Susan: Once you start working and you're mixing with every other type of age group, you don't feel like you're in a band – I don't personally feel that I'm in a group now as such. [And] I think generations are more – no, I think its not as pronounced now as it used to be – I think the age groups are more blending together – I think society's split more in other ways now – I think its split more on religion or race. I don't think generation by age is as clear as it used to be, no. I think if you meet someone now, you're talking about what kind of religion they belong to, what kind of background they come from – not how old they are. I really don't see generation splits as clearly now – definitely.

Factors implicated in the eroding of the significance of generation, concern the blurring of age boundaries in adulthood. An age related 'sense of belonging' is felt by Susan to be diminished by being part of a multi-cultural workforce (currently aged 16-65 plus) where other factors than the period in which a person was a young adult, are more important in constituting identity – such as religious or ethnic differences. This is not to argue that age is unimportant in stratifying the workplace, given the current discourses around ageism (see chapter 5), but that notions of generation have become far less significant for the younger members of this sample, in producing their sense of self.

Although another interviewee, Ben, claims that the concept of the sixties and of generation itself have little relevance to him, he nevertheless has occasional 'moments' where he experiences a

'generation gap'. He makes this comment with reference to the multi-tasking abilities of his younger ex-students:

Ben: while we're having a beer, they're text messaging, they're doing work, but using text messaging – while we're talking, they're doing business.

He goes on to consider, in relation to the question of ever feeling part of a generation, that he was aware of punk in the mid to late seventies, as 'technically' he would have fitted that age category, but claims that he was 'never a part of it'. Tellingly he says that:

Ben: I've never particularly felt, ahmn belonging to a particular generation. [But] if you're looking particularly to the pop culture as a reference for a generation [for] belonging [it] would have been the Generation X one. [It's] the sub-element that you associate with not the generation.

Whilst he does not identify specifically with any generation as such, only with 'sub-elements relating to style, he nevertheless points to the popular cultural significance of the term. Ben notes that generation was probably more significant in terms of 'belonging', from the perspective of being so categorised, via a 'marketing tool' in his youth. The 'sub-elements' of generation he refers to, relate to:

Ben: some aspect of pop culture.

He goes on to cite the example of an old advertising campaign for Pepsi, where:

Ben: if you drink Pepsi, then its anti-Coke or its anti-parents you know.

This provokes him to assert that he does not believe that 'one associates with a generation as such anyway'. Generation X is the closest that Ben has come to feeling he belonged to a group - but again, this was in the past and importantly he cannot even remember 'why I would have felt that then', nor can he remember now, 'what were the characteristics of it'. Even though he rejects a notion of 'belonging' to a generation (in his youth or at any time), Ben is still aware that he may have qualified for membership of the so-called Generation X in the past, yet his amnesia as to why he may have, or how it is defined, may be less of a memory lapse on his part and more of a defining feature of the category - even perhaps its central point. Generation X is defined by being indefinable⁴. In terms of the changing periodicity of the notion of generation, it is significant that any reference to a decade is

⁴ As Douglas Coupland, author of *Generation X* (1991) remarks 'regarding Generation X, well, the whole point is that there never was or will be a definition' (Coupland, 1997). He goes on to argue that the term gradually became a 'synonym for young people' for journalists/pundits and whilst initially it was used in a pejorative sense, 'now it's like Kleenex or Jello-O. Semiotically blank', (ibid. 1997). Coupland also comments that 'marketers and journalists never understood that X is a term that defines not a chronological age but a way of looking at the world', (Coupland, 1995).

missing from the signifier 'X'⁵, emphasising that neither age, nor the period in which a person was a young adult are no longer important features of the category. This further emphasises the overall points regarding how notions of generation have changed - from a means *through* which some of the usually older interviewees define themselves in relation to a specific time, in comparison with those usually younger interviewees who use notions of generation as something to define themselves *against*. The latter category feel more that they are separate rather than unified individuals, characterised by a multiplicity of views and sub-cultural styles in their youth, which are then adapted or discarded as they grow older. These changes have emptied the term generation of its former content, to the extent that it can be used to describe almost any grouping⁶. As Ben no longer considers himself a 'young person', and less likely to be targeted by marketing in such a way, he posits this as a reason for him having little or no generational affiliation any more.

Target marketing is one of the individualising and fragmentary forces that are believed by some interviewees to have altered relations to notions of generational identity. In the following examples, marketing techniques are held partially responsible for a perceived rise in differences between generations, which Jack characterises in terms of the level of desire for material goods, consumer cultural lifestyles and diminished idealism:

Jack: youth culture, certainly since the sixties, has sort of, seems to be, its sort of been integrated now and its all sort of a lot of advertising imagery and marketing exercises, all geared toward that age group, you know. Cos they see them as the most susceptible if you like - to go out and buy their products, and er I think the youth culture themselves, probably still see themselves as being very rebellious and its like - they go out and buy the clothes probably still and then you know [laughs] there is kind of this - the way things get integrated into society and then become the tools of which it gets manipulated. [And] its very sort of insidious, you know, something about it.

Jack distinguishes between the youth culture of the sixties and that which has followed it, where the post 60's youth culture, not identified with a specific decade, is perceived to be different, in that it has become more 'integrated' into mainstream, or adult culture. Jack implies that 'youth culture' has since become 'more susceptible', or less resistant, to 'marketing exercises' targeted at it, than in the 60's, where desire for material goods introduces the possibility of being manipulated, or controlled by advertisers and the interests they represent. This awareness produces a more ambiguous relation to

⁵ A survey of a number of so-called 'Gen X' websites conducted by myself, suggests varying age ranges where the term could plausibly be applied - the early sixties to early eighties would cover them all.

⁶ Consider for example popular representations of the 'prozac generation', or 'generation prozac' (Stecker, 2002) in which generations are defined in relation to 'pharmacological habitus', which may be applied to a person of any age, or generation (defined in terms of decades).

generation, in that whilst he does not identify himself with the form of 'youth culture' that he implies is less aware of having their desires manipulated, he does however identify with:

Jack: a generation of, yeah, rebelliousness, really, it probably was started in the 60's you know.

This relation to generation involves a distinction between two kinds of youth culture for Jack: where he distances himself from youth culture in the 'manipulated' sense, but associates himself with another kind of youth culture that he associates with a more general 'rebelliousness', which is an attitude he believes characterises younger people generally, and that the association between rebelliousness and youth originated in the 60's. This relation is now more amorphous and less clearly demarcated in terms of decades. Jack retains a sense of affiliation with elements of youth culture that he sees as being capable of a more resistant attitude:

Jack: I still feel part of a just a kind of youth generation, as far as I'm concerned, and a rebellious nature that wants to defy all these means of control, that we didn't have any say in, in the first place. So, erm, yeah, I feel part of that youth culture that, like, er, the Sex Pistols, sticking two fingers up to it – you know – cos its like who's benefiting from all this youth industry. You know, the people at the top, the large corporations.

Although Jack was not a teenager in the sixties he seems to be aware of and has adopted some of the features popularly attributed to this period - the 'politics of it, or the kind of reforms that were going on', he says. This illustrates a continuity regarding representations of this generation, particularly insofar as it is associated with a more nebulous 'youthful attitude', synonymous here with attempting to defy a perceived mainstream authority, whom he believes are profiting from attempting to control their desires through marketing. This continuity has changed however as he acknowledges that some of the idealistic 'messages' from the sixties 'were lost' in the intervening years:

Jack: there was a lot of messages that were lost in these years, you know, in terms of how we can live together and how we can do away with war and how we can – you know, I mean maybe they're ideals that we'll never achieve, but it seems that its an ideal that is something that is worth kind of hoping for. [As] things can improve you know, so that we have a freer society.

Jack's idealism and some of the values he holds, that he attributes to the sixties, have been tempered, but evidently not completely extinguished by the 'means of control' he identified earlier. Although Jack accepts certain limitations on his idealistic ambitions, he does not abandon them completely, as he still cherishes hopes for a 'freer society', which he advocates through the music he plays, in order to challenge other forms of music and popular culture that he feels have become too homogenised and safe. As its:

Jack: good to not accept, to support the er, monopolising culture and the way that it kind of infiltrates everything, you know – from all the mass media, down to the music industry as well you know - even the way its sort of perverted that.

The 'insidious' and 'monopolising culture' of which target marketing is a part, has 'infiltrate[d] everything' and is viewed as a negative force, that has co-opted and manipulated what Jack regards as the more 'genuinely' rebellious elements of popular, youth culture, that originated in the 60's. Such influence of individual desires has produced less unified relations within youth culture itself and between generations, through the promotion of more individualistic and materialistic attitudes⁷.

These individualistic and materialistic attitudes are evident in differences between generations:

Emma: people from – who I call people of the sixties [have] a very different feel to their attitudes and lifestyles - a much more freer, care-free attitude to, for example, somebody ten years younger [who were] affected by Thatcher and her values and they are much more materialistic. [And] are already getting mortgages at the age of twenty-one and all that sort of thing.

Interestingly Emma, the youngest member of the sample, who was born in the sixties, but did not reach adulthood until 1980, refers to people *of*, rather than *from* the sixties, emphasising again the level of cultural importance attached to this generation, as a defining feature of identity, in her more positive identification with a period (the 60's) which ended when she was still a child. This contrasts to her non-identification with those ten years younger than herself, that is so strong, that she feels they 'seem to come from different worlds' regarding what she feels are their defining characteristics. For her 'there's a definite difference', between the generations and she is 'somewhere in between the two', regarding her own attitudes towards material goods. There is a suggestion that she holds political and economic forces partially responsible for the changes she observes, regarding the more conservative, less 'care-free' attitudes of those who were young people in the late eighties.

The changes in attitudes observed above, relate to how generational associations with the unified, idealistic 60's generation, have given way to looser notions of generation, or groups of individuals.

⁷ The perceived rise in materialistic attitudes, are also implicated in diminishing the idealism (and its implied purity) of the 60's. Holding on to some form of idealism and not abandoning it in later life, is reminiscent of some of the critiques of the 60's generation, by those who were young in the late 70's, who felt that the entrepreneurial efforts of some ex-hippies, exemplified by such ventures as Apple computers and Ben and Jerry's ice cream company, represented a form of 'sell-out' of those ideals, and is captured well in the late 70's slogan – 'never trust a hippie'.

These 'different' people are characterised more by their relation to popular culture, in terms of music, style, fashion and consumer cultural lifestyles. There are also other ways of challenging the homogeneity of the 60's, some of which do not assume the fragmentation of a generation (the 60's - that is assumed to have existed) into different consumer niches, but which contest the very existence of that generation in all places at all. In the following section, there are however different cultural settings, where both national and spatial factors challenge homogeneous notions of the 60's, that define it in quite dissimilar ways to the ones analysed thus far.

4. Challenging the homogenisation of the 60's

The examples discussed so far, regarding what the 60's generation were or are, produce this as a distinct period of time, in which particular things happened, where the assumptions by many of the interviewees here constitute the 60's as an almost universal homogeneous category, now fragmented by consumer cultural lifestyles; a position which is practically unintelligible for others. Some of the Irish interviewees experienced and defined this category in quite different ways, where factors such as nationality, geographical and spatial factors come into play, producing quite different effects related to the lived experiences of the 60's and notions of generation more generally. In pursuing this issue here, my intentions are not to posit a more accurate or truthful picture regarding what the 60's were 'really' like, or to essentialise ethnicity as providing explanations for difference, but to stress instead the variety of ways in which generation is constituted and how this occurs.

In answer to the question can you remember a time when you felt part of a generation? A seemingly similar response to that of Liz in the first section is provided:

John: Yeah, I mean I grew up in my late teens in the late sixties and you couldn't but feel part of a generation.

This comment has a similar 'of course I did factor', leading the listener/reader to expect some of the now familiar rhetoric often associated with this period. However, when asked to explain more about the generation in question and what produced an affiliation to it, the narrative took a different turn:

John: Well, I think the sixties is a very difficult concept in Ireland. [It] was quite a late moderniser in the sense of the post world war two modernisation that took place in Europe and that. I mean it came to reasonably good fruition probably in the early sixties, mid-sixties – many would argue in fact, despite a nominal happening in Ireland in the sixties and seventies that in fact it was much later that it actually happened. So I think there are a lot of false

claims made about the sixties in Ireland, as a period of fundamental change, er, there is no doubt there were openings – slightly more open kind of society, but the core of it was still incredibly fixed and that. At the edges you could see fraying and that and people would grasp onto the fraying at the edges – as being indicative of what was happening generally. But erm, so I think the sixties is a difficult concept in Ireland, its not internationally comparable.

John's reflections here illustrate the often taken-for-granted assumptions about the sixties in the Euro-American context, where proclamations about what the sixties were like and the characteristics of the young people at the time do not bear close scrutiny in all national or cultural contexts. The post-war structural, economic, social and political changes taking place in North America and Western Europe are not mirrored in the Irish context, nor did the changes that did take place there occur within a similar time frame.

The sixties generation has rather different connotations for some within this context. Instead of being characterised as in earlier accounts by political activism, popular cultural lifestyles, peace and love and alleged 'permissiveness', the sixties in Ireland for some involved the:

John: beginning of a collapse of deference.

'Deference' here refers to parental and religious authority, where parents would have expected to have a say in the 'career decisions' of their adult offspring, and where:

John Irish Catholicism had such a grip on us all – some people say we could never even today [laughs] cut the cord fully.

The authority of the church, is portrayed as being able to exert levels of control that were able to resist challenges regarding potential change from the younger generation, allowing parental authority to prevail, whilst restricting intergenerational differences and change. Factors such as these held a 'grip on [them] all' and are posited as reasons as to why perceived cultural changes taking place in the U.K. and elsewhere happened differently in Ireland:

John: substantial lifestyle changes didn't take place in Ireland, the way they took place the way they did, say, in the U.K. [And] you could argue that in Ireland, substantial changes didn't take place until the nineties really, in terms of lots of areas of lifestyle. If you take areas like sexuality among young people and things like that, yeah it was twenty-five years later than most of Western Europe.

Once again a change in the perceived sexual behaviour of the 'younger generation' is identified as heralding a major difference between the generations, yet unlike the earlier examples, the impetus for

these changes does not come from the assumed behaviour of the previous generation, but is seen stemming from external cultural and economic forces, outside the nation's boundaries. The whole notion of the sixties in Ireland is significant for John as the beginning of a move away from different forms of authority – but this did not herald the same kinds of lifestyle changes or at the same pace as those he associated with other Euro-American societies⁸.

Monica, one of the younger interviewees at 41, positioned herself rather differently, answering that she did not feel that 'generation' was a useful concept, as she preferred not to categorise people in terms of their age group, and made no reference to the 60's through which to define herself. Nevertheless, she did make use of the term generation when describing her youth when she was at college, feeling part of a 'technology generation', relating to her experience of 'huge changes' as part of this:

Monica: technology generation – there was a definite change from our parent's generation, in terms of the way people worked. I suppose I was quite career focused at that age – so I would have said, well the women can work, its more acceptable for the woman to work. Now I'm saying that's not necessarily such a good thing and God, we've sold ourselves out [laughs].

The 'technology generation of the 'New Ireland'⁹ is identified as a means of signifying difference from her parents generation. Unlike earlier [non-Irish] examples, who used non-decade defined generational categories or groupings *against* which to define themselves as individuals, or in order to make looser associations with popular cultural styles which preserved their sense of individuality within such groupings, later abandoning them in line with their transient nature; Monica uses a different, non-decade defined generational category *through* which to identify herself *with* other women. This produces a sense of unity with the other women of the 'technology generation', in the implied common experience regarding the difficulties involved in balancing a career with family responsibilities. Again this was different to those younger interviewees who experienced their workplace in the U.K. as being stratified by age, but that this did not map on to, or produce any noteworthy kinds of generational sense of self, where multi-cultural ethnic and religious differences were more significant in this regard.

⁸ Ardah (1995) states that there were no 'hippies' as such in Ireland in the sixties, and the social, economic and cultural factors associated with the rise of modernity, individuality and cultural change in the U.K. and U.S. happened at different rates and in different contexts within Ireland - which could be offered as explanations as to why Ireland could plausibly be seen as being relatively isolated from the changes that John perceived to have taken place beyond its borders.

⁹ The popularly referred to New Ireland is associated with closer links to the E.U. and capital investment by large hi-tech companies. These forces helped produce social change, where increased labour demands created greater necessity for and acceptance of women in the workplace, further necessitating changes in attitudes towards traditionally conceived family life.

This further challenges the homogeneous position which constitutes a generational sense of belonging, as effectively ending once the decade of the 60's drew to a close; when the individualising tendencies associated with target marketing were perceived by some to have eroded an earlier sense of generational unity; a position which is challenged by Monica's sense of generational belonging. This point is also re-enforced by Monica's claiming 'never' to have felt part of a 'baby boom generation', which she associates with 'older' people - citing the ex U.S. President Bill Clinton, as an example of someone who is. Monica's unprompted awareness of the term 'baby boom generation', demonstrates the pervasiveness of its association with notions of the term 'generation' more generally, which can function as something for Monica to define herself against, as it has little applicability in Ireland's national context¹⁰.

Conclusion

Concepts of generation produce a variety of different relations to both the self and to others, which are still evidently important in terms of the production of identity. The interviewees often implicitly cite or refer to their awareness of structural change in order to make their points, which they feel have been influential in producing different relations to generation. Homogenising tendencies are evident in some of the earlier claims made in the introduction and first section, regarding the 60's in particular. These tendencies towards presuming homogeneity of experience, regarding what a generation 'really' is are complicated by nationality, spatial location, gender and relations towards popular culture. In the latter case, relations towards popular culture are implicated in the perceptions of some of the interviewees regarding what they view as the waning significance of generation, who configure it in less rigid terms, where it is not bounded by decades, but more focused around looser notions of temporary identifications with groups. The speed of change within popular cultural styles and fashions, create more fluid changes in self-identity, where generational affiliations, contra Mannheim, are far less likely to be retained into mature adulthood. Even in situations where Mannheim's conditions for the realisation of generation-as-actuality were met in some of the interviewee's perception of their youth, such identifications seemed unlikely to remain indefinitely static. Mannheim's theory presumes a more permanent sense of generational identification, that requires an additional, more fixed form of awareness if it is to survive – which is precisely what the individualising forces some associated with

¹⁰ Ireland is notable as a singular exception amongst other Euro-American countries, for having a relatively stable birth rate with no 'bulge/boom' between the mid nineteen-forties to mid nineteen-sixties. (Central Statistics Office Ireland, 2002).

modernity (and the reflexive project of the self - see Chapter's 4 and 5) appear to undermine. If a collective ethos is not perceived in an individual's youth, then generational identifications are never made in the first instance, or peter out in later adulthood if they were. In this sense, the 60's could be regarded as the last reasonably coherent example of a generation as Mannheim conceived of the term – although even some of those who were young adults and 'there' at the time and could still 'remember' it (now a popularly ascribed contradiction in terms), there was also an awareness amongst some of them of the erosion of its significance.

In view of the above, it remains to be seen whether the baby-boomers, who were characterised by Featherstone and Wernick (1995) as homogenised and as having 'socially critical' faculties that were produced and developed through their 'radical experience of the sixties', will indeed provide the collective resistance that Liz, with whom this chapter began, hoped would force 'consumer society' to 'change tremendously'. And, whether or not they, as a group will have the collective desire or means to be able to prevent current stereotypes of old age, typified by Pollard's (1999) 'beige-cardihood', being applied to them, whilst simultaneously managing to avoid being categorised as a 'burden on the state' in retirement. The subject of generational activism will be returned to in the thesis conclusion. This chapter has illustrated the productive work that generation achieves, regardless of (and perhaps because of) the ambivalences and contradictions associated with the term in general, and with the 60's generation in particular. In the following chapter I will be focusing upon the concept of extended youthfulness, in which notions of generation also have a part to play. 'Generation' is a key way in which extended youthfulness is lived/performed, either as part of the 60's generation, or by producing them as a generation of separate individuals, where individuality is a characteristic of that generation.

Chapter Four: The Lived Experience of Extended Youthfulness: Age is Other People.

Introduction

Some of the central themes that originally provoked the current analysis, are to be found in the following quote regarding members of the so-called 'baby boom' generation, who are 'at once socially critical, narcissistically self-absorbed, and self-defined as forever young (Featherstone and Wernick, 1995, p.13). My response at the time was, are they - and if so how are they? Leaving aside issues surrounding what constitutes a 'baby-boomer' (see chapter 3), this chapter focuses upon if and how the interviewees (who may reasonably be categorised as belonging to such a grouping), are defining themselves as 'forever young' and the extent, if any, of their narcissism. The topic of youthfulness, related to ageing, was also something that the members of the focus group found sufficiently important, in voting it to be included in the interview schedule. What began to emerge from the interviewee's responses was not so much a desire to remain 'forever young', but different levels of orientation towards what could be described as a period of extended youthfulness¹. This describes an almost ideal state of being for the interviewees, where their way's of doing ageing, relates to how they want to think of themselves in the present. It is not about not becoming an adult, but more accurately relates to a desire to keep what could be regarded as the best aspects of life that youth confers -- bodily appearance, health and energy levels, in combination with what are seen as the best traits of adulthood -- confidence, maturity, independence and so on. Rather than wishing to be children,

¹ Hepworth and Featherstone (1982) identify a reconstruction of 'middle age' as 'mid-life'. This is notable for the expansion of the 'middle years' (mid 30's to late 60's), which from the 1920's onwards, in a proliferation of texts, portray this period of life as a time to 'take stock' and for 'self development' - involving an extended phase of vigorous activity. Signs of ageing - wrinkles, sagging flesh and the like, were 'increasingly portrayed as visible evidence of an unwise and socially unacceptable way of life (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1993, p.327). This introduced a moral element to discriminations based upon appearance, facilitating judgements regarding those who were seen to have aged 'well' or not. This new notion of middle age involves deferring processes associated with ageing for 'as long as possible: a youthful appearance was the ideal and 'premature ageing' the dreaded enemy' (ibid.p.327). Images of retirement are also changing (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1995) from traditional representations of passivity and inaction, to more modern representations of 'positive', lively depictions of 'lifestyles' - involving activity, leisure, consumption and choice, that challenge the 'naturalness' and inevitability of slowing down. These 'consumer cultural artefacts' are marketed to older people, with the promise of promoting health and youthful vitality, requiring constant vigilance of themselves and others, regarding the possibility of self-improvement. Consumer cultural representations of the physical body invite the scrutiny of appearance and age-related characteristics - 'younger people, especially women, are warned of the dangers in store and the need to engage in body work to maintain their [non-aged] appearance' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1995, p.29). Those already categorised as 'old', and who are still regarded as youthful looking and fit, are often deemed worthy of praise. In combination these representations serve to further distance middle age (or mid-life), from old age and death - reconfiguring the process of ageing around an extended period of youthfulness. Mid-life social positions, in addition to being historically and culturally situated, are also enmeshed within class, ethnicity and gender relations, which are acknowledged by Featherstone and Hepworth (1993) as leading to differing expectations, possibilities and realisations of mid-life experience - that require further research into how these processes inform everyday understandings of ageing, of which this thesis forms a part.

teenagers or forever young, extended youthfulness refers to a desire to have what could be regarded as the best of both the young and adult worlds. This chapter documents how extended youthfulness is constituted in a variety of ways, manifested in terms of holding particular attitudes, or making lifestyle choices they regard as health and fun promoting. What begins to emerge is the high degree to which consideration is given towards how interaction with others is able to influence their opinions and ability to extend their feeling of being youthful, revealing that notions of age and youthfulness are relational. The concept of extended youthfulness proposed here does not encompass everything about ageing, yet even those interviewees who answered that they did not do anything to remain specifically 'youthful' (roughly half the respondents) said they engaged in similar practices and expressed similar views to those who said they did – albeit for different reasons. All the interviewees were concerned with improving the quality of their life as older people (thirteen of the fifteen respondents did things to remain healthy and active), primarily by holding specific attitudes and doing particular things, perceived as being different to earlier generations and regarded by all as what could be described as being non-old. The different dimensions of how extended youthfulness is constituted are elaborated in what follows.

1. Extended youthfulness: an insecure reflexive achievement

In my interviewee's experience, youthfulness is primarily extended by age-related boundaries being pushed further and further back. In Susan's case she believes that what constitutes a person as being young or old, reveals that ageing is not a static, chronological concept, but is changing, resulting in a person's period of youthfulness being extended:

Susan: Yeah, I think it used to be old to be sixty and now I think sixty is quite a young age – I think eighty – eighty is the new sixty and definitely – like forty's not old anymore is it? People have children at forty. You go out, you live at forty don't you – you can do everything that a twenty year old can do.

Here Susan claims that in her own lifetime what she used to regard as 'old' has changed, with a corresponding knock-on effect for the other age boundaries she identifies, which have expanded to encompass elements previously associated with lower age bands. These elements are conceived in terms of age associated behaviours that she identifies as changing, judging by comparisons she is able to make regarding what she believes was usual, or possible to do at certain ages in the past. Thus she is aware of people now starting families 'at forty'. Other examples of youthful behaviour at

increasingly advanced ages, that demonstrate the existence of extended youthfulness, include those involving participation in strenuous physical sports. Tony still plays:

Tony: 'golden oldies' rugby and – I'll do things that are twenty years old and rugby trips and all that sort of thing. I don't believe in [laughs] you have to switch off now because, you know, you've had your fun. I hope I still will be doing the same sort of stuff when I'm fifty and sixty and seventy.

Tony demonstrates a desire to maintain youthful levels of vitality, requiring a healthy and active body in order to do so, which he expects to be able to do into his seventies. Similarly he sees no reason why he should stop having 'fun' and doing things more usually associated with twenty-year olds. Ben has started 'clubbing' again in his forties and has put his earring back in after resuming:

Ben: going out and that makes you feel younger [and] doing things that you used to do when you were in your twenties.

An awareness of certain dress codes appears to be advantageous in such situations, in that they facilitate an element of choice, regarding the performance of an identity related to extended youth and its acceptance by particular others – clubbers in this instance, which could be advantageous regarding his attracting potential 'dates'.

All of the interviewees were concerned with improving their health, which was often associated with feeling younger. To these ends, Barbara has:

Barbara: given up smoking.

And is trying to:

Barbara: lose weight – and that'll make me feel youthful.

Similar sentiments regarding doing things to remain healthy, that promote feeling more youthful, are shared by Katherine, who uses:

Katherine: quite a lot of wrinkle creams [and] I do go into phases of doing quite a lot of yoga. Erm, and I worry quite a lot about smoking.

Katherine feels that her 'wrinkle creams' do not really 'work' and act more as talismans regarding the feeling of doing something to appear more youthful. In addition to feeling that people are more youthful for longer periods than previously, like many of the other interviewees, she also appreciates certain advantages that she feels maturity brings:

Katherine: I think that the confidence I feel is such a certainty about myself, and in my own identity – is erm, just a helluva lot better than being in my early twenties – which I didn't find very easy.

Aspects of youthfulness are valued and being extended: healthiness, vitality, looks and having fun, commonly associated with younger age groups, are now being performed at increasingly older ages. There are however, attributes linked with a person's youth that are considered less desirable, perceived in the above example as a lack of 'certainty' and 'confidence', which maturity can bring. Extended youthfulness is seen to be an ideal way to be (or aim to be) in the present. This ideal state incorporates what are regarded as the best aspects of both young adulthood and more advanced age groups. Even those interviewees who said they did not do things specifically to remain youthful as such, still valued similar aspects to those who said they did:

Rhona: there's bit's of youthful that I don't really want – silly music, too many episodes of Friends on television, or you know, maybe girls being obsessed with you know, being size eight or whatever. But their energy and good health and sense of humour and being able to enjoy things – I'd hope that they'd apply to – you know, they're the good things about being old, as well as being young.

The hope that the positive aspects of youthfulness that Rhona identifies can also be enjoyed up to and including old age, is not as certain for all the interviewees. Susan implied at the beginning of this section, that quality of life is superior at the younger end of the age spectrum she identified. She characterised this quality as still being able to 'live' at forty, where 'liv[ing]' was equated with 'go[ing] out' and still participating in what might be regarded as more youthful activities, previously indulged in by twenty year olds, with their corresponding levels of vitality, fitness, activity, appearance and viewpoints. Susan implied that beyond a certain, admittedly shifting age, a person's ability to 'live' in such a manner declines. There is evidence however that the elements which are felt to constitute youth and youthfulness, are changing and extending to encompass higher age bands, where the point at what could be regarded as old- agedness occurs, is being pushed further and further back.

Extended youthfulness is also partially constituted in relation to other people. Tim explicitly addresses the meanings associated with particular chronological points and the relative nature of how age is perceived for him. This is partially in terms of it being dependant upon the age of whoever is making the assessment:

Tim: I think I probably don't feel as old as I am, I mean I'm 56, what does 56 mean – how old I feel? I feel middle aged, but only probably in the last five or six years. Whereas young people might see middle age starting at forty or forty five, something like that.

Tim 'feel[s]' younger than his chronological age. He appears to disassociate himself from attributes he feels would ordinarily be applied to someone aged fifty-six. This provokes him to question the 'mean[ing]' of age itself, in that chronological markers are not necessarily the best indicators of what could be termed a persons 'real', authentic, or felt age. Tim has only started identifying himself as middle aged in his early fifties, implying that for him, his period of youthfulness extended to around age fifty. He realises however, that younger people might constitute middle age as beginning at a much earlier point. This highlights that whilst his period of youthfulness has been extended in his eyes, it is also partially dependent upon the age of the person making the judgement. It appears as though Tim prefers to empathise with and heed the opinions and judgements of younger, rather than older people, whose assessments of him appear to be of greater concern. This suggests an awareness of other elements he believes constitute middle age, in addition to chronological markers, which he is then able to reflexively place himself in relation to, whilst simultaneously being aware that other (younger) people may position him differently. This awareness ultimately imposes restrictions upon his choosing which age band he associates himself with, and therefore how old he is able to 'feel'. For Susan and Tim, age related behavioural conventions appear to exist, which they believe are used to make comparisons with. The experience or self-perception of their age is also relative to an extent upon the age of the person (themselves or an other) making the comparison. The freedom to choose the age they feel is limited by concerns regarding what other (often younger) people might view their age as being

Youthfulness is also believed to be able to be extended by adherence to particular attitudes, which in turn facilitate doing things commonly associated with youth:

Susan: its whether you like to have that outlook on life, where you go out and do things, do new things, don't you – meet new people, have friends, have partners – have relationships, or a relationship – friends and a partner, keeps you young doesn't it. And if you end up single again, at thirty whatever, you've got to go out there and find new friendships. And I think that's the attitude, its being positive, you know, and getting on with things really and doing hobbies, or going to new places, so yeah – I like to think I've not shut down [laughs].

A youthful outlook on life is predicated here upon remaining connected to other people, constantly trying new things or visiting new places, all associated with positivity. The implied opposite tendencies of withdrawing from new relationships and not constantly trying to have new experiences are perceived as a form of 'shut[ting] down', associated with being 'old' and negative traits. The emphasis upon trying new things and attempting to keep an open mind, are associated with a more youthful attitude and values. Constantly forging new relationships, replacing partners and so on, are a means of staving off the loneliness and disengagement from the outside world, that often accompanies old age, which would impede or prevent 'getting on with things', which signify the end of the kind of person Susan would like to be.

Nevertheless, it appears that youthfulness cannot be extended indefinitely, as changes to an individual's self-image related to ageing, requires constant negotiation, as Katherine points out:

Katherine: you have to keep adjusting, once you're – I think that in your early 30's, you can go around with this illusion that you're still young at – in a young/immature way I suppose, and get away with it. And I think later on you realise that er, you know you are older and, you have to make a mental adjustment to deal with that. And so I think I've made a lot of mental adjustments [laughs].

In Katherine's case, the boundaries of the behaviours she considers to be 'young' can be sensibly extended up to the early 30's, at least in terms of some people's self image, and still be able to 'get away with it' – where 'get[ting] away with it' is implied to be in terms of other's judgements, regarding how old that they might think they are. There is an implication that a point is reached where the 'illusion' is dispelled, where the individual can no longer 'get away with it' – in that they are made aware and are challenged by other's reactions to them, into accepting that they have become older and are no longer 'youths' as such. So, whilst behaviours commonly associated with particular chronological points appear to be malleable, they are not limitless - in that for some there comes a time when in retrospect ageing is admitted to have occurred and identifications begin to be made with a higher chronological point and what they normally signify, albeit reluctantly.

Some of the interviewees thought the reluctance to identify with particular chronological points influences men in particular, regarding difficulties in reaching the age of forty and their behaviour in long-term partnerships. These are linked with wishing to prolong their feelings of youthfulness, where:

Monica: men tend to see themselves as 18 and then they suddenly realise they're 40, and they're not 18 anymore and they have to adjust to that. And that is difficult, and my husband has found that tough and some of his friends have. I think a strong marriage helps and I think we've seen friends who don't have a strong marriage and the question is, will the marriage survive it, you know.

There is a common perception in Monica's and subsequent examples, which links some men reaching the age of forty and beyond with certain behaviours, related to perceived gender differences regarding the value placed on (their own and others) youthfulness. For Monica there is an implication that the men she knows, have an image of themselves as perpetual eighteen year olds (young adults), who have little sense of responsibility until their fortieth birthday, which may be regarded as some kind of landmark age, from which it is no longer possible to hold on to such a self image. This reveals another aspect of how age can be 'done' to another person – this time in terms of expectations associated with significant chronological points, where Monica has an expectation that men do not become fully adult, or behave as fully grown-up until reaching this age. She believes that the realisation that the men she knows are getting older (reaching 40) requires adjustments to their sense of youthfulness that is 'tough' to accept, which can provoke certain behaviours in those who have difficulty facing up to whatever responsibilities or limits they associate with this age. The difficulties in adjusting to these realisations can be disturbing enough to threaten less adaptable married relationships.

Susan's next example shows how similar behaviour is manifested more explicitly, describing male difficulties in adjusting to perceived limitations on a project of extended youth, regarding their no longer being able to feel as young and free of responsibility as they may have done in their past:

Susan: I've seen a lot of erm – actually the people I work with – you know the coming into their forties type of age group – late thirties, early forties – looking around and thinking 'ooh, its time to get some life' you know – like meet a young girl, lose their responsibilities, lose the family man tag and have some fun before its too late. Yes, I've seen that around me definitely. I think men especially want to live a bit, before they get too old. I think 40 hit's them quite hard and I think it will hit quite a few of you [referring to myself and some mutual friends] in the next year [laughs].

Susan begins by referring to the non-gender specific 'people I work with', when recounting how those in their 30's and 40's decide to 'get some life', where life (and youth) is equated as a 'life' and youth without responsibility, other than indulging individual desires. It becomes apparent later on that she is actually referring only to the men she works with, who are involved in trying to 'lose the family man

tag', as they become acutely aware that time is now against them, concerning any specific desires she feels they have regarding attracting substantially younger women than themselves. This suggests again the idea that forty is perceived as a form of limit by the men described and is seen as almost an excuse for them indulging their youthful, young-adult desires. Short-term sexual relationships are equated with 'fun' and 'liv[ing]', where it is implicit that being a part of a family or over the age of forty are restrictive and have less potential for the activities associated with this type of 'fun'. Particular responsibilities associated with adulthood itself are seen as impinging upon the satisfaction of individual desires for extra marital relationships, or freedom from responsibility towards others, at the expense of other family members feelings. This highlights a high degree of narcissistic concern with the individual self, or self-absorption, where it seems as though there is almost a sense of entitlement that these desires should be fulfilled. It also suggests a reaction against, or resistance to pressures from reflexively construed (actual and imagined) demands placed by others.

Extended youthfulness is constituted in this instance in terms of individualism, involving a form of longing for freedom from responsibility towards others, which they may have enjoyed whilst single, young-adults. This is not seen as a longing for childhood, or to actually be a young adult at eighteen again, rather to have features associated with adulthood, which they can control – confidence, maturity, and individualism, whilst retaining aspects of young adulthood – vitality, health and the freedom to pursue younger women, which could be described as having the best of both worlds. This apparent desire for aspects of being a young adult, combined with the advantages of maturity and long-term relationships, are seen as worrying and threatening by Monica and laughably futile by Susan - both of whom recognise that reaching forty is a form of limit for the men they know, regarding 'liv[ing] a bit, before they get too old'. 'Old' is equated with heralding unwanted change and the loss of individuality and independence.

The perception here is that the majority of men in the age group referred to have been married, or in long term, steady relationship's for some time. This in turn is associated with having less 'life', or 'fun' (constituted as a staple ingredient of extended youth) than when younger and single, where it is assumed such relationships involve more responsibility, particularly if children are involved. Monica is also concerned with having more fun, stating that the:

Monica: things that keep me young are fun – which we [herself and partner] have agreed that we haven't had enough of recently, so we're making a big effort there – so we want to go out a bit and enjoy ourselves – see our friends, erm, spend a bit more time on interests, as opposed to on mundane things and that's what I felt we were missing.

Monica explicitly equates 'keep[ing young]' with 'fun', excluding the possibility that fun can be had whilst behaving as a more mature adult, given its 'mundane' associations. This has been achieved through her recognising and acting on the realisation that both her and her husband, were not having as much 'fun' as they used to, when they were younger adults. It appears as though not being able to indulge individual 'interests' and desires in a partnership is 'tough' to accept, however 'strong' that relationship is and ageing beyond forty is too stark a reminder for some that time is running out, regarding the very possibility of having fun at all. The period between being post-forty and the onset of old age can be described as 'mundane ageing', which acts as a buffer zone between the limits of extended youthfulness and the beginning of old age. It is constituted through feeling the pressure of responsibility toward others, such as for instance, by the demands imposed by childcare and home and /or paid work. This leaves little or no scope for indulging individual desires and interests, or for going out with friends and is experienced as monotonous and lacking in fun. This weighs some of them down and provokes a desire for a kind of golden age, of early adulthood, perceived as a time when such pressures were not as great. It is little wonder then, that the post-forty age category which is experienced as being less individually differentiated and homogenous, in that it is not associated with particular behaviours typifying either young adulthood or old age, is perceived as bland and a limit to having fun. The further associations with dull and unexciting 'mundane ageing' - or the point at which youthfulness is limited by these responsibilities - provokes some to try and prolong their individual concerns and sense of youthfulness, along with the activities they associate with it.

The process of doing extended youthfulness or feeling youthful, requires a high degree of reflexive negotiation and adjustment. According to Katherine, Monica and Susan's examples, many of those who continue to hold the view that they are still 'young' in their 30's, also believe themselves to be at the end of the 'youth' spectrum and are aware that they may be fooling themselves in some way, or viewed as foolish by others, if they are not. A belief that they are still 'young' at these ages might be illusory – as it involves some form of breach of what might be considered customarily acceptable,

which may be out of synch with the views of others. The high degree of reflexivity and adjustment required in order to feel young at such ages, 'fluctuates':

Jack: in terms of age I think, you know – it's something that fluctuates, I don't think it's fixed – I don't know what thirty-eight years old feels like, but I know I've felt old and I've felt young [laughs].

How Jack feels about his specific age is not a constant, but varies according to his, 'state of mind', which is also affected by cues from his body on a:

Jack: physical level – you [can] feel that things are more of an effort.

Although again this varies and can depend upon whether or not he:

Jack: exercises as much as [he] used to do.

Jack's perception of his age varies, depending upon how physically fit he feels and his 'state of mind' generally, which does not make a chronological indicator a reliable guide. As fitness and feelings of vitality can be increased through regular exercise, it follows that it is possible to feel younger than before, if age is measured in the manner Jack suggests. How a person feels about their age is also context dependant, making it possible to feel old in one situation and young in another. This can be seen in Katherine's case, where she says that she is 'not usually taken as older' than her actual age by others, but did feel 'older' on a night out with a group of her friends who are all in their twenties and that:

Katherine: I enjoy going out with them and everything, but there are situations where I'll suddenly feel my age – like we all went to a club in Brixton one drunken night... And er, it was a great night out, but er, I did sort of feel aware that I was erm, a lot older than most of the people in the club.

Whilst Katherine was able to enjoy her night out, she found herself at one point in a space given over almost exclusively to youth culture and largely inhabited by 'youths' in 'a club'. This permitted her to make a number of comparisons between herself and the majority of the clientele, which had the effect of shocking her into 'suddenly' becoming aware of being 'older'. The club environment is implied to be different in some way from the less rigidly age stratified locations she had frequented with her friends previously, that did not have the effect of making her aware of being different. So, it appears that being unaware of ageing, or being consciously aware of feeling youthful, or feeling older, is connected to certain cues or reflexive reminders. These can be taken from particular behaviours, in specific environments or spatial locations, and the appearance associated with particular chronological

groupings of others around them - relating to signs or cues that people display, that are in turn associated with ageing. As Susan points out:

Susan: I think when you go out in erm – like a new bar or something – like a trendy place, and you look around and you see lots of eighteen year olds – suddenly you're old enough to be their parents, whereas its not long ago since you were mixing with that sort of crowd. So then I do start to feel a bit older I think, yeah.

The word 'suddenly' as in Katherine's example, occurs again – where the presence of groups of teenagers jolts Susan into confronting being older and realising she is no longer eighteen. The implication is that she hadn't consciously realised time passing, or sensed having changed particularly since the time when she was eighteen herself. In Susan's everyday situations, there is a sense of time standing still since she reached adulthood and a lack of awareness of her own ageing, where the realisation that she is actually old enough to be their mother comes as an (almost existential) shock - disrupting her sense of comfortably mixing with her peers. In order to feel youthful, or to extend the age at which the above interviewees still feel youthful, becomes increasingly threatened the older they get, by the presence of other, younger people². Susan is made aware when she mixes with groups of young adults, sharing the same social space, that she is no longer quite the same as them, as she is 'old enough to be their parents'.

The reflexive monitoring, negotiations and adjustments regarding an awareness of ageing - whether feeling young or old, involve a high degree of relating to others around them. Susan demonstrates this when commenting on other situations, where her sense of feeling older is brought to her attention. Such as, for example, when she meets an acquaintance who she knows to be a similar age to herself:

Susan: when you meet people you went to school with – you know, that you previously were connected with. And then you, you see them looking older, where you automatically think of yourself as – cos you don't always think of yourself as getting older, but when you see someone that maybe you went to school with, and they've got grey

² The process of an awareness of being aged by other younger people, is played out to its logical conclusion, in the extreme example of so-called 'Sun City' retirement communities (Laws, 1995 in Brown, 1997, pp.43-54). These are purpose built houses, shops and leisure facilities, primarily located in Florida and Arizona, for the 'active' retiree [post aged fifty-five] only. Surrounded by high walls and under twenty four hour security surveillance and aggressively marketed towards those who want to stay and feel young – contact with other non-adults is actively discouraged - in that they neither contain, nor in some cases permit to enter, people under the age of eighteen, representing a safe haven from which to avoid surveillance from younger people - wishing as they do, to distance themselves from viewing old age as being analogous with childhood, or to be reminded of their own ageing. Reliance upon children and relatives is spurned to the extent that such dependence is described in the language of disease – 'gramma-it is' (Fitzgerald, 1986) in the case of residents who leave the community to be with children and grandchildren. As these communities contain all the facilities found in small towns, with one notable exception - medical facilities - once a person is no longer able to participate in the youthful, or active retiree lifestyle, they are effectively forced to leave, via being 'counselled' to find alternative accommodation in a 'care' establishment - lest they remind other residents of their own mortality and limits to their project of extended youthfulness.

hair, you haven't seen them and they look a lot older than you remember them and then you automatically start to think – I'm getting older [laughs], sort of going to school reunions [laughs], that sort of thing.

Importantly, regarding her (sometimes lack of) sense of ageing or youthfulness, it appears as though certain situations are more likely to bring a realisation of her own ageing process than others. Ordinarily she is unaware that she is ageing at all, or that her appearance may have changed over the years, which is an important component in facilitating the process of extended youthfulness. In less usual circumstances, it takes meeting an old acquaintance whom she has not seen for a long time, in order for her to notice the signs of ageing displayed by them ('grey hair' in this instance) and by inference, conclude that this must also be happening to her as well. The high degree of relating to others is underscored here, involved in sensing becoming older. Without such reminders or cues regarding feeling older, her everyday sense of self and appearance remain little different from when she was a young adult, if she is aware of them at all - as 'you don't always think of yourself as getting older'. The realisation of the degree to which she perceives and assesses other ageing bodies, provokes a reflexive awareness of how her own body must appear to others (extended youthfulness, the body and facticity will be discussed more fully in chapter 5), which in turn brings her sudden, instantaneous awareness, that she has also aged twenty plus years. In this sense Susan does not feel that she has a 'true' age, rather that her reflexive awareness of other people's ageing produces her differently in different contexts and in different, 'other' places. Thus there are contexts in which she feels younger or older, or unaware of the ageing process at all, where one scenario is no more real than the other. In this sense, age is relational, constituted in reflexive relations with other people and different situations. Cues of ageing can be taken from both natural and/or cultural sources, neither of which necessarily has a greater authority than the other. Thus a person's wrinkled skin is not necessarily a truer indicator of age, than their mode of dress or where they socialise and visa versa. It is this monitoring and relational adjustments that produce a feeling of a fixed biological body in one instance and a relational body in another – where neither is the 'real' age, or the 'true' body. If these reflexive, relational reminders of age are absent, then the process of extended youthfulness is enhanced.

In sum, there is evidence that the interviewees have a sense of the period of a person's youth - where 'youth' is equated with going out to pubs and clubs, still being able and willing to have children, being able to 'live' life to the full, seek new relationships, maintain a youthful outlook on life and have

fun, as having extended considerably, in what they have witnessed in their own lifetime. The period of sensibly being categorised as youthful is believed to have previously ended in a person's early twenties and for the interviewees here, now extends to forty and beyond. There is a tension however, between having the freedom to individually choose to extend the period of youth so conceived and limitations imposed by reflexive interpretations of how others perceive a person's age. These can come as a shock in certain situations or contexts, particularly those devoted to youth culture, or involving groups of those in early adulthood. This implies that in contexts or environments not strongly associated with youth culture that there is a strong tendency to still feel younger than conventional associations with their chronological age, which is usually quite an easy, although sometimes precarious, everyday reflexive achievement. What emerges from the above examples, is that a person's sense of ageing is very much relative to others and is dependant to an extent upon both the behaviours and signs their bodies exhibit, which are linked with ageing. These in turn have chronological associations – irrespective of their actual chronological age, that they believe are currently able to prevent youthfulness from being extended indefinitely – the post-forty age category being a case in point. Bodily signs as wrinkles for example, can provoke reassessments of biographical narratives of still feeling/behaving as though they are twenty years old, whilst simultaneously illustrating the desire for the body image some may wish to possess or would like to project, that are revealed in their efforts to conceal or reverse them (see section 3). In this sense, appearance or looks are also a limiting factor regarding the possibility of being/feeling 'forever young' and constrain how far youth can sensibly be extended. A consequence of changing age boundaries and the premium placed upon youth and its associations with being able to 'live' and have 'fun', entails some of the interviewees retaining a concern with extending their period of youthfulness well beyond the age of forty, although there are significant internal differences in this regard, as is shown in the next section.

2.The non-binary of extended youthfulness and attitudes towards the 'old'

Differing levels of orientation towards a desire for extended youthfulness produce different affects. The following two interviewees illustrate that whilst they do not wish to possess certain attributes commonly associated with being old – lower levels of vitality, or wrinkled skin for instance, that it does not necessarily follow in a binary sense that they wish to extend their period of youthfulness

indefinitely, or that they desire to actually be younger. This facilitates a more ready acceptance of their being able to identify with similarly chronologically aged people or older - permitting a view of old age that in contrast to some of the other interviewees is not seen in an almost entirely negative light, nor do they feel a need to identify with much younger people than themselves. In section 4, Tony's almost exclusive identification with younger people and inability to identify himself with older people, is partially illustrated by his choosing to describe himself as a 'Peter Pan' figure, which he uses as a positive metaphor for remaining 'forever young'. All the men in the sample do not hold the same metaphor in equal esteem however, as Jack comments when discussing what he does to look after himself:

Jack: I've read lot's of things about ginseng and you know, which has sort of very – incredible properties to your health, to rejuvenate your body and keep it youthful and I've taken it in the past and I find something like that, which is an organic kind of substance, which does make you feel good, taken regularly, it could be, you know, really beneficial. Not because I wanna remain youthful, like Peter Pan, you know, sort of the same age, but because it makes me feel healthy and gives you a sort of boost of energy, which is healthy, rather than something illegal.

In this instance, a focus on health and energy, rather than an identification with younger people per se, is paramount in Jack's use of the term, where he does not appear to wish to remain static with an appearance and behaviour that seems suspended in time like Peter Pan, but is instead happier to appear older, provided he still has his health and a reasonable amount of vitality. This highlights that there is not a necessary binary opposition between old and young - where just because a person might not wish to have certain attributes they associate with being old – ill health, or low energy levels, it does not automatically follow that they wish to be young forever. This more flexible attitude produces a different relation towards both the ageing process itself and those already showing signs of old age, as Jack comments when considering his mother's ageing. When he views photographs of her it makes him aware of:

Jack: the fact that the ageing process is quite a quick thing, in terms of the history of mankind and the history of the earth and just time. [This] makes you aware of your own life I suppose, in that sense. But that doesn't mean to say you can't empathise with the images of other people as they age, or as they seem to be maturing in life.

Jack's sensitivity to ageing in the wider context of the 'history of the earth' produces an awareness of change in all things, where ageing is happening to everything around him, including himself. This awareness facilitates 'empathy' for other, aged people and an acceptance of his own ageing in the wider context.

The acceptance that everything and everyone around him are ageing also produces a sense of loss:

Jack: I don't want to sound as though I'm [laughs] talking about age as being a bad thing. Because you want to hold onto life – if you appreciate life, that is – you want to hold onto it and you realise that its something precious in your childhood, that is lost when you reach adulthood – something precious that is lost from your twenties to your thirties, you know, cos your vigour, or your outlook may have changed quite considerably.

This sense of ageing conceived in terms of 'loss' is revealing, in that it is not dependant upon changes in his physical appearance, regarding the loss of youthful looks, but relates instead to changes in attitudes and the perhaps more masculine association of the loss of 'vigour'. This awareness is different, in that it is not entirely negative, as its realisation fosters a realisation in Jack of an appreciation for the 'precious[ness]' of 'life' at all its different stages, particularly when he reminds himself of a photograph of an old man he also brought to the interview, who had:

Jack: that kind of surprise in his eyes, you know, that made me realise something I've just thought of, that you can be surprised all through your life – at different things. Whether it's good or bad. We can't predict from one moment to the next, what is actually going to happen to us. So we are surrounded by unknown things, unknown territories and encounters – which is great you know.

So, not all aspects of old age and representations of older people need just be sobering, or fearful reminders of mortality in their affects. Some are able to act as reminders that there are still worthwhile pleasures to be had at any stage of the lifecourse, and that there is a possibility of excitement to be had from embracing change, in all its 'surpris[ing]' forms, which can be gratifying and 'great' at any age.

In a similar vein, notions of attractiveness need not necessarily be equated with being 'forever young', or involve a necessary binary opposition between 'young' and 'old'. In section 3 one the interviewees say's she would like a partner who 'appreciates differences' in terms of having any changes to her physical appearance wrought by age, accepted as they are, without being perceived as diminishing her attractiveness. She goes on to comment, in answer to a question asking whether she did anything to 'remain youthful' or not, that:

Sadie: I use a lot of moisturiser [laughs]. But that's quite a comfort thing as well, its quite nice for your skin to sort of not – cos it does really feel drier [laughs] when you get older, so putting moisturiser on counteracts that, but it also has the benefit of reducing your age appearance and I suppose I try not to get as sunburnt as I used to as well,

because I know that can be harmful and apparently its ageing – ahmn. So yeah I do dye my hair sometimes and sometimes I wear makeup, so I suppose those could be seen – But that – you could be saying that makeup to sort of make you feel as if you look more attractive – not necessarily more youthful – I don't think. I think they are – all those things are sort of to make you feel more attractive – so I don't think youthful is quite the right answer. No, I don't think I specifically do things cos I don't really yearn to be or look younger. Although its quite nice if people say I don't look as old as I am [laughs].

For Sadie, her appearance is detached and separated from wishing to appear youthful per se, citing other reasons for using the products she does – moisturiser, sun cream, hair dye and make-up, as they make her feel 'more attractive', rather than a desire to feel more 'youthful'. Although Sadie chooses to use these products in order to feel attractive, rather than youthful, they are often marketed with promises to reduce the appearance of signs of ageing in order to ensure more 'beautiful' looking skin - often equated in the copy with younger looking skin³. These act as external influences, implicitly promoting the message that aged skin, or grey hair should be unwanted, reduced or removed. Such advertisements provoke and invite people – usually women, to self reflexively monitor and become aware of their aged appearance in particular ways, which they may not have imagined before – possibly producing new insecurities and fears of ageing in those who almost inevitably 'find' the signs they have been implicitly asked to check for. So, it is very interesting to note that 'reducing your age appearance' is viewed by Sadie as a benefit and that it is 'nice' if 'people' say that she does not look as old as she is – or that she avoids sunburn as it is 'harmful' and 'ageing', as opposed to healthy and radiant. This reveals the complexities and ambiguities involved in trying to manage notions of attractiveness in different situations, without referring to youthfulness aligned with sexuality, as being of benefit in some way - given the external influences that attempt to link them together and promote them as valuable⁴. Despite Sadie's best efforts to separate them, it appears as though such cultural standards are deeply embedded to the extent that it will be very difficult for her to do so, given the pervasiveness of the link between youth and attractiveness and the level of esteem in which they are

³ See for example, Olay [2004] *Total Effects Anti-Ageing Moisturiser*. This promises to 'reduce the appearance of the 7 signs of ageing for visibly younger looking skin', where the seven signs to look for can be summarised as: lines and wrinkles; uneven skin texture; dullness; visible pores; blotches and age spots; dry areas and uneven skin tone. The skin is helpfully further subdivided into the most 'age-prone zones', should the potential customer be in any doubt where to look. The 7 signs are most apparent on the face, specifically the forehead, cheeks and around the eyes and mouth. It seems unlikely that anyone over the age of eighteen would come away completely 'sign' free, from such levels of scrutiny. The Total Effects foundation will 'help you look beautiful and stay beautiful', implying that from a cosmetics company perspective, unless you look young, you cannot be beautiful.

⁴ An article in *The Observer* (Adams, 2003) supplement on the body stated that the U.S. 'grey beauty' business was valued in 2003 at around twenty billion pounds. This business incorporates women and men, particularly the post forty year old baby boomers, who 'grew up in the youth obsessed 1960's and 1970's' (Adams, 2003, p.9) spending money in order to 'preserve their fading looks' (ibid.p.9) on a variety of treatments – botox, hormone replacement, anti-wrinkle serums, fitness and hair dyes.

held by others. In order to feel attractive, she is almost compelled to refer to youthfulness in some way, despite her desires to the contrary.

Although the interviewees in these examples do not wish to possess certain traits often attributed to being old, they demonstrate that there is not a necessary binary relation between this and wanting to be younger. Such a position produces more of an acceptance of both their own and others ageing processes. There are however (possibly gendered – given the historical differences in the objectification of women and men) limits, which are able to constrain their individual choices, regarding how they are ageing, or might wish to be perceived by others. The ageing process, in relation to changes in the body and its outward appearance, can be problematic for those with more of an orientation towards remaining, or extending their period of youthfulness.

3. Extended youthfulness, narcissism and the limits of control

The self-adjustment and monitoring of appearance is a key site in the constitution of ageing and differing levels of feelings related to the desire for youthfulness. Appearance, in a variety of forms, is a limiting factor in how far youthfulness can be extended, even though gradual changes in it may not be immediately apparent on a daily basis, or carry the same significance in relation to gender. Physical changes in how the body's looks, are monitored in terms of their association with and signification of old age. Such as, for instance, the appearance of wrinkles, grey hair, loss of hair, weight-gain, loss of muscle tone and so on. These signs of ageing are able to affect the interviewee's sense of their own ageing and produce different subject positions in relation to it. This can be problematic for those who wish to choose to actively manage their aged appearance, particularly if they do not wish to exhibit bodily signs associated with older age. Amanda does do things to attempt to remain youthful, but jokes that:

Amanda: oh god! I've obviously failed miserably as you can tell by looking at me. Erm, I'm terribly practical and I rationalise everything. So, I ahmn walk quite a bit, but that's just because I have to get from a to b [laughs] and I don't like to drive, so you know I can organise my life and erm – I used to belong to a health club, but I never went, so ahmn I basically just walk up escalators at tube stations and things like that.

Amanda applies practical reasoning in her attempts to remain youthful by walking as a preferred means of transport – not for the fun or enjoyment of physical exercise (she stopped going to the gym

she joined) but rationalises that it may be good for her in terms of preserving a youthful look. Although she acknowledges in her joke that she cannot rationally control everything about her appearance – ‘I’ve obviously failed miserably’, regarding choosing trying to look younger, as she is aware of her lack of control over how others might perceive her age to be – ‘as you can tell by looking at me’, which limits the extent to which feeling younger, is for her, a matter of individual choice.

The concern with displaying a particular image, relating to ageing and extended youthfulness involves differing levels of narcissism (see chapter 5), producing different subject positions. Narcissism⁵ in this context refers to the high degree to which the interviewees are individually self pre-occupied. Whilst containing a component of reflexivity, it additionally involves constant self-scrutiny of particular aspects – youthfulness, appearance, attractiveness, healthiness, vitality and so on, in which they are almost always found wanting. The narcissism exhibited by them is not necessarily enamoured nor self-satisfied with what they see:

Amanda: part of er, sort of the immature side of me, I’m just you know, honest and er its very sobering to look at photographs because I don’t see myself looking as old as I look in photographs and so I think its very interesting to imagine what one sees in a mirror and interpreting it in a bit of a time warp.

Amanda chastises herself over her ‘immature’ concern with her appearance, implying that she feels older looking (mature) people should no longer care as much about their appearance, or should be able to resist such concerns more readily. She goes on to clarify that despite her maturity, accepting her ageing appearance is difficult and ‘very sobering’ nonetheless, as her outer appearance does not match her (younger looking) sense of self⁶. Amanda’s ambivalent relation to her ‘looks’ do affect her, whether she likes it or not, however inappropriate she feels this to be at her age. This reveals a reflexive compulsion to be narcissistic, where thinking about her aged appearance, serves to constitute her ageing through the reflexive judgements she makes about it and her behaviour – appearing old in one situation (the photograph) and relatively unchanged in another (her mirror

⁵ Featherstone and Wernick’s (1995) narcissism, refers to a ‘self-absorbed’, shared interest in the perceived concerns that constitute a generation, produced through a ‘relatively unifying’ and self-consciously aware ‘historical experience’ in Mannheim’s (1952) terms – see chapter 3 for an elaboration of this theory. This form of narcissism relates to self-interest in the ‘collective’, generational experience produced through being a young adult in the ‘radical’ 1960’s, partially formed through members potential as a ‘market’. This is in contrast to the more individuated ‘life-course experience’ documented by the majority of interviewees here.

⁶ The ‘distance’ between a stereotyped aged outer bodily appearance, that does not reflect the experience of the age of the inner self, is argued by Featherstone and Hepworth (1989) and Hepworth, (1991) to be affected by ‘symbolic meanings’ attributed to the face and body and the extent of the frequency to which they are visible in society. The physical changes stereotypically associated with the category ‘aged’ and the passage of time, can be described as a ‘mask’, concealing the younger self within.

image). This is evidently an unpleasant experience and also an unsatisfying form of narcissism, which is not un-troublesome for her.

The narcissistic concern with appearance is also constituted through observations of other, older people:

John: yes they do affect you [laughs] in that erm, I think you see physical characteristics and deterioration that you find unattractive – and then you say to yourself, my god, that's what's happening to me. And maybe even happening at a rate you don't even notice, because of its gradual nature. And I think every time and stop and say am I getting like that – so yes it does affect you, particularly what you might call the more unattractive aspects of it.

Not only are the interviewees affected by other peers they see around them, in terms of benchmarks for comparison, but the signs of ageing observed seem to carry overwhelmingly negative connotations. Ageing is equated here with 'deterioration' and being 'unattractive', so it is little wonder then, given such associations, that accepting that it is also happening (to John in this instance) can be so difficult, as it is 'sobering' to be reminded of 'deterioration' and most would probably be less than happy to consider themselves 'unattractive'. In considering other older people's appearance, John is also reflexively made aware of his own appearance. His awareness of others ageing and the realisation by inference of his own ageing, compels him to reflexively 'do' ageing to himself and others (with negative connotations attached). As John does not wish to exhibit the bodily signs he is aware of in other aged individuals – regarding them as 'unattractive', there is a form of reflexive and continual narcissistic concern implied, in the sense of him wishing to remain if not younger looking, then less aged looking, in order to feel more comfortable.

Judgements made about aged appearance are connected to and reveal what is customarily considered to be acceptable, in terms of what is culturally valued as aesthetically pleasing, where a higher premium is attached to a more youthful appearance, that does not exhibit particular bodily signs associated with ageing. For those who do not wish to exhibit such signs of ageing, there will always be the uncomfortable knowledge that changes wrought by ageing cannot ultimately be prevented, however much they may do to slow or reverse them. Tony displays a great awareness of and willingness to conform in this regard, answering a question that he did do things to remain specifically youthful, being determined to remain:

Tony: active, erm, eating – giving more consideration to what I eat, trying to quit smoking for the millionth time [laughs], yeah doing stuff outdoors.

This inspires him to try to do particular things he believes will help him remain youthful for as long as possible, following a healthy diet, exercising, getting fresh air and attempting not to smoke. Tony was also emphatic on the topic of age related dress codes, claiming that he:

Tony: will not wear Pringle v-necks, I don't want to look like, you know, these awful people that golf. Yeah erm, so maybe that's some acknowledgement that I don't want to look like some old, middle aged guy, I just don't – erm, but I think its also that I just hate Pringle sweaters [laughs].

Items of clothing (and particular sports – golf in this instance) are linked with projecting certain images, not only in terms of fashion trends, but also in terms of reflecting the chronological age of the wearer. In Tony's opinion Pringle sweaters are not appealing, primarily due to the image he associates with them, of 'old, middle aged guy's', where 'old', or even 'middle aged' are looks he definitely does not want to be associated with – suggesting an acute desire and strategy for remaining youthful looking for longer (by not wearing such clothes himself).

How a person styles their hair is also important in terms of the images the interviewees wish to project of themselves, as John comments:

John: you consider a lot of things that you don't do, it'll cross my mind – should I have started dying my beard or my hair sooner, before it got so grey [laughs] and then it would be less noticeable. So I think people play around a lot with what they might do – I'm not so sure that they do much actually [laughs]. And I wouldn't say – I do some, but not that much – I don't think people ever grasp doing a lot. Erm, like a friend of mine, who's the same age [mid fifties], he said – you know that I.T. technician we had with the bald head, he said, I wonder if I did that [shave his head], would I look younger [laughs]. Because he said, John, when you look at him, he's actually quite bald. Now that's just a playful thought – but I think it is an example of the way people think around with varying degrees of seriousness, about things like that. But I think 90% of the time, nothing is done.

The fact that he and his friend spend some of their time considering and reflecting upon these issues – reflexively 'doing' ageing to themselves and others, in their interpretations of physical signs, still reveals a concern with not wishing to display certain physical features, even if they do not necessarily go through with all of them. These are not neutral signs of advanced ageing, but are interpreted as having negative connotations attached. This provokes John to consider that they should ideally be disguised in some way, preferably before anyone notices them, in order to present either an

unchangingly youthful or a 'younger' looking appearance – where greyness or pattern baldness are viewed unfavourably. In that they are associated with old age and looking 'younger' is what counts in this instance. Such evaluations are revealing in terms of how he feels these signs of ageing are currently situated, in terms of their cultural significance. Whilst it is not entirely clear whether or not '90% of the time, nothing is done', refers to all older people, or more specifically to men, there is a definite sense that he believes these issues do concern 'people' in general. John's awareness of ageing has led him to become:

John: more conscious of things like diet and that you get more conscious of your appearance and the way you dress – I'm not for a moment suggesting that I'm a trendy dresser or anything like that, but erm you do become conscious of it – some people don't, but I do. I suppose in terms of outward appearance you make efforts in that way, or you're conscious of it. Or you wonder should you, or should you just say no, I'm not going to cave in to that – whatever happens, happens whether I carry on or whatever, o.k.

An awareness of ageing, or recognising the signs associated with old age – putting on weight, or not following trends in fashion, reflexively compel John to attempt to control his outer bodily appearance. As with Amanda he has the contradictory and perhaps uneasy feeling that he ought not to let it bother him and a feeling that he should resist such urges, as they seem inappropriate concerns for someone his age and maturity, suggestive of a desire to be free from something that is a troublesome, rather than pleasant experience. Additionally his appearance is probably going to change, irrespective of whether he conforms or not, and he will still age, and the trends will still continue to change whatever he does now, prompting him to resist such forces, described in terms of not 'caving-in' to their perceived demands. Yet evidently this awareness does not prevent such factors exerting substantial influence over him and illustrates that a person may not be completely free to individually choose how youthful or old they feel – given that bodily signs appear to place limits, via the reflexive interpretations of others (and his own) reactions to them. There is also a suggestion by John that he feels these limits may not be absolute, provided that there is a willingness to work on ensuring a particular diet and that modes of dress, regarding changing fashions, are constantly monitored and adapted to. While he has the sense of a possibility of changing his aged appearance, he will carry the burden that there could always be something else that he could potentially be doing to address it. This highlights a narcissism that is anything but self-satisfied.

Sadie elaborates her feelings on how standards of (sexual) attractiveness related to an aged appearance may occur and also be beyond individual control:

Sadie: its something that you don't much celebrate and its something that has generally been hidden away. Older bodies are pretty much regarded as fairly unattractive and not to be displayed or seen. And I would like to think that you know, if I had a partner, that that person would appreciate differences, rather than you know, be upset by them and the same for myself.

It is other people who regard 'older bodies' as being 'unattractive', to the extent that they should not be 'displayed' or 'seen', lest they offend anyone's aesthetic sensibilities, a factor contributing to the production of an awareness of 'older bodies', as an undifferentiated, almost invisible mass. The non-display of such bodies contributes to a lack of individuality when cast as 'old people', highlighting the extent to which others are valued and appropriated in terms of such desirability. The fact that Sadie would like to be appreciated for her older 'differences', shows her resistance to these cultural standards, in that she does not make a necessary binary link between a desire to be attractive, with a desire to appear younger, even though she is well aware that older bodies are generally regarded as 'fairly unattractive' - to the extent that rather than containing the possibility of being sexually desirable, they are more likely to be 'upset[ting]'. This highlights that the contemporary emphasis on active sexuality, as an essential aspect self, is one of the elements contributing to the production of extended youthfulness. In that linking notions of sexual attractiveness to an aged appearance appears to be almost unthinkable and taboo, and when conceived of in such a way, makes it not entirely unreasonable or inconsistent to wish to appear more youthful in order to be valued – whilst simultaneously being critical of such evaluations regarding self worth, preferring instead to be appreciated and of value, irrespective of whatever signs of old age may be in evidence. In this instance, extended youthfulness is again constituted as an ideal state, whereby rather than desiring to be 'forever young' some members of the 'baby boom generation' may be more appropriately described as wishing to be forever attractive, or forever desirable.

Although Sadie would choose to have her 'differences' appreciated by her partner and would willingly do the same in return, there is a suggestion that her potential partner may not feel the same way. If this happened to be the case, there would be little choice for her in terms of how ageing would be done to her, short of finding a partner with a similar view to herself. Considering the previously mentioned gendered views on attractiveness (section 3), related to a youthful appearance, this might

be less than easy to accomplish. It may also result in some women experiencing feeling homogeneously 'old' before some of the men in the sample. Sadie's awareness of gendered views regarding aged attractiveness, illustrate how she is almost forced to become more self-reflexive and narcissistic as she gets older. She is made aware of the possible reactions of others to her appearance, and is constrained in terms of the extent to which she has a choice in terms of how she might hope to be appreciated. For Sadie, what we might call the facticity of her ageing body and its appearance, produces an ambivalent relation towards extended youthfulness, over which she has only limited control.

For Amanda, the alignment of youth with notions of an attractive appearance is also mediated by gender⁷ and may be even more pronounced in other cultural environments. As a U.S. national, who is 'very, very conscious' of her ageing, Amanda states that although she has lived in England for many years, she:

Amanda: spent the first twenty years of [her] life in America, [and is] a product of that cult of youth, perhaps as well – which exists rather more, perhaps erm over-emphasis on youthful appearance – especially for women rather than men. They seem to be under rather a lot of pressure to not grow old and yet of course it's inevitable.

Amanda acknowledges that she is very conscious of her appearance in terms of her ageing, which she attributes to ingrained social pressures she experienced, during her upbringing in the U.S. – a culture which she believes is particularly concerned with promoting the notion that keeping a youthful appearance, is highly valued, particularly in the case of women. These pressures may be diminished for her in the future, as she expects to feel some relief and compensation for no longer being judged on her looks alone, as she believes her aged appearance will eventually no longer generate such attention:

Amanda: I'm waiting for that mantle – of all that attention, to perhaps go elsewhere.

She goes on to narrate an example, where as part of her job, she attends meetings in different European countries:

Amanda: they're usually Professor level, there erm usually do have rather a lot of men from continental universities especially, so erm, you know, I'd be quite relieved actually to not have to play that role. I suppose it would be easy

⁷ Lakoff and Scher (1984) argue that stereotypes of women's physical attractiveness are equated with a youthful appearance, which are also a traditional source of power for those who match these criteria - that can therefore, diminish through and by time. As men's power is more likely to be based around occupational and financial status, which are potentially more long-lived, this can produce a 'double standard of ageing' (Sontag, 1978).

for you to say, well, why let yourself play that role, but its more sort of the way in which that erm attitude comes at me, then I need to come back without being rude, because I don't think that its anything sinister, and erm – yet it can be quite irritating, when one cares perhaps more about the ideas than the superficial interpersonal exchange.

Amanda felt that her appearance affected how she was treated by some of her male colleagues, at meetings and conferences. This was 'irritating', as she felt that she had little control over being appropriated in such a manner, and would have been far happier if it was not an issue at all. She felt that this would happen, once her 'looks' had aged further (making an explicit link between attractiveness and youthfulness) - when she expects that she will no longer have 'role[s]' associated with sexual attraction imposed upon her.

Significantly, this is complicated however, by her feelings regarding what she perceives to be other gendered differences, relating to appearance and attractiveness, believing it to be:

Amanda: unfair how like, how men get better looking as they get older and women don't – you know and I think all this idea of the triumph bride [trophy?] and how you see men trading in the older version for a younger one, maybe in some cultures more than others, that piss me off.

This example is illustrative of the culturally defined extent to which a youthful appearance, aligned with perceived attractiveness and mediated by gender, is held in higher regard than a more aged appearance. It is not contradictory for Amanda to desire a time when she is not valued in terms of her looks, whilst pragmatically acknowledging that being valued/appropriated in such a way does happen, that is beyond her control and has negative connotations attached, regarding the stability of her relationships. Holding such a gendered perception of youthfulness equated with attractiveness makes Amanda angry (regarding the consequences she associates with it), which also points to a view that acknowledges some utility in remaining youthful looking, however 'unfair' it may be. This is part of the reason why a compulsion to be reflexively narcissistic Lasch (1991) can be so un-pleasurable and experienced as 'pressure'- particularly in the apparently gendered context of 'attractiveness', related to an aged appearance (see chapter 5 for a discussion of narcissism).

It is not only in the U.S. context that people are:

David: trying to look younger, because society demands that we look younger and so, the plastic surgeon makes a great living – unless he's sued of course, erm, and in which case he's allowed to make a great living, so that's

alright. Erm, but I suppose people do that, partly for their own satisfaction, but also partly do it because society demands it of them. Because in some way's you're respected if you are younger and stronger, not if you're older and stronger I guess.

Not only does David perceive social pressures to look younger and actively monitor his aged appearance - that place restrictions on choosing to do nothing about it - but he feels that there are also other incentives for those who are judged to have accomplished it, beyond being merely attractive for its own sake. Such an individual will earn themselves 'respect' from others if they appear more youthful - which may be reflected in reflexively monitored attitudes at both individual and societal levels, towards the young and the old. The self adjustment and monitoring of appearance, involves a high degree of narcissism, involving judgements based upon external standards and the perception of others, that form a key site in the constitution of differing relations towards age and the desire for extended youthfulness - often seeming to be experienced as a disciplinary burden, even when being consciously resisted by some. This is a form of narcissism that is intrinsically unsatisfying and unpleasurable, manifested as individual self-absorption in their aged appearance, that is part of the normalisation and naturalness of individualism (as shown in chapter 5). These concerns with appearance are reflexively and simultaneously both inner and outer directed towards the perceived (often negative) opinions of others. The most willing participants who attempt to enjoy the advantages that extended youthfulness, or a more youthful appearance may confer, cannot afford to stop doing things to remain youthful, given the changes wrought by time, that requires them to be constantly vigilant. Even those who wish to resist such forces are subject to external pressures to conform, within certain contexts, however much they may resent it.

4. Extended youth as a choice

In addition to choices made about appearance, extended youthfulness and the age a person feels, can also be constituted in terms of choosing to adhere to particular personality traits, attitudes and behaviours, which are associated with (a younger) chronological age. In the following examples, extended youthfulness is achieved by choosing the company of chronologically younger people than themselves. In David's case:

David: most of my close friends are younger than I am and are people I do lots of socialising with.

Whereas people of a similar age or older he does not:

David: really have much in common with [and] these people are too fuddy duddy, or whatever -

Here chronological age is constituted in terms of personality traits and attitudes, rather than looks, in that David generally perceives people of a similar age or older than himself to be dull, uninteresting and different. He prefers to spend most of his time with and align his attitudes and behaviour with his 'close friends' - most of whom are chronologically younger than himself. David suspects that he makes such identifications, in order to feel more youthful himself:

David: I always think of myself as rather young at heart. [And] I like the company of younger people, now whether it's a sort of lack of recognition that I'm growing old, or whether it's a definite desire not to grow old - I don't know.

The implication is that socialising with other, similarly aged people or older, whom he does not feel subscribe to his notion of extended youthfulness, produces disassociation from them, which would limit him in this regard. The same approach is true of Monica, where interactions with other, younger people serve to keep her feeling younger:

Monica: so what keeps me feeling young - erm, my job [lecturer] actually keeps me young and I don't think I appreciated that before I joined. It's lovely to work with young people, because they're so full of enthusiasm and think they're going to change the world, which they probably will do actually, you know. Part of me is cynical and saying oh yeah, it'll be the same, but it isn't going to be the same, its always changing anyway.

Interactions with chronologically younger people also has the effect of allowing Monica to feel younger herself, by reminding and enthusing her with the notion that the world is not static, as she implies may apply to those older people with a less fresh pair of eyes, where things can always be different than they are. There is a link between the extent to which a person identifies common elements between themselves and with younger, similarly aged or older people and their desire for extended youthfulness (irrespective of their own chronological age).

What David is aware of or 'know[s]' is that he thinks of himself as:

David: hopefully, not eternally young but, kind of on that side of things [And] I don't really think of myself as old at all - I don't even think of myself as 45 - its strange I never have. [M]y father's mother used to call me 'Peter Pan, funny wee man' in the sense of just never growing up.

The desire to maintain a sense of never feeling old, or 'never growing up' and effectively extending a period of youthfulness, requires choosing a corresponding level of disassociation from other 'older'

people, that is strongest in those who exhibit the highest levels of a desire for extended youthfulness. Such traits are pushed to an extreme in Tony's case:

Tony: I actually prefer the company of the twenty two, twenty five year olds I work with on the outside, [also that] I'm actually very conscious that I'm very different to my contemporaries, very, very different, erm, in that the people I hang out with, you know, my good friends, tend to be twenties and thirties. [My] girlfriends, even in the last few years have been twenty-five and twenty-sixes and er, the oldest girlfriend I had, has now been blown out – still at present, thirty two. And that might be me saying ok I just – people like my age – personally, I find them boring, erm, there are a few exceptions.

Tony goes even further in choosing to identify himself with considerably younger people, in order to feel more youthful himself, insisting that he is 'different' and has nothing in common with, nor desire to be associated with, anyone who is a similar age - only ever socialising or having relationships with people considerably younger than himself. There is a suggestion that his 'oldest girlfriend' being 'blown-out', may have had something to do with her becoming too old for his tastes, given his focus upon stressing her age. Tony's dismissal of his contemporaries in a vocabulary more commonly associated with youth - they are 'boring' with 'few exceptions', 'blow[ing] out' his 'oldest girlfriend', suggest a desire to create an impression of being more youthful. He does not:

Tony: want to enter old age, the same way as my dad – that's a very, very conscious decision. I actually would be very, very unhappy. Erm, now, then I look at other old people, and I say, is there any old person that I really admire [laughs], no! And you know, that maybe is something related to myself. I actually don't like interacting with old people, erm, I just don't – I don't find that they have that quality that I like, you know in being with say younger people, or people my own age. Erm, and that might be telling [laughs].

Here, Tony uses memories of his father as a cautionary example in order to motivate himself to manage age, in order to extend his period of youthfulness - as his father contradicts the image he would prefer to hold of himself, as being unusually 'young at heart'. Tony's statement reveals his attitude regarding a keenly felt sense of the possibility of consciously choosing how to age, which is very much oriented towards extending his youthfulness. His behaviour also marks a conscious, reflexive effort on his part to avoid having his chronological age done to him by others, through choosing to avoid the company of those his own age, or rarely being associated with them. This highlights a fear of being limited by them, should he find himself beginning to identify with them and a rejection of their identification with him. In this sense Tony regards some forms of ageing as being vastly preferable to and more fun than others. These only seem to be able to be achieved in specific contexts, namely by enjoying the company and pastimes of considerably chronologically younger

people than himself. This is because he feels that the majority, if not all people of a similar age or older to himself, are either 'boring' or unsatisfactory role models and unworthy of admiration or emulation. Tony represents them as homogeneous (his use of the word 'they') and undifferentiated - prompting him to avoid 'interactions' with 'old people', preferring instead to spend his time in different relationships with younger people:

Tony: interacting with a lot of very early twenty year olds.

This is part of his charity work with the students union, which is very:

Tony: demanding in terms of time and – oh, just energy. And well I'm making an effort to say I have to match these twenty year olds, who have all the energy in the world to burn – I can do it, but it takes a lot out of me – yeah, that's when I'm conscious of age, is that my recovery time, from say a fourteen or a sixteen hour day, erm that's maybe the fifth or sixth in a row, is longer than theirs. And physically it takes it out of me.

This led to him being very ill on the first day of his summer holidays when he slowed down a bit:

Tony: I just got totally run down and the moment I could switch off, my body switched off. And I ended up getting a really bad throat infection, then I got shingles and I think it was my body saying – you're pushing yourself too far, and I was conscious then of – shit, I'm getting older! But it was physical, rather than mental, erm, mentally in my mind and in my outlook, I'm as young as I was when I was twenty.

The above extract illustrates how strongly Tony feels that his body is separate from his mind in his conscious attempts to remain as 'young' as the people he socialises with and the amount of effort and energy required that he is prepared to expend in order to do so. Not only does he socialise with and attempt to adopt the attitudes of chronologically younger people than himself, but he also chooses to try and match their physical energy levels – prepared to push himself almost to the point of collapse to achieve it. Even if his body finds such aspirations hard in terms of physical demands, his attitude is that through conscious choice, will and determination such practices will keep him as 'young as I was when I was twenty'.

This is also very revealing in terms of what might be regarded as some of the cultural traits associated with age that are highly valued, namely youthful vitality and energy, which can inspire a high degree of desire for self preservation in some. Tony is keen to reassure me (the younger interviewer) that when he meets:

Tony: one of the girls – who is my project director for the charity project this year for a pint, and we enjoy each other's company And its mutual, its not a case of here's the old fogey. We actually have a lot of craic together and I'll do things that are twenty years old and rugby trips and all that sort of thing. I don't believe in, ah ha, you have to switch off now because, you know you've had your fun – I don't [laughs]. And erm, in a lot of interactions I'd have with any age group, I will be the rugby player at heart who will start the messin' or the fun and that's I suppose in some way's, er – this is rugby as being forty something. And I [unclear] I hope I still will be doing the same sort of stuff when I'm fifty and sixty and seventy [laughs].

That Tony feels that he has to justify to me the interviewer that the enjoyment of 'each other's company' is 'mutual', referring to a younger, female friend of his, illustrates some of the perceived social norms regarding behaviour between adults of significantly different ages of which he is reflexively aware. There is a suggestion that it is not likely that someone from the younger age group would 'really' enjoy his company on a 'mutual' basis, or that such a relationship might be inappropriate in some way, regarding the possibility of sexual attraction between them, which may limit the extent to which he is able to feel as though he is still a youthful twenty. Again the theme of fun arises, where youthfulness is associated with fun and being a mature adult is inferred to be associated with having a lack of and loss of the same. Tony believes this isn't a necessary link and aims to retain his capacity for the enjoyment of similar kinds of fun, for as long as possible, choosing to extend his period of youthfulness through practices such as listening to the 'same music' as his 'students who are twenty years younger, thus avoiding Monica's 'mundane ageing'.

5 Limits of extended youthfulness

Encounters with particular others in particular contexts throughout the chapter, reveal the reflexive limits of a desire for extended youthfulness, in terms of the degree to which this can be solely an active, individual choice. Beauvoir's existentialism is instructive here, regarding the so-called 'problem of the other' – in that the individual is alone in making choices, yet these choices are made amongst actions involving others, who may become obstacles to realising that freedom. In Beauvoir's (1989) *The Second Sex*, an awareness that forces are able to affect particular 'situations', put situations beyond complete individual control to differing degrees, that are able to form (as opposed to determine) an individuals character. A person's gender, age, ethnicity, social class and so on, and their historical and cultural location, produce different challenges to face, that affect people differently. 'Systematic situational differences' produce social ideas that are able to shape, rather than determine

the lived experience of the self. So for example, social ideas about femininity or old age are able to form the experience of self as a woman, or as an aged person, involving the interplay of both psychological and biological elements. The infamous phrase, 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 267), emphasises that whilst a person may be classed as female, this does not automatically make that person a woman, rather a person becomes a woman through existing in a world of lived experience, where social ideas and expectations of what women are and do, can become internalised, to the extent that the experience of femininity seems 'real', that inform ways of viewing the world. The characteristics attributed to femininity are not innate, but the product of interactions within a society, informed by certain physiological aspects and the understanding of them (embodiment and facticity are discussed in chapter 5).

In Beauvoir's (1948) *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, ambiguity refers to the idea that meanings are not determined in advance and that it is up to individuals to create or discover them, through the choices they make. The act of choosing is inherently ethical, as it involves taking responsibility for the consequences of actions. Deciding how to act and take responsibility for freedom of choice is significant, as it involves reciprocal relations with others. Importantly for the discussion here, other people can either facilitate or hamper freedom, in the former case by acknowledging the meaning a person makes and in the latter by determining the world in advance. Although the individual makes choices (amongst many) on their own, the fact that they involve others opens the possibility of being helped or hindered. In order for freedom to be realizable, each person needs the others freedom. As choosing not to choose is a form of choice, freedom is inescapable and a form of reciprocal relation where others are always needed to recognise the meaning of projects – a person cannot choose to be 'youthful' for instance, without recognition from others that affirm this. Not recognising an others' freedom, or their non-recognition of our freedom, is an act of bad faith, which renders a person an object and negates reciprocity. The ambiguity of this freedom is that all individuals are simultaneously free and dependent, subject and object, whose body and mind form a single entity that experiences the world as a 'willed body', or as an embodied subject.

Human beings are at once both sovereign individuals able to choose and make meaning and objects for others, where choices are situated in social contexts – simultaneously free and dependent upon

others. This ambiguity forms the basis of her ethics. The phenomenological notion of situation tempers her idea of freedom, where importantly people are situated differently, that may make it less likely for them to be able to act upon their freedom, in terms of their social, historical and political location – indeed some choices may not be available at all regarding social inequalities relating to femininity, and/or oldness in this instance. The lived experience of oldness is not some form of innate essence, but is situated, that is able to shape the way the world is thought about and known from that individual's perspective and the way's in which relations between people are encountered. Interactions with others are able to limit and constrain choices, highlighting that an individual's facticity, or the 'givens' or facts that are true in relation to a person, do not apply to the biological alone.

Examples of situational elements that impose limitations, in that they are beyond the complete control of the interviewees – include: gender and appearance; social environments occupied almost exclusively by younger people; and judgements made by others concerning age appropriate behaviour. With regard to the first situational elements, some of the men in the study attach little importance or awareness of the extent to which their ability to have particular kinds of 'fun', or behave in a 'youthful' manner, as attributes of extended youthfulness, are mediated to an extent by their gender, related to their appearance. This concerns how some of the women in the sample believed that men are able to attract women much younger than themselves, and as Amanda stated earlier, that there are cultural evaluations that emphasise the importance of a youthful appearance, 'especially for women rather than men'. This also appears to be related to the effects such factors have upon their perceived attractiveness to/acceptance by younger people and to their awareness of limitations, regarding consciously using their looks to achieve certain ends. In Tony's case, he implies that as long as he is interested in having fun with younger people, and women in particular, they will be just as interested in him, however old he gets and however young/old they are. Even though some of his earlier comments suggest certain anxieties relating to other's opinions of his behaviour, he still feels that he will be able to choose to overcome them.

This contrasts with some women who may have chosen to use their looks strategically throughout most of their lives, as Liz comments on her using her looks in 'subtle' ways in business to 'sell to men', as even though she felt:

Liz: guilty, if you sort of use it, you know, sort of use your looks kind of thing.

She still found it advantageous to do so on occasion, but now realises in view of the age she feels herself to be that:

Liz: its gonna be that much more difficult, right, to talk people into things.

This is revealing in that she is aware that beyond a certain age, the more pragmatic stance she takes on using her looks in terms of a form of power, will, she believes diminish, whether she chooses this or not. This suggests there are gendered differences related to ageing, regarding the extent to which people feel they have control over how they are viewed by others, or able to extend their period of youthfulness. Even Tony (the most committed exponent of extending his period of youthfulness here) who may be less aware of the effects of his appearance and the social extent to which he is valued by it, still finds certain contexts or environments - clubs in particular, prove problematic in this regard. In that he 'won't go to' clubs, as they involve the participation of many of the chronologically 'young', where such spaces challenge the view that a certain attitude is all that is necessary to achieve such ends:

Tony: ah there's-clubs I won't go to-er-and I don't do 'e' and a whole bunch of things that teenager's and twenty year olds are doing.

This implies that he would not feel comfortable in such a setting, given what he perceives as his different attitude towards the recreational drug use that he believes would go on there. Such settings and some of the people who he feels he might encounter there, seem to be a barrier to and therefore limit the extent to which he is able to have 'fun' and feel youthful, however much effort he might make to do so, possibly due to an unfamiliarity of the codes and practices he might encounter there, or the possibility of standing out – by being visibly older looking.

These encounters with particular others, expose in turn the reflexive limits of agelessness/extended youth, in terms of the degree to which it is an active individual choice alone. The possession of an aged appearance, or an unfamiliarity or uncomfortable-ness with perceived 'teenager and twenty-year old' practices place limits on a project of extended youthful fun-seeking, which may be able to be avoided by staying clear of particular environments (a strategy which Tony seems to have adopted). Whether the individual chooses to heed these limits or not, may also be governed to an extent by that person's gender. There are internal differences regarding the level of a desire for youthfulness which

seem to depend upon associations with youth itself, in that in less extreme cases, than Tony's, it may also still be possible to conceive of having 'fun' beyond a period of extended youth, as a 'mundanely aged', mature adult. This illustrates that the concept of extended youthfulness cannot account for every facet of the ageing process.

Attempts at extending the period of a person's youthfulness can also be limited to an extent by others' judgements, of what might be termed age-'appropriate' behaviour. Whilst some may choose to ignore these judgements, they still reveal how extended youthfulness may be able to be simultaneously produced and constrained by others' opinions - where pressures to conform can produce behaviour that contradicts, whilst simultaneously revealing cultural values regarding ageing. This is highlighted in an example Tim provides of his father-in-law, whom he appears to believe acted inappropriately regarding a relationship he had with a much younger woman:

Tim: I think society does put a pressure on people to behave inappropriately for their age. I mean there are pressures on you – peer pressures, er, my father-in-law is eighty-eight and his girlfriend has just packed him in - I think she's twenty-four or twenty-five. She's gone to live on the south coast and she's packed him in. She was twenty odd. And I think its – I think its been quite bad, cos she's been using him and he's been using her and its been two people using each other, not for the same thing [unclear].

This is revealing in terms of the cultural premium placed on the association between youthfulness and attractiveness/desirability, which can provoke some people (men in these instances) to transgress what Tim refers to as age 'appropriate' behaviour. The implication in the word 'use' is that the relationship he refers to is not based upon mutual attraction (as Tony was keen almost boastfully to stress previously was the case, regarding his relationships with significantly younger women – illustrating his awareness of standards around age, appropriate behaviour), but based on the use value of the commodity 'youth', linked to sexual desirability. (Tim mentioned at the end of the interview, off the tape, that the woman was 'using' his father-in-law to obtain money for heroin). It seems that some would rather breach these standards and face possible censure from others, than choose a partner who is no longer regarded as being young or as desirable, irrespective of whatever other qualities they may possess. This highlights one of the cultural prejudices against the aged and the evaluation of women in particular, whose paramount importance for some, is their youthful attractiveness.

Tim's statement regarding his father-in-law might not have the same impact if the ages of the couple referred to had not been mentioned, as the implication that this was a sexual relationship (use of the term girlfriend), would probably not be enough to be considered unusual, as Katherine demonstrates when referring to a relationship between her father's ex-partner and her 'boyfriends':

Katherine: Joanna and her boyfriends is quite a hilarious and on-going saga. Because she's very – you would never think that she was nearly eighty if you met her, she's a very bubbly, attractive character. And erm, she's had sev – since my father died, she's had several [similarly aged] boyfriends, and erm, I think that at one time, that would have been considered very shocking, for a person of her age and now I think that erm – I think in a way our generation who changed all the sexual boundaries have liberated them in older age also.

Sexual relationships in old age are not considered 'shocking' any more according to Katherine (although finding them 'hilarious' produces them as different to her own), as in her opinion, her 'generation' has liberated sexual relations and boundaries for everyone, whatever their age. The 'pressures' Tim refers to, seem to concern the 'appropriateness' of the disparity between the ages of the people involved in his father-in-laws relationship. This is noteworthy enough for him to mention, regarding the degree of the woman's perceived sexual attractiveness related to her relatively young age, rather than the fact that his father-in-law was eighty eight and still sexually active. For some men, Susan's earlier comments regarding the desires of the 40-year old men she knows, to 'live', conceived in terms of having 'fun', with little personal responsibility attached and still being able to attract significantly younger women - do not stop there. In the more extreme examples of Tim's father-in-law and Tony, they seem to be able to be extended almost indefinitely, irrespective of how 'appropriate', in terms of possible censure, such relationships may be viewed by others. This reveals that what could be seen as the contemporary emphasis on active sexuality as an essential aspect of self, being a significant element in contributing toward the simultaneous production of and limitations of extended youthfulness.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that it is the interviewees' experience that people are generally living to greater, healthier ages, with corresponding changes in looks, behaviour and attitudes, in comparison with previous 'generations', that makes them appear younger for longer. It is not generally believed that the period of a person's youth can be extended indefinitely however, highlighting a tension between the things that are unchangeable about a person, such as for instance, that they age and are

mortal (the theme of facticity is developed in chapter 5), which limits to an extent, choices they may wish to make regarding how they wish to age. These limits can be negotiated, but seem to work in conjunction with gendered age, regarding differences to the extent to which choices are held to be either individual, or limited by other peoples perceptions, particularly in relation to notions of attractiveness.

There are internal differences amongst the interviewees, regarding their level of desire (if any) for extended youthfulness. Many do exhibit a concern with remaining younger for longer, or extending their period of youthfulness, albeit in different and complicated ways and to differing degrees. Extended youth as constituted by the interviewees here, is primarily associated with differing notions of attractiveness, sexuality, fun, desire and responsibility, in which each context is gendered in terms of how age is perceived as a limit. A high degree of adjustment and monitoring goes on, regarding the (often flexible) age that the interviewees feel themselves to be – as Jack remarked in section one ‘its something that fluctuates’ and isn’t ‘fixed’. These processes are extremely relational, in terms of the differing environments the interviewees find themselves in and the different people they interact with. In this sense, age seems in some ways to be other people, in terms of how others perceive a person’s age and how this is reflected back at them, constituting ‘age’ in the process. People are able to do ageing to one another and to themselves, so there is not one single ‘true’ age, but notions of age and youthfulness are always relational.

Extended youth appears almost paradoxically to be constituted in terms of not meaning to be young, but functions in the sense of meaning not to be old, or displaying signs associated with older age. There is not a necessary binary relation between a desire to not exhibit signs of old age, albeit for different reasons and a straightforward positive conception of wishing to be young per se. Perhaps unfortunately this serves to marginalize those deemed by themselves and others as already being old. Oldness appears to be of lesser value and desirability than being non-old. This produces anxiety and fear and the unimaginability of becoming old. In this way, old age is produced as a kind of existential limit, or a point at which a person’s sexual desirability or attractiveness and value as a human being is perceived to diminish or be lost entirely. This also points to the extent of the level to which desirability is held in cultural esteem, and a lack of the same is firmly associated with old age. It is possible to

imagine an alternate scenario, where other traits are held in equal regard, such as for instance, kindness, smartness, sense of humour, empathy and so on, that may not appear to be so age related, or appearance dependant, that may serve to reduce such anxieties, if the perceived limits were more flexible. This does not appear to be the case for the majority of the interviewees, who seem instead to be compelled to be narcissistic and critical of both their own (evidence of inner self absorption) and others (providing evidence of also being simultaneously outer directed) appearance, even if this is troubling for some of them, desiring if anything, to be forever attractive, rather than forever young, in order to feel valued.

Importantly, there is a tension between facticity and choice – illustrated in Amanda's feeling 'pressure not to grow old' whilst recognising its 'inevitab[ility]'. Not recognising that there are some choices, however limited, regarding attempting to hold more positive attitudes towards our own and others ageing, is not insignificant, as not doing so can have negative implications and consequences, in terms of the judgements made about other, older people, whom are not identified with, or recognised as the 'same'. As Tony remarked, he does not 'like interacting with old people'. The very presence of older people may act as unwelcome reminders for some of their own ageing. This can result in their attempting to distance themselves from them entirely, or trying to identify themselves exclusively with chronologically younger people, almost indefinitely, reflected in the behaviour of those who only form relationships with significantly younger people. Evaluations of people largely in terms of their looks has different, gendered effects, where such attitudes serve to marginalize everyone eventually, as bodily signs associated with being aged, cannot be convincingly effaced for ever. In the more extreme cases represented here, 'old – people' are perceived as an irrelevant, almost invisible, undifferentiated 'them' or 'they', who are completely Other. Holding such views has important consequences for those already constituted as old (irrespective of their chronological age) and the practices that are engaged with now and possibly in the future by the interviewees, which will be explored more fully in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Five: The Aged Body: Fear and Loathing and the Loss of Individuality

Introduction

De Beauvoir's (1972) understanding of 'facticity', related to embodied subjectivity, is relevant to parts of the analysis in some of the sections that follow and is elaborated within the chapter as a whole. Briefly, facticity refers to the 'givens' or facts that are true in relation to a person, such as, for example, that they were born, that they have a chronological age and are mortal beings. Crucially, the individual is free to choose how they respond to, or position themselves in relation to these facts. De Beauvoir's argument is qualified however, by the claim that there are not an infinite number of choices available to the individual in any given situation. For her, there is a tension between facticity and freedom of choice. The interviewees here are negotiating and shifting the conditions of the facticity of their bodies in terms of individual choice, where the kind of body they have is not viewed as being fixed, but is malleable, relating to practices of extended youthfulness, evident in perceived increases in health and vitality. The individualising tendencies¹ exhibited by the interviewees, regarding a narcissistic concern with their own and others aged bodies, reflexively mobilise their bodies as they seek to construct and control it.

Lasch (1991) argues that in conditions of late modernity in the U.S. - involving processes of rationalisation, individualisation and the propensity to metaphorically and literally conceal death behind closed doors - a particular, narcissistic personality type has emerged. This is a form of self-identity that focuses upon the possession of a youthful body and a pronounced fear of death, given the diminished social spaces occupied by religion and the sacred, which previously helped ameliorate such fears. Within such a cultural climate, notions of youth and orientations towards the future come to be valued - rather than living on in posterity within subsequent generations. Death cannot be readily

¹ Giddens (1991) argues that individualising tendencies at an institutional level in late modernity, such as for instance, de-industrialisation, reduced spending upon the welfare state, the decline of traditional family forms, the erosion of class based frames of reference, increases in the cultural significance of mass media and the decline in the hegemonic status of religion and science, produce a sense of disorder and insecurity, and a lack of continuity and stability in social processes and relationships. These individualising tendencies at an institutional level, lead to a focus upon self-identity, where the individual is compelled to make decisions based upon a seemingly infinite diversity of options and choices. The modern reflexive project of the self involves sustaining a biographical narrative that must be continually revised through a series of lifestyle choices. The interviewees are currently choosing extended youthfulness and/or non-identification with being old.

accounted for in a context where it has come to represent no future - heightening the fear of both old age and death, making each harder to accept. These forces produce a heightened desire to remain youthful and difficulty in accepting agedness. Relations towards youthfulness are ambivalent however, as 'clinging to the illusion of youth' cannot be maintained forever and may produce resentment towards 'real' youths embodied in the vitality of younger generations. Attempts at insulating themselves from the fear of death, also affects relationships, where enduring attachments to others are resisted to safeguard against loss. Narratives focused upon 'growth' and movement come to predominate, encouraging the adoption of new careers, houses, travel, new relationships, new marriages and so on. Lasch's analysis portrays individuals as passive agents, subject to and compelled by social forces and expert systems, yet these are not necessarily entirely negative. They are implicated for example in some of the examples given in chapter 4, regarding some men leaving their partners for significantly younger ones; yet they also facilitate a certain amount of freedom, from what may have been deeply unsatisfying relationships, through the relative ease of divorce.

The ageing process can compel the interviewees to be reflexively aware of the body's inevitable degeneration, as it becomes a site of options and choices. The possibility of changing, delaying, or reversing what are no longer necessarily viewed as 'natural' biological processes, can result in notions of biological and chronological ageing diverging, where for some, the status of facticity is called into question. An outcome of viewing the body in such terms, results in the aged body being seen as less viable, once practices of extended youthfulness are viewed as no longer working in 'extreme old age', where the ability to make individual choices – to remain 'vital' for instance, are compromised. This has profound implications in terms of the production of ageism and the acceptance of euthanasia as a means of controlling and managing facticity.

1. Ageing differently: choosing healthiness and activity

The interviewees 'do' ageing and extended youthfulness, with reference to the body, by choosing to act in ways they perceive to be new and different to their parent's generation². This is manifested with regard to the bodily practices surrounding activity and healthiness (for 13 out of 15 participants) that constitute ageing, youthfulness and the body through diverse behaviours and attitudes. Changes in

² The differing work that 'generation' does is analysed in chapter 3.

the body associated with ageing, are not viewed as being inflexible, or an inevitable consequence of chronological progression, as both Katherine and Susan go on to demonstrate:

Katherine: I can see our/my generation in their forties and people in their fifties, just not getting old in the same way that, I saw people in their forties and fifties.

Katherine has noticed that people of a similar age to herself, seem to become 'old' in a different way to her awareness of previous generations at comparable ages, where this difference is remarked upon and elaborated by Susan:

Susan: I definitely think erm we're all a lot younger [laughs] than our parents were. I think we're a lot healthier as well

The perception that people tend to have healthier bodies nowadays, than people from earlier generations, play a large part in how extended youthfulness is constituted, where there appears to be a consistent expectation that a person will become old (eventually) at greater ages than before, judged in terms of their perceived healthiness - pointing to a less rigid view regarding the facticity of poor health in old age:

Katherine: Cos I suppose actually, that a lot of erm, what I would call my generation, are in much better health than anybody was say - in their - I think this war generation, like my dad and Edith, who were in their twenties during the war...You know, they didn't have the health that we've got in their forties - they were losing their teeth and losing...I don't know - had a lot more problems, whereas now, we've all got an expectation that erm, and we are actually, probably much healthier. People expect to have teeth, don't they...Or keep them, or er, you know erm, if you do get some serious illness, you've got an expectation that you are going to be cured. So...Yeah.

For Susan and Katherine, there is an expectation that people of a similar generation to themselves are becoming older (or remaining youthful for longer) later than previous generations, manifested in terms of their perceived healthiness - having fewer 'problems' at comparable ages. The expectation of remaining sound in body for longer periods than before - appears to be almost self-evident from Katherine's observations of the older people she currently sees around her. Furthermore, even if they were to eventually 'get some serious illness', Katherine believes that they would be able to choose to be 'cured' - implying this may not have been the case in the past. The belief that cures will be available to them should they become ill and should they choose to use them, pushes the facticity of mortality to a hazy point, somewhere in an undefined future.

Those who continue to do strenuous physical activities at greater ages than before challenge the facticity of the ageing body. Tim places ageing differently to previous generations in the context of tradition, where he believes that his:

Tim: parent's generation had more traditions, you know – you know, you were born in a certain kind of place in society and you kind of stayed there. Er, at a certain age you did things and when you were probably 60, you were old – you were quite old.

Here, being 'old' is perceived as relating to a specific chronological point – 60 plus in this instance, and this chronological lifecourse stage is linked to certain 'appropriate' activities. The 'things' people do at particular stages Tim claims are changing in comparison with previous generations, as evidenced by his mother's opinion of one of his pastimes:

Tim: me mum says stop running, you're 56 and I say well no I enjoy it, you know – it keeps me joints moving and as long as I can do it and enjoy it and its not having a bad effect on other people, then I'll do it.

Tim does not want his age to be restrictive, in a way that might prevent him from:

Tim: being active at whatever age you are [And that he] want[s] to be open to new experiences when I'm older than I am now. And just because I'm gonna be – hopefully I'll be 60, or 65 or 70 – I don't want it stopping me doing things – you know, new things that I've never done before.

Importantly, his ageing body is perceived as a potential barrier to what could be construed as a practice of youthfulness – being active, which he hopes will allow him to 'enjoy the things that I want to do, if I'm a healthy 60', long past the time when his parents 'were old'. The 'things' Tim alludes to, are often portrayed in terms of physical activity, which he values to the extent that he claims he would be content to die:

Tim: if we [he and his wife] both went [died] together at 70, it wouldn't particularly bother me - 70 odd maybe if we'd been active, then 70 is a good age.

Tim both desires and expects to be able to be active well into old age, maintaining a body that will not restrict his ability to have 'new experiences', but is ambivalent about continuing his life beyond an age at which his body becomes less capable of the kind of activities he values most. The facticity of the aged body comes into play here as a restriction upon his absolutely being able to continue to choose an active lifestyle, but is expected to do so at a later age than previous generations, which is more acceptable to Tim. For Beauvoir (1948) in the *Ethics of Ambiguity*, human reality is a product of both freedom and facticity, and human beings are both body and mind concurrently - unlike the Sartrean notion that the mind is able to determine the influence of the facticity of the body and that each person

is radically free, irrespective of their situation. Different situations (becoming too infirm to run, for example) do not equally permit the taking up of freedom, (choosing to run) as all human freedom is for de Beauvoir situated – affected by embodiment (joints wearing out, for example) and the subject's cultural and historical location (having the desire and belief that he will be able to keep fit and be active at a relatively advanced age). Some people are more impeded than others in terms of being able to act upon their freedom (having spare time to go running, or the resources to afford specialist equipment for sport) and some choices are simply unavailable (having legs and fitness levels that enable running). What has been categorised here as 'extreme' old age, or the point at which the body becomes less receptive to being managed in terms of activity, is implied by Tim to be an inferior, or almost pointless form of life, where dying upon reaching this stage 'wouldn't particularly bother' him. The expectation of being active at greater ages than previous generations is not peculiar to Tim alone. In Katherine's case she does not:

Katherine: think we'll all be sitting in bath chairs, as soon as we can get there And erm – a lot of people aren't going to want to...

Cultural and historical changes regarding the facticity of ageing and attitudes towards health and fitness, which construct ageing as an inevitable period of decline, are in evidence here. Instead of people working until retirement age and immediately stopping work – then expecting to literally sit out their remaining few years in a bath chair³, Katherine feels that people will no longer be content with inactivity, once their working life is over. Changes such as these, have affects regarding how older people are perceived.

In Susan's case she no longer regards old people in the same way as she used to do, seeing them as less of a homogeneous category in her distinction between 'old' and 'retired':

Susan: Yeah, I mean retired people are not just little old people sat in their chairs are they, with their t.v. on – they're active, they're doing things – I'm sure it's a good time if you can manage it properly, you know to be retired - but people, retired people seem to be more active now don't they – they seem, I don't know, they've just got more time but they – I can't think of the words really but, they're not like little old people...

Susan portrays 'little old people' as being different from non – old people. She infantilises them, making an association between an old, shrinking body and that of a small, passive, dependant and

³ A precursor to today's wheelchair, which was used initially in Victorian England both for those with disabilities and those who were simply of 'a certain age' and able bodied. This allowed them to be wheeled around inside the home, gardens and public parks.

gender neutral child. This group can be contrasted with the (less homogeneous) recently retired - still different to Susan, but also different to the 'little old people', in that they are perceived as being more vigorous and have chosen to manage their time 'properly', in order to do the right kind of things, namely more physical activities. This implies an almost moral imperative to participate in practices to avoid becoming a 'little old' person, with its negative connotations of dependency and maintain, or increase youthful levels of activity. Susan provides the example of the recently retired as evidence that this is occurring:

Susan: I suppose retirement is lengthening really, isn't it – people are retired longer – if people are living longer, then obviously they are going to be retired twenty, maybe thirty years... And I think erm, I think there are changes for retired people, there are lots of things developing aren't there – you know, like places they can go to and you see lots of people out walking – you know in these big walking groups on the moors and – just doing things, getting active.

So, one of the ways the participants view ageing as being done differently from other generations, is in terms of what bodies are seen to be able to do at increasingly older ages, focused around a desire for and expectation of increased healthiness, longevity and the ability to be active – enabling continued participation in physically demanding sports and fitness regimes, more usually associated with younger people. Evidence for such changes in behaviour are still seen to be remarkable, but may become more widespread:

Ben: Some bloke the other night was telling me he was on a skiing holiday and he said half the class were over sixty.

What is worthy of note regarding the above extracts, is how consistent and narrowly conceived their notions of 'activity' are, given that it is a relatively abstract and ambiguous term, which could potentially apply to a vast range of other things. Instead it is almost exclusively applied in terms of being able to participate in outdoor sports - often associated with being the most physically demanding in terms of energy expenditure and until recently, the preserve of much younger people. The majority of this activity is viewed as something which is not necessarily participated in now, but is seen as something to do, less for the sheer enjoyment of it (if it were only this, then presumably they would all do the activities they mentioned in the present), but more to do with a compulsion to prolong health - defined by them as being of retirement age, yet still being able to perform strenuous sports (hiking and hill walking; running; skiing). It is remarkable that over half of a skiing class is composed of over sixty year

olds and that previous standard's regarding tough physical sports have almost been inverted. As Tim comments:

Tim: I think you can be inactive as a child, you can be inactive as a teenager. You can be active when you're 70, you can be active when you're 80 – alright when you're 80, you're not going to do 100m in ten seconds, but you're gonna be trying to stay, perhaps want to stay healthy.

Children and teenagers can in some way afford to be slothful if they wish, the implication being that they will still be relatively healthy and so are exempt from having to managing their selves/bodies. But, once past a certain age, this is no longer seen as the case and a person's health and youthfulness can no longer be taken for granted and becomes their individual responsibility. An imperative begins to emerge, that in order to retain youthful levels of health and fitness, this work has to be done, by participating in demanding sports. Embarking upon such a project of extended youthfulness involves a high degree of maintenance and management. Notions of active retirement, focused around leisure and participation in sport, contrast sharply with Katherine's perception of earlier generations being happy to retire to a life in a bath chair.

Increased numbers of active older people are now viewed as a relatively common occurrence, in comparison with Katherine's parents 'war generation'. This view can be contrasted with the following participants parents, who were seen as unusual, in being remarkably youthful for their age. The following examples also show how gendered embodiment, or situatedness, has different effects (Beauvoir, 1989). These effects relate to elements of choice and are illustrative of how other people can constrain freedom to choose evaluation of self worth, in terms of how the parents in these examples are subject to moral judgements from others, about their form of agedness:

John: my mother is 92 – now she's in a very bad state now physically and mentally and that, but you know, she was very active up to until she was 85, and would have been exceptional and my father was, until he died at 79.

You know, he worked incredibly hard, right until the end – I mean he had the energy of a man of 50 in his late 70's.

The activities John's mother participated in until she was 85 are not stated, but that she was active for so long, John deems remarkable, relative to the standards he perceives for her generation. There is a suggestion that in his fathers case, the very fact that he maintained a high level of activity for most of his adult life, contributed to both his youthful energy levels and his longevity. Interestingly John stresses a possibly gendered difference in how age and the body are mediated – commenting on his

father's vigour and 'energy', a term not applied to his mothers 'exceptional' activities. This can also be contrasted with Monica's mother's case, who 'aged beautifully' - an adjective less likely to be applied to a man:

Monica: Erm, my mother has aged beautifully and if I aged as well as her I'd be very lucky. She's really active, much more active than I ever was and probably ever will be, so I would like to age the way she does. I don't want to age the way my mother-in-law does - where she was old before her time and finds everything too much.

For Monica ageing 'beautifully' is something to aspire to and worthy of admiration, which is attributed to her mother's high levels of activity. The choice of the word beauty signifies not only the esteem Monica feels for what she regards as her mother's accomplishment, but also hints at the possibility of still being able to be beautiful/desirable in later life, as not being beyond the realms of possibility, however unusual this may be. Her situatedness as a woman, also underlines an additional gendered requirement to that of a man - in order for her to be judged to be ageing positively and still valued, she is also required to be beautiful as well as vigorous. In contrast to her mother, Monica's mother-in-law is depicted as a negative example of how to age and someone not to be emulated or identified with - in that she was 'old before her time', implying that there is somehow a correct way or 'time' to become old/inactive at. It is as though her mother-in-law has transgressed some form of moral boundary, in choosing to allow herself to become inactive, resulting in her finding 'everything too much'. The ability to be active, well into retirement, pushes the point at which the more homogeneous status of 'little old' person is reached, further into the future. It also serves to produce this category as being different from active retirees, who are regarded as same, rather than other. Beauvoir (1972) argues in *Old Age* that there are however, always some choices to be made in relation to specific givens, including 'extreme' old age and the ultimate facticity of death and the individual's relation to it. Ethically, if a person cannot face their own ageing process and death (to be in 'bad faith'), they should at least recognise that non-identification with older people and their shared mortal destiny, can affect how older people are treated. This is particularly so if this leads to making negative judgements about them, through not recognising themselves in them.

For many of the interviewees however, the demands that being a non-active 'old person' places upon others, in terms of requiring help, invoke little sympathy:

Monica: she's very negative, finds everything very difficult and that's the way she is as an old person. And that's the way she was ten years ago when I first met her. Erm, except now she's more helpless, you know, or let's herself be more helpless.

For Monica ageing positively, equated with being youthful, active and not requiring help, is almost entirely a matter of choice and attributable to a person's individual character, irrespective of age. It is implied that her mother-in-law may have avoided her situation, had she chosen to continue being active and not given in by choosing/accepting a more passive lifestyle and allowing herself to become helpless. There is also a suggestion in her judgement regarding her mother-in-law, which ignores the element of luck she hints at, relating to being able to age 'beautifully', which may be an additional requirement to the high activity levels exhibited by her mother. This is echoed in Maggie's example:

Maggie: Oh the differences are between my mother and erm my father and my father's very physically active and I'd like to hope that I was as physically active as I could be. Whereas my mother had a condition which kind of made her give up a bit and I wouldn't like to think that I would do that and really, sort of sit around and complain, I think I – disheartening for yourself and everybody around you.

This time it is the father who provides the inspiration, judged in terms of activity again (where the stress lies on his physicality, rather than his ageing 'beautifully'), whereas her mother is described as having an unspecified 'condition', which resulting in her giving up the struggle to be active. This 'giving up' is again, as with Monica's description of her mother-in-law, portrayed as a moral failure to attend properly to an obligation to be active, which is in turn detrimental to both her mother and for 'everybody around you' - or self and other. Not only are these parents viewed as being relatively exceptional in the length of their active lives, but they also provide benchmarks to aspire to, or improve upon. Whilst those who were inactive due to illness, or helplessness have let both themselves and their children down and are moral failures, who are judged as being 'disheartening' examples, invoking little sympathy from the interviewees.

Judgements regarding inspiring examples of how to age well, or correctly, extend beyond the family circle in John's case, where:

John: what has presented negative images to me – is to see people in their late sixties, kind of washed out and given up and all of that. I think that's a much more worrying factor. I mean I'm greatly encouraged – I mean you grasp at straws – at seeing older people energetic.

For John, it seems almost as though people are not allowed to show signs of advanced ageing (at ages previously assumed to be 'acceptable') and those who do are anxiety provoking. Those who are still able to be energetic are 'greatly encourag[ing]', as exemplars of how to age well, as they haven't 'given up', in that they are still youthful and energetic. As a person's level of activity into old age is seen here as a matter of choice, there are attendant ethical and moral sanctions directed at those who are judged as not complying with standards held. Here, ill health is seen as resulting from choosing to be sedentary, rather than individual misfortune:

Amanda: if someone has all the time in the world they do nothing – and always that the busy person will do something. Also that rather than slowing down cos one gets older to being active and busy and engaged with a variety of positive influences. Its quite easy to slow down and almost – there's another cliché coming you'd better watch out – 'use it or lose it', you know – and I think you know sometimes a mid-life crisis comes from people slowing down.

The implication here is that provided a person keeps going, being 'active and busy and engaged' then they will continue to be healthy. If they are not vigilant and slow down for a moment, their mental and physical ill health will soon decline. The phrase 'use it or lose it' is a warning, signifying dire consequences and moral disapproval if unheeded. Becoming a 'little old person' is constituted as a personal and moral failure, in terms of a project of extended youthfulness and the implied positive evaluation of independence.

2. Managing anxiety and health

It becomes pertinent to enquire what is going on here as regards activity as a bodily practice. Why are the participants so invested in doing ageing differently from other 'generations' and why is it so important to them? Its importance stems from allowing them to feel better in some way, in that it settles their fears about ageing. There is evidence of fear of empty time and inactivity in Susan's comments on retirement – 'I'm sure it's a good time if you can manage it properly' and that retired people have 'just got more time'. Time has to be occupied and filled in some way, in the space previously occupied by a job, as pointed out by Amanda – 'if someone has all the time in the world they do nothing', whereas 'busy' (working) people, always find time to 'do something' to ensure their mental and physical health. Amanda refers to this in the context of 'a very depressing time', when her husband was 'made redundant', which 'was partly age related'. Amanda continues to stress the importance of an active body to mental well being in an example of a friend of hers, when she replies

to a question on so-called mid-life crises, saying that 'it would be quicker to say do I know anyone who hasn't' (had one), emphasising her awareness of difficulties in adjustment to changes wrought by ageing. This friend was a 'loner all his life' and did not fill his life up with activities outside of work. When he 'looked around and saw other people perhaps having outlets', this precipitated:

Amanda: not actually a mental illness or a breakdown, although I do know colleagues who have had that, I don't know if it can be attributed to age related...Erm, I think he in particular has a kind of idea of a milestone birthday and erm, hitting a number that you realise that this is my last career – no one would now hire me because of my age and the way pensions work. We become more expensive as we get older and not necessarily more valuable to the institution. And I think that sometimes there are messages that society is delivering – leads to a mid-life crisis of a sort – even if it's not anything obviously identifiable and labelled as such... [And] sometimes a mid-life crisis comes from people slowing down and then looking around and then there's nothing or anyone – no one's there. So I think the more you give, the more you get – I know that sounds really hokey, but its true...

One of the ways anxiety and fear arise is from simply not being active enough - it is not enough to work hard holding down a job, putting all one's activity eggs in one basket. If one is not active in other areas (having a social life outside work) and slows down, then there will be the shocking discovery that there is nothing to fill the time, or anyone to fill it with, should they lose their job, or face compulsory retirement. Mental and physical health may deteriorate as a result, placing seemingly un-necessary burdens upon others, if the all- important independence is compromised. This is an ever-present threat, the older one gets, particularly in view of the fear inducing 'messages' about older workers 'that society is delivering'. The notion that old age and retirement in particular, have to be 'managed', is not just about filling time per se, but in making sure that one adheres to an ethical commitment to 'manage it properly'. In many cases, 'properly' means ensuring an adequate income in old age, which in turn produces more anxiety related to activity. This takes on another related meaning – having a body that is fit, youthful and healthy enough at older ages, in order for it to be still capable of participating in the labour force, either by avoiding redundancy in a current job in middle age, or being capable of working past retirement age. Situatedness (Beauvoir, 1989) is applicable again here, regarding (possibly ageist) social ideas surrounding the employment of older people in the workforce, that place limitations on the freedom to make certain choices - in this case choosing to continue paid employment in later life:

Susan: I want to prolong – I don't really want to retire too early and I'd like to be earning a bit longer than – well I know its all changing⁴ at the moment but er, if I'm fit and capable I'd like to be earning for quite a long time – but retirement, when it comes – its frightening really. You think it'll be really good, you think you'll have lot's of time – or hopefully plenty of money, for the things you want to do – but erm, its frightening really I think...

It seems strange that retirement is so 'frightening', for Susan, particularly when its going to be 'really good', with 'lot's of time', 'hopefully lots of money', to indulge in 'things you want to do', particularly when its not:

Susan: out of fashion now to be retired – I think it's a new sort of erm fashion really – I don't know if that's the word, fashion, but its not unusual now is it?

What is perhaps unusual – apart from retirement's re-branded, fashionable status, normally associated with sexy and cool - is why it should produce any anxiety at all, given that here it sounds to hold out the promise of youthful fun, in comparison with Katherine's perception of earlier generations taking to a bath chair upon retirement. Susan's use of the word 'if' in the line – 'if I'm fit and capable', is instructive here, in that anxiety is provoked by her recognition of the lack of guarantees inherent in types of situatedness, acknowledging she may not be able to rely upon, or be free to choose to have a healthy body in old age, irrespective of how much time and effort she may invest in trying to do so:

Susan: it depends how healthy you're going to be. But I think we erm – you need to phase yourself into it don't you – you need some – you know – get yourself some extra interests, but phase the work out slowly really – get yourself into having free time. Cos I think you could start to vegetate and everything slows down, and I don't know if that's healthy really – cos I think the more you do, the more active you are – so I think you'd need to look at it really carefully and depending on how fit and healthy you are and how much money you have as well and plan it really – you know – plan to do things and to use the time and not become a vegetable.

The investment in management and planning are acting as mental props, supporting the idea that the negative judgements regarding old age, primarily focused on being unhealthy and inactive, can be avoided indefinitely by attempting to extend the period of youthfulness. This can be achieved by choosing to remain active, in order to ensure perceived benefits from being healthier - regarded as a more positive form of ageing. The situated variables of fitness and healthiness are acknowledged by some as being dependent to an extent upon factors which may lie outside their individual control, including financial status. These are seen as comprising the 'if's', which are problematic and therefore

⁴ Whilst the UK does not have a mandatory retirement age, the trend has been for employees to take early retirement, funded by company pension schemes - a trend the government is keen to reverse, given changes in increased population longevity and the closing of many company pension schemes. A green paper published in December 2002 recommends offering incentives for those prepared to work beyond age 65 in an effort to relieve the tax burden on the diminishing working age population (BBC, 2003).

unsettling/fear inducing. There will always be the risk that whatever management strategies are deployed, the individual may not always be able to do enough, or might lose control of their body. As there can be no absolute guarantees that illness, inactivity and old age will not eventually happen, which ever 'correct' avoidance strategies are adopted, some interviewees are forced to recognise the unpredictable, unmanageable aspects of the body and ageing. It is the unknown elements regarding the possible recalcitrance of the body to be subject to the mind or individual will, that make Beauvoir's analysis of the situated nature of human freedom, more compelling than the Sartrean notion of the mind being radically free to choose the influence of the facticity of the body, in all situations. Not being able to do so would imply that the subject had been rendered non-human in some way. Bodies are key sites for the expression of difficulties and limits in relation to a project of extended youthfulness, with its inherent uncertainty, regarding never knowing if enough is being done to ensure its success.

3. Freedom of choice, responsibility and fear

With freedom comes responsibility - the more radically freedom is insisted upon, the greater the personal responsibility. In circumstances where the situatedness of facticity is not adequately accounted for, what could be regarded as harsh judgements related to an individual's responsibility for their lifestyle in later life can be produced. This is particularly so in terms of the degree to which negatively viewed lifestyles are thought to impact upon others – invoking a moral aspect to a commitment to extended youthfulness and the management of facticity. Viewing ageing and extended youthfulness via particular bodily practices as a matter of choice and therefore, personal responsibility, leads Ben to comment that:

Ben: O.K. so you can go skiing, you can mountain walk, you can be active, you can be adventurous, you can – o.k. physically able to do some things, that you could have done when you were younger, ahmn, but if you wanna feel old, like then mentally take yourself to be old, if you wanna feel young then mentally choose to do that, ahmn – so yeah, you can be outgoing, adventurous, all of that, at seventy, you know. So yeah, you have the choice I think about growing old mentally.

Ben's use of the word 'you', implies that anyone can choose to feel and act as a young person, at 70 plus. As this is a free choice, if a person engages with these endeavours and fails, then they have only themselves to blame, from not trying hard enough. Here, physical (and mental) health relating to ageing becomes a matter of personal responsibility and obligation (as choosing not to choose, would still be a form of negative choice) construed in terms of a Cartesian mind over matter. An emphasis

upon the mind as being radically free to choose, in a Sartrean sense, over the influence of the facticity of the body and its situatedness, can lead to unsympathetic evaluations regarding levels of personal responsibility.

A person's ageing can be viewed as a form of constant (in that everybody ages and may eventually become old through the passage of time, provided they live long enough), whereas the processes of managing ageing are where choices can be made and these choices are seen to have an ethical component:

Monica: I don't know of any – if ageing has changed – I don't think it has. Erm, I think people find it as difficult as they allow themselves to – you know, they can be overwhelmed by everything and erm, afraid of life, you know, the way they always were, or they can seize it and get on with it. You know, and I think it's always been that way. I think there are more old people around, because of technology and health, you know and therefore you probably need to provide for yourself as you get older. You need to make sure that you are going to have a comfortable old age and make some provisions, because the state isn't going to be able to pay for everybody and fund them, so they can have holidays, you know.

What she believes has changed is the management of ageing, where there are more older people around due to technological developments⁵ and changes in health awareness. As these increased numbers of older people will she believes place a strain on 'the state[s]' resources, it up to them individually to ensure they have 'provide[d]' adequately for their old age. Those who do not have a comfortable old age, have been irresponsible in choosing the wrong form of management, or have failed to manage the bodily practices that will ensure health and extended youthfulness. Viewing aspects of ageing in terms of active decision making introduces an ethical element, as choosing whether or not to perform certain bodily practices in order to be young or old, involves individually making a choice and making that choice in the 'right' way. So if 'you wanna feel old', then there is visible evidence of ways to choose to be that way - by not indulging in the activities Ben suggests and not being 'outgoing and adventurous'. Alternatively there is visible evidence of those of pensionable age who have 'freely' chosen otherwise – 'if you wanna feel young', then it is a matter of choosing to retain, or regain the fitness levels of a person's younger self and continue to enjoy an active social life - safeguarding their mental health in the process. Inherent in the obligation to choose, given that an individual cannot choose not to age, but can choose how they relate to it, is the implication in Monica's

⁵ The use of technology to increase lifespan is discussed in section 6.

comments of moral failure - for those who have chosen to 'give up', or 'be overwhelmed by everything' and be 'afraid of life' for not 'seiz[ing] it and get[ting] on with it'. Fear may arise when a person realises that there are, and will continue to be, more older people around and that it is their individual [moral] responsibility to 'provide for yourself as you get older' and others, rather than the state, friends or family, should they fail to be able to be active enough to accomplish/manage this.

In sum, an overarching theme relating to ageing, the body and extended youthfulness, coalesces around the interviewees differing fears of old age, closely connected to certain choices and responsibilities they feel obliged to make. Indeed one of the questions that was suggested to me and voted on in the focus - group, was that I be sure to include in my individual interviews a question on what people feared most about getting older. Of the 15 interviewees, 12 explicitly mentioned physical incapacity, or the related inadequate financial resources in advanced old age, as being amongst their main 'fears', with only two of them explicitly referring to dying in some way - suggesting that for some, their fears about losing their freedom to choose individually not to be old, is a fate worse than death. This can have negative consequences for those already constituted as old (Beauvoir, 1972) through not recognising themselves in them.

4. Ageing and the threat to independence and individuality

When ageing is construed purely in terms of individual responsibility and choice, with little or no regard for its situatedness, there is little wonder that the greatest fears about old age come to reside at the point at which bodies might no longer respond to the call to be active and youthful - where dependency upon others comes to be dreaded. In Susan's case she has a:

Susan: Fear of losing my independence. I fear being erm physically incapable of looking after myself -- I really don't want to have to depend on anyone really -- that's something I really am worried about -- you know, if you lose your ability to walk, or speak or hear and having to depend on other people and being a burden to them really -- I think that's what it is. That's the only thing.

Importantly for Susan and others, getting old and becoming dependant is the antithesis of individuality and autonomous self -- sufficiency, whereby the sense of self predicated upon being active, independent and youthful they wish to possess is challenged by their opposite associations with old age. Similarly in Liz's case:

Liz: I think most people fear erm, being em, incapacitated – that sort of thing.

Significantly, Liz believes that almost everyone would share her viewpoint, which is certainly different from those whom Katherine believes might previously have accepted and preferred to have been wheeled around in their bath chairs. Rhona appears to share similar fears to Liz and signals that she regards what she feels as being the experience of advanced, or deep old age, as being qualitatively different in some way from the age she is now:

Rhona: I'd fear getting much older, not the sort of years that I'm going through now. As I said, they are busy years, they're good years in many way's. But erm, the sort of things I said earlier, when you see or read about people, older people in terms of health and independence and I suppose finances as well to an extent. [And] My mother-in-law is moving into her eighties and you can see lots of changes happening very quickly, and I don't like the thought of that happening to me.

Part of her fear is connected to her belief that she will change in some way, into a different kind of inactive, non-youthful person, as she believes her mother-in-law has at a similarly advanced age - where the changes in health and economic independence she has witnessed, might not be able to be managed in the way she would like. In such circumstances her independence and autonomy would be compromised, along with a sense of self that is still youthful and capable of autonomy. So, 'busy [active] years' are equated with what could be positive about growing older, whilst the expectation of loss of 'health and independence' and possibly individuality, are negative. Fear is produced regarding the possible limits in choice and independence, that signify a new and undesirable form of (less than complete human) being. The difficulty in identifying herself with the negative aspects she associates with elements of the ageing process – to be in 'bad faith' (Beauvoir, 1972), is a process that can also affect how other, older people are perceived and treated. Bad faith arises when other, in this case, older people are not identified with as being the same - such non-recognition can lead to negative judgements of those dissimilar others. The process of bad faith is able to produce associations of fear, disgust and guilt surrounding physical signs of ageing and mortality, where in some cases these fears are projected onto other, different old people, who's very presence can act as unwelcome reminders for some of their own mortality.

The view that old age is automatically equated with inactivity, ill health and fear per se, is (although unusual) not the case for all the interviewees:

Ben: I would have a more positive attitude toward life I think anyway. Ah, I would see a new beginning or start of something new, rather than a finish. Ahmn, I've a greater fear of suffering ill health, but that can happen to me at any age, so erm being incapacitated and needing care would hold a greater fear for me, but that could happen to me next week.

Whilst Ben is unusual in not making a necessary link between old age and ill health and retaining a 'positive attitude to life', including that of old age, there is still evidence of fear of loss of independence through 'ill health' and having to rely upon others. There is also an implicit fear of a loss of individuality, strongly associated with youthful vigour and independence, which would be thwarted or ended. His sense of self would be challenged in such circumstances, signifying in a sense, a form of the death of the youthful self. This produces a kind of twilight period between positive associations with healthiness and independent living and that of being incapacitated and needing care. As the latter scenario is often associated with old age, it can provoke some to attempt to avoid it indefinitely:

Tony: I don't fear getting older, but I do fear – its probably a very natural one, that I lose a mental or physical ability
[And] When I'm 60, or 70, or 80 – I want to be as vital to myself and to the rest of the world as I am right now...

A point re-enforced by his still playing rugby at:

Tony: forty something. And I hope I still will be doing the same sort of stuff when I'm fifty and sixty and seventy
[laughs].

Tony is more fearful of losing 'mental or physical abilit[ies]' at any age and is unusual in the extent to which he believes he is able to separate 'getting older', from such perceived losses. Mitigating against his fear of loss, is his strong desire and belief that he can remain as vital and as youthful as he currently is – implying maintaining his vigour and energy levels to the extent that he might be able to avoid any kind of dependency in old age. He views this as being a realistic possibility, provided he chooses not to 'give in' to old age. Where he believes a person should be:

Tony: able to do the things you want to do, because you really want to do them. And it's a sense of not giving in to old age – your body's gonna tell you to slow down a bit, but that's fine. I don't really mind you know – slowing down, or slowing my body down, but I don't think I will let that happen. I hope I won't let that happen.

For Tony, the link between old age and the body slowing down is called into question, producing a relation to his body in terms of attempting to keep it functioning at consistently youthful levels. He invests a lot of faith in his belief that he can choose to avoid the physical and mental deterioration he associates with extreme old age -- where provided he wants it badly enough, he hopes and believes it will be possible to prevent his body slowing down significantly, retaining his current levels of 'vital[ity]'

and youthfulness, almost indefinitely. The terms of the facticity of the body are shifted here, as what may have been viewed by earlier generations as inevitable accompaniments to old age, are no longer necessarily viewed as being fixed, where the kind of aged body a person has, becomes a matter of choice.

Conceived in such a manner, any changes to this project of extended youthfulness, involving forms of 'deterioration' he might experience in later life, will be a matter of his personal responsibility and could be construed as a failure on his part, through somehow not trying hard enough, or 'allowing' himself to lose control of his body. Difficulties in accepting changes that occur in the body that are associated with old age, are fear inducing for many, particularly with regard to becoming dependent upon others and the loss of individuality. This can lead to forms of bad faith, through non-identification with other people who are already constituted as old, producing forms of ageism in the process.

5. Ageism and the other side of extended youthfulness

An effect of the interviewees telling themselves that they are able to manage their ageing, by taking responsibility for their individual choices in this regard, allows them to keep their fears of ageing at bay. There is always the possibility that if that person starts to take more care over what they eat and drink, how much exercise they take, what they put on their skin and so on, that they will be able to look younger, be more active, more vital and retain or even possibly reverse the processes that constitute a person as old, and retain an air of control. The fear that they might not be able to accomplish such feats, of which there is evidence from comparisons that can be made with aged parents and other, older people around them, can produce a sense of individual failure, blame and moral judgement of themselves and those who provide the comparisons, regarding their appearance and activity levels – who have 'allowed' themselves to become old. Viewed in this regard, although the facticity of the aged body is challenged and seen as less fixed than earlier generations, this has also produced extreme old age – or the point at which strategies to remain active, and/or appear youthful are perceived to no longer work - as a new kind of existential limit. It is difficult, or almost unthinkable in some cases, to be able to imagine beyond the ultimately doomed practices of extended youthfulness, given the fears that are heaped upon older bodies in their final stages of life, that have become dependent, inactive, or both. This disassociation from non-active, unhealthy, different 'old'

people can produce forms of ageism. Although the interviewees acknowledge that ageism does exist, their disassociation from old people, through doing ageing differently to earlier generations, produces an ambiguous relation, as they offer little or no resistance to it – revealing the other side of extended youthfulness.

Ageism is a way of 'doing' the fear of old age with its perceived loss of individuality, through the othering process of having high expectations regarding retaining good health and vitality and non-identification with the homogenised 'old', who do not. There are a number of instances of this:

Katherine: we've all got an expectation that erm, and we actually, probably much healthier' and 'if you do get some serious illness, you've got an expectation that you are going to be cured.

These expectations can have the effect of producing more fear around the idea of becoming ill or inactive in old age:

Rhona: sometimes older people are represented in kind of negative way's, in terms of failing health and disability and you know, losing independence, so that's something that would make me feel a bit apprehensive, or nervous, especially maybe if it was a story about serious illness – dependency I think – that would be something that would trouble me – you know, the idea of being very dependant on other people, losing my independence.

Apprehension of becoming similar to a different, older person, is expressed in terms of fear of enforced dependency upon others -signifying a loss of individuality and the inability to be an active agent, when joining the ranks of the homogenised, different, others needing care⁶. Practices that are able to mitigate against such fears are the belief that being active is a positive thing - that will facilitate avoiding ill health and associated dependency, whilst promoting more autonomous participation with others:

Rhona: there's quite a few sort of active retirement groups – now I think you can join one of those at 55, which isn't really that old [laughs]. Erm, but I suppose, like any sort of club, or association – meet on a weekly basis and get involved in all sorts of activities, and erm, you know physical activities and relaxation – and you know stuff for fun – learning computers – very positive, that even 20 or 30 years ago, I don't think erm, people probably wouldn't have had the time or the money, or even er – there wouldn't have been the openings for these sort of get togethers -- mixed men and women.

⁶ If the individualising forces referred to by Giddens (1991) produce particular kinds of subjects in late modernity, a feature of which is the high value placed upon independence - then extreme old age represents a failure in this regard, resulting in a possible sidelining from participation in the wider society.

Rhona points out that representations of older people are changing and are less monolithic in only depicting frailty and ill health, where there is an expectation that current forms of old age might actually be enjoyable for those who are still active/healthy. Interestingly the 'negative' images that are fear inducing for her, are not in terms of associations with the possible pain and discomfort that disabilities may bring, that made her 'apprehensive' in her earlier example, but in terms of the dependence upon others they may bring. The loss of the ability to be an independent, active, individual agent is seen to produce the most distress, which is again illustrative of how the interviewees see themselves ageing differently in comparison with earlier generations - as a far cry from being content with retiring to a bath chair. Different, 'positive' images of old age on the other hand, stress being 'active' and are contrasted with earlier periods when such options would have been limited by time (dying shortly after retirement), or money – the image of impoverished pensioners.

The perception of ageing differently to earlier generations, regarding aspects of old age as being less fixed than previously, produces an ambivalent relation towards ageism, in that the majority of the interviewees acknowledge that it exists, although only four reported experiencing ageism directed at themselves. Most were very ambivalent about practices to actually resist ageism, given the aforementioned moral judgements regarding managing ageing and disassociation from those who apparently have not. This ambivalence was particularly evident regarding attitudes towards employment. An interviewee commented that a colleague who is a retired employee aged 'sixty-six plus', who has returned to work, because he:

Tony: never got a retirement plan and he needs the money [and] I can't imagine that his lectures have the same vitality as they once had and so on. Maybe that's ageism, or maybe that's just a commentary on something I see that's unfortunate and maybe not particularly pleasant for anybody.

Although it is regarded as 'unfortunate' that this individual has had to resume work out of economic necessity, it is also regarded as un-'pleasant', as it is assumed, but not established, that the lecturer will not have youthful levels of 'vitality', making the job harder on them and the students they teach. The association with vitality and being older 'maybe' a form of ageism, as the individual's ability to deliver an interesting, well-researched lecture is not commented upon. An attitude such as this suggests an awareness of ageism, but an ambivalence regarding resisting it, based upon a negative assumption regarding older people and a more positive evaluation of the energy levels – 'I want to be vital until the day I die' associated with younger people. This ambivalence towards resisting ageism

stems from the viewing older people as a homogeneous category, whose uniformity in terms of the possession of perceived negative traits regarding their impact upon performance in the workplace⁷, produces them as other and something to be disassociated from, in that they are:

Monica: viewed differently – erm, by society, you know. You're not – some people would say that you're not making a contribution.

The term 'contribution' is linked implicitly with paid employment. Such contributions are held to be minimal in retirement, provoking a moral response from 'some people' who view retirees as not contributing anything to the wider society and therefore of lesser value. From such a perspective, there is little impetus to:

Monica: resist it [ageism]– it depends you see. I don't think the company wants to resist it, because they are under pressure – they might say that its not quite right – but they are under pressure to get the results and get the performance. So, they'll take the decision that's necessary. You see that's the problem, unless it's the owners who are older people, ultimately, though they don't realise it – erm they're the ones who has to put the pressure on it.

In this instance, it appears that 'the company' are thought only to able to get the 'results' and 'performance' they want from younger people per se, which is based on the ageist assumption that these are qualities all young people possess and all older people do not. Even if the owners of such a company were older themselves and able to implement such policies/decisions, Monica implies that they would probably not resist ageism either, as they will not 'realise' it, as she believes that they too would hold the same assumptions. This lack of recognition regarding viewing older people as the same is an example of 'bad faith' (Beauvoir, 1972), regarding the ethical element in disassociation from older people, as such negative judgements affect how those other people are treated, in this instance affecting their chances of gaining employment and ability to earn a living. Unless such values are modified in some way, the consensus evident here is that these kinds of practices would continue, including in countries (Ireland) where it is already against the law to do so. An interviewee was:

Ben: involved with a company yesterday – where we were looking to take on a general manager. And the person we clearly wanted was a young person. Because the ahmn age of people in the company, is quite young. Ahmn, the salary being paid wouldn't have been of a higher nature, ahmn it was generally felt that a younger person was required.

⁷ Factors compounded by compulsory retirement, which can be regarded as a form of institutional ageism. Although the government is currently considering allowing people the legal right to work beyond age 65 (BBC, 2004).

Without disputing that a younger person was 'clearly wanted', it is not entirely self evident as to why an older person could not also potentially perform the required tasks equally well. The other members of the company were younger, but it is not beyond the realms of possibility that a particular older person could also fit in to the working environment and relate to the other, younger employees there. The fact that the wages on offer were not 'of a higher nature' also involves assumptions about what a potential older applicant might be looking for, before demonstrating the case as it were. The disassociation from those considered old, different and other, not only affects the livelihood of the older applicant who did not get the job, but re-enforces the negative assumptions about becoming old and desire to identify with older people -where it becomes a 'fact' that simply having reached a particular chronological point, has 'real' consequences regarding getting a job in this instance. Such attitudes efface the individual qualities of older people and are illustrative of how ageing is done to other people, which problematises the notion that ageing can be managed, by doing it differently to earlier generations. People may well be living to greater, healthier ages than earlier generations, but this will not necessarily prevent the homogenising tendencies involved in discriminating against those perceived as old and other, whatever age this eventually occurs at:

Liz: Liz: Its very difficult to go for a job at fifty – you know when I look forty-four. God you know, you shouldn't put your age down [whispered] you should put you're thirty-eight/thirty-nine - you don't put forty down. You can't get married before you're fifty. Once you're fifty you'll be over the hill. [And] they've got preconceived ideas about what fifty means and what thirty means and what twenty means, you know.

However...

Liz: its difficult to know how old people are, once they get past sixty...

Assessments are made about people based upon their chronological age, which can be marked out in decades. Once sixty plus is attained, the cues to a person's chronological age – looks, occupation, marital status and so on, become harder to apply, as though the category of old is adequate enough to subsume all other characteristics within it and part of the process by which 'they' become Other, older people and an undifferentiated, homogeneous mass. Given the premium placed upon managing ageing and retaining individuality, in addition to viewing ageing as malleable – being aged by others (in terms of assumptions made by others of a persons chronological age) who in the case of job applications, may never have met them in person before, is almost impossible to control, short of the applicant lying about their age, which Liz views here as an acceptable and necessary, pragmatic solution. Given the investment in strategies to manage ageing (in order to avoid being categorised as one of the homogeneously old) disassociation and ambivalence arises, from the lack of desire to

recognise themselves in those aged others – or, in some instances, to be unaware of their own ageism. To identify themselves with old people, would in a sense involve an admission of defeat, regarding any desires to extend a period of youthfulness. In response to the question ‘can you remember an occasion when you, or anyone you know, experienced ageism?’ one interviewee replied that he was unaware of any, but:

Ben: obviously that doesn't mean that it hasn't happened to anyone that I'm close to, but not that I'm aware of.

And, in relation to participating on interview boards:

Ben: I was involved with a company yesterday – obviously you can't legally mention age, but you know – there's way's round that, ahmn, so therefore I suppose, in some ways I was involved in, you know, discrimination – partly to discrimination.

Although it could plausibly be argued that this interviewee's initial response involved interpreting the question as knowing anyone personally who had experienced ageism, which he did not. It could equally plausibly be argued to refer to ‘know of’ anyone who had experienced ageism, in which case the person he rejected the day before due to their age, before interview, based on ageist assumptions regarding their ability to fit in with younger people, or the level of salary they might demand, would qualify. This is not to point out an inconsistency, rather to accept it at face value, in order to illustrate how easy it appears to be to make assumptions about an older person and not identify with them, without having ever met them and probably not even notice that they are ageist assumptions. Even if they were recognised as such, the ambivalence produced from the othering tendencies already stated, would not necessarily change such attitudes:

Ben: the individuals made their own choice, as to whether they wanted to apply and be part of such a company – you can justify it, in your own mind by saying – that, the company's never going to employ somebody of fifty or sixty years of age for this – so by, kind of indicating that, or kind of subliminally indicating that, then it stops people from wasting their time, applying for something they are not going to get.

Resistance to ageism is a choice and there is not a necessary binary relation between making positive evaluations of particular aspects of youth and being unable to identify with, or find positive aspects to becoming old. Only a small minority of the interviewees reported such evaluations however:

Jack: I don't understand it, if someone's capable of doing a job, or has proved their worth, their age is irrelevant, it really doesn't come into it. By pointing out, by people being aware that you know, just because you are old, doesn't mean you can't do something, you know. It's the only reason I ever think ageism exists, is that its because someone looks at an older person – unless they've got a problem with age per se, because they are afraid of it.

The majority however, did not make identifications with other older people and their ageing processes, or share a similar viewpoint to the one just stated. Not making such identifications with older people and being in 'bad faith' (Beauvoir, 1972) results in negative judgements being made, where their own fears regarding old age are projected onto others constituted as old, producing ambivalent attitudes towards ageism and the old as a homogeneous category. The perception of doing ageing differently from earlier generations, in terms of regarding bodily changes as malleable and subject to individual control produces extreme old age - where such practices are viewed to have failed, or no longer work - as unimaginable, making it particularly difficult to recognise themselves both in and as old people:

John: well I remember it would shock me to the core when three or four years ago I was on a bus in Prague and a young lad got up and offered me his seat! I didn't know what he was doing for a moment.

The sense of jolt or 'shock' at the realisation that he may have been categorised as being old by a younger person, is difficult to accept, as it does not fit with his view of himself as being non-old. Nor does possibly being categorised as old appear to be a particularly welcome realisation, given his sense of indignation expressed at being viewed as aged. This highlights the difficulty in accepting such identifications, in terms of not wishing negative associations with old age (being too frail to stand) being applied to them.

A consequence of regarding an active and healthy body almost wholly in terms of a matter of choice and individual responsibility, where old age and retirement are envisaged as a 'a good time if you can manage it properly' - is that having an unhealthy or inactive body in old age, insidiously becomes that individual's fault, rather than what may have previously been viewed as a 'normal' part of the process of being alive. Not facing up adequately to the prospect of their own ageing process, or being in 'bad faith', produces disassociations that have ethical implications, which negatively affect how other, old people are treated. Evaluations of older people, in terms of their 'contribution' are culturally produced, rather than necessary relations, as there are:

Ben: other societies who view older people more positively. Whereas our culture is much more youth oriented. And our culture is saying that youth is good, old age is bad but I think we can learn a lot from other societies that there is a contribution that all ages can make.

Such knowledge still seems to produce at best, an ambiguous relation to the notion of the contribution of older people, which is still viewed in terms of comparisons with contributions made when younger:

Ben: from eighty onwards, like the contribution you are making becomes less possible [and] returning to Native American culture, euthanasia is seen as a positive thing, where the wiser people – like the older people are seen, but they recognise in themselves that their contribution is no longer the same value as it once was and they choose a time to go off and die.

When 'contributions' are envisaged in terms of comparisons with what a person was able to do when younger, with a particular emphasis placed upon contributing to the workforce, then the further away from working age a person becomes, the less value is attributed to their individual contribution. In such circumstances, choosing death can be seen as a perfectly rational solution, to the demands that might potentially be placed upon others in terms of requiring care, as it would still permit the exercise of rational 'control'. If a person can't 'manage it properly' and their ability to 'contribute' to society, via continued employment is curtailed - either through ill health or ageist employment practices regarding their date of birth, then retirement and old age may well not be quite such 'a good time'. This is particularly so if their economic situatedness means they haven't the resources to enjoy it, or their Cartesian conceived body refuses to cooperate – making permanent inactivity, via euthanasia, seem like a sensible choice in fear management for some - an element that will be focused upon in the next section.

6. Extended youthfulness, extreme old age and the end of life

The variety of practices aimed at managing the ageing body and challenging its facticity, are different to earlier generations, in that the ageing process compels the individual to be reflexive about the body, which calls into question its inevitable degeneration and produces it as a site of options and choices. Practices aimed at increasing healthiness and vitality – paying attention to diet and exercise and so on, can extend the period of youthfulness, allowing the possibility of changing, delaying, or reversing what may have been seen as a 'natural' biological process by earlier generations. Notions of biological and chronological ageing begin to diverge and for some, the status of facticity is called into question - where biological ageing is perceived as being malleable, almost indefinitely in some cases.

Views such as those outlined above have consequences, in terms of the ageism and negative discrimination directed against those perceived as old, who have not managed their ageing sufficiently well. The limit for a project of individualised extended youthfulness is still death (biomedicine has so

far been unable to conquer mortality), although dying and death is institutionally screened out (see also Lasch, 1991, in the introduction). Signs of bodily degeneration associated by the interviewees with extreme old age, were generally perceived as being particularly difficult to accept, regarding their identifying that this was also happening to them. In this sense, the unimaginability of extreme old age has replaced death as the limit to existential freedom of choice, and old age and death are collapsed. Such a denial of destiny, or bad faith, has profound implications in terms of the production of ageism and how older people are viewed, particularly towards the end of their lifespan. Evaluations were perceived by the interviewees to be made about the relative worth of life, related to chronological age, at both institutional and personal levels. At the institutional level, holding particular views or assumptions with regard to ageism is not without consequence or import, as the previous section on successfully gaining employment showed. In some cases, holding such views, can be argued to be literally a matter of life or death, evidenced in the fears of some of the interviewees, regarding their perception of the rationing of healthcare by age, which could threaten those perceived as olds very existence:

Amanda: I think there is age discrimination in the NHS, quite considerably – aahmn, that many of the conditions which start as minor conditions for elderly people – by the time they are seen, it becomes quite a serious issue. And that worries me. [If] there'd be more money for the NHS, then perhaps we could be more enlightened in terms of the way in which we send elderly people home, to their damp cold flats that – you know, exacerbates their condition, rather than keeping them in hospital, purely because of age.

The sense that older people do not receive the same level of care as younger people, when they become ill or have accidents, reveals a fear of how the lives of older people are valued in relation to younger people. Amanda argues that the attitudes informing these policies, regarding discriminating on age grounds, could be more creative or 'enlightened', as she believes that in some instances, they have the effect of hastening illness and death, rather than aiding and prolonging life. It is recognised that leaving older people in hospital for long periods may be pragmatically convenient, but it is not seen as the best solution, for the older person, who it is feared may become viewed as a hopeless case and therefore, less deserving of care:

David: they do turn off machines when people are so old and frail and gone that there's no hope, and – but I -- ageism is a pejorative term and I think what I've said has been quite a sensible policy, cos there are only finite resources.

Although pragmatic attitudes such as these may well be rational solutions to a perceived problem of funding and the rationing of care, the interviewees typically exhibit a disassociation from recognising themselves in a similar situation, where such assessments may not necessarily appear as 'sensible', or unproblematic, if they happened to be the older person being assessed in this manner:

Amanda: I have to say that I feel guilty because my ten year old son fell out of a thirty foot bedroom window and was – he had marvellous care at erm the hospital – that's a miracle that he's still alive because he actually erm caused – two ambulances came for example...And erm, I think you know, sorry to say, but I don't think an older person would have been dealt with perhaps as quickly and you know, have twelve doctors waiting at A and E with a blue code emergency when we arrived. Aahmn, so I think there is that ageism there.

Amanda fears that if an 'older person' had had a similar accident to her son, that the emergency would be classified as being less urgent, with a slower ambulance response time and fewer number of doctors on hand to assist - possibly resulting in a far less favourable outcome for the older person, or even contributing towards their otherwise preventable death.

Regarding extreme old age as a barrier to the malleability of the facticity of ageing and extended youthfulness, has consequences regarding choices and evaluations made about the relative worth of a life, related to chronological age, reflected at the personal level also. This is evident amongst the majority of the interviewees regarding their enthusiasm for having the right to choose not to have to continue life indefinitely (thirteen answered that they would like to legally have the choice, one abstained from answering directly, whereas only one of the interviewees would not want to have to make such a choice⁸). Variation amongst those who thought there should be legally sanctioned rights in this area, concerned the level at which it was thought it should be an individual's choice, rather than

⁸ Monica's interpretation of the question means that she views such a scenario as her having the sole responsibility for another family member (rather than own life) who was suffering and having to make the decision herself, regarding the other person's life. For the majority of the other interviewees, they interpreted the question in terms of making the decision over their own lives, not another's. Monica's understanding of assisted suicide or euthanasia also differs from the majority of the other interviewees, as she views the procedure as inhumane, understanding it in terms of withholding food, causing death by starvation. This she views as actually causing someone deeply cared for, even more distress, seems to be her main objection to such a scenario, but acknowledges that it would also be deeply distressing to 'sit by', knowing that that person was 'suffering' - suggesting that she might amend her position, if permission for the procedure was taken out of her hands and it was quick and painless. Where Monica shares common ground with some of the other interviewees, in making a distinction between being terminally ill and what she hints at might be viewed as depression in some cases. That Monica is aware of a 'debate about euthanasia at the moment' illustrates that the whole subject has relatively recently become more visible and openly discussed than previously might have been the case, possibly reflecting cultural changes regarding the later stages of life. Unusually, even though Monica hints at a distinction between terminally ill people and people suffering from depression, where in the latter case there is a chance that their condition might improve in the future, she is still against euthanasia in the former scenario, as she recognises a possibility that even for some terminally ill people, they may be able to have some form of 'fulfilling life', possibly in terms of the intensity of their relationships. As with the other interviewees here, this highlights an overarching concern with notions of quality over quantity of life.

a decision taken by others, such as, for instance, in the Diane Pretty case⁹. In relation to this case, a number of opinions were offered by the interviewees, regarding their views in this area, that were related to Ms. Pretty's then situation:

Sadie: [She's] got M.S. I think, some sort of deteriorating disease – where she can't do anything for herself, and she's just trapped – and she would rather die. And I think probably one of her reasons might be to release her family from the responsibility of doing everything for her, or you know [unclear] and she knows its going to get worse. Erm, I think she should have the right and I don't think it should be up to the courts to decide, erm I think you should be able to consent, personally to let other people help us to die in that situation.

The response here is framed in terms of the individual's inalienable 'right' to choose what to do with their life, which a court should have no part in and that additionally, another person should be allowed to help if necessary, in this instance to ease the burden on the family. This particular case was cited by four other of the interviewees, (as it was frequently reported on at the time, but her request was notoriously denied by the legal system) who all agreed that in this case, the woman in question should have been allowed the legal option of assisted suicide, in order to ease the burden on her family and avoid her husband being prosecuted, should he choose to assist her. Where the responses differed to the case, was in terms of the degree to which it was seen as an individual right to choose, free from intervention by others, rather than its potential as a legal precedent. Such responses and the case's controversial nature, suggest that the fear of the loss of control over mental and physical capabilities, also pose a threat to individuality itself, where the choice is taken out of the individual's hands, irrespective of their wishes, with a removal of control over the facticity of the body's deterioration. In reference to the same case, an interviewee at one end of the spectrum regarding the extent to which individual control was highly valued, argued that the:

Jack: woman who wants her husband to help her take her life and the government's saying no – or the judge has said no. Why should they have the right to oversee that, its none of their business, you know, its two consenting adults. They can do what the hell they like.

This extreme level of individual responsibility recognises no other authority greater than that of the autonomous self, whereas others felt that:

Katherine: It [is] such a difficult question. Cos I think erm – I just really don't agree that somebody who feels like dying, should be allowed to, just like that. But I do think that if somebody's terminally ill, then doctors should have a lot more discretion – about giving them an extra dose of something. I think to make somebody suffer is cruel. But at

⁹ Diane Pretty suffered from motor neurone disease. She desired assisted suicide, with the help of her husband and fought unsuccessfully for a change in the law so that her partner would not be prosecuted for doing so (BBC, 2001).

the same time – there was a woman last week in Ireland, who was very depressed and committed suicide with some help from two Americans. And that to me seems extremely sinister.

A distinction is made in these instances, between a person who 'feels like dying' and someone who is terminally ill. In the former case assisted suicide is seen as unacceptable, implying that depression or mental illness impair judgement regarding such choices, so individual autonomy should be overruled, as their ability to make a rational choice has been compromised. Terminal illness is seen as more acceptable regarding euthanasia, performed by doctors, as a judgement is implied regarding quality of life, which, unlike the former case, is inferred to be of inferior quality and unlikely to improve. Facticity is also implicated here, in terms of bad faith and non-recognition of the other in themselves.

One interviewee suggested a rational solution to the problem of terminal illness, regarding his taking responsibility for deciding the worth of his life in advance, from the vantage point of being non-old:

David: if I was sensible I would a] organise my funeral, cos I know pretty much what I want and b] also say to my executors that they have permission to say turn the machine off. I don't want my life to be prolonged when I have no quality within it. I don't want others to be put through the sitting by the bedside scenario, because I'm being kept alive by a series of machines. Erm and as I say, I have faith [in God], so in a – the death thing is o.k., but the dying thing you know – quite quickly, thank you very much!

A high degree of desire for rational autonomy is demonstrated here regarding what he may potentially do, to control this possible scenario in the latter part of his life. His use of the word 'if' implies that this provision in his will, is something he has not actually made yet, which suggests the difficulty in identifying himself as an ill or extremely old person in the future. The evaluation of the quality of life involved in being dependent upon a machine for survival, as having little or no value, either to himself, or to his family reveals the difficulty, if not impossibility of relating to a situation where health and vitality are so diminished and the unimaginability of conceiving how he might be, or die in the future, or indeed actually occupy such a position. This is also a significant factor inhibiting the recognition of other older people as being the same. Significantly, his fears are not about death itself, but relate to the process of dying, which he would prefer to be over - 'quite quickly'. Again this has resonance with notions of quality of life, often associated with old age, where once the body becomes ill and unhealthy, with little chance of recovery, that such a form of life is presumed to have little or no value and may as well end, 'quickly'. Given that the future is unknowable, it is revealing how none of the

interviewees imagine terminal illness affording some quality of life, particularly in the possible increased intensity of relationships with others, once the knowledge that life is finite is fully accepted.

The whole procedure leading up to death is something that is anxiety provoking:

Rhona: I certainly would feel very apprehensive about ending up oh you know – no independence maybe, no speech, no you know – the sorts of things that you read or hear about – I don't have any personal experience of that, but erm, yeah I think – it's a very tricky question, but I do think people should have a right.

Although Rhona admits she has no personal experience of anyone ending their days in the way she describes, she admits that she is influenced by what she 'read[s] or hear[s] about' as though she takes what for her would be the worse case scenario she could imagine and associates it with what might very well happen to her. Linking these possible outcomes with her own eventual demise makes it difficult for her to even think about:

Rhona: I certainly wouldn't like to be hanging around myself if I wasn't reasonably able – I really wouldn't you know – I wouldn't want to know about it.

Linking old age with such possible (but not necessarily probable outcomes) makes it almost unthinkable for some, making the prospect of a quick and painless death, via some form of assisted suicide, far more appealing – particularly as it is associated with preserving individual autonomy:

Emma: if the quality of your life isn't good then you should – I think you should be able to say that you wouldn't want to er, hang around, you know – living this life, you know – which in your – for you is erm, basically not a life, you know.

Taking such views to their radical conclusion, if a person's quality of life isn't good, then it ceases in a sense to be a life, in that the person is no longer living when defined as such. It is this kind of assumption, when attached to the idea of a terminal illness, and/or 'extreme' old age, viewed from the perspective of someone not in such a position, that can lead to old age as being viewed as frightening and almost unthinkable, producing almost complete disassociation. This scenario is perceived as 'not a life', where in addition to its lacking 'quality', it also seems to pose too great a threat to notions of individuality and the possibility of exercising the autonomous right to choose and the exercise of rational control:

Tony: we spend our lives exercising control over what we do next, but suddenly, when you can't exercise control, what do you do next, cos your physically, or mentally incapable? What would you do, or what do people who really value you do – what they do becomes important.

It is almost as though from the perspective of a relatively young and healthy person, assisted suicide/euthanasia is also preferable to handing over and entrusting autonomy and 'control' to someone else, even if it were to a close family member. In this regard euthanasia could be seen as the exercise of the ultimate form of control and choice:

Tony: yeah, there is a role for euthanasia, er and we can do it and we can do it well.

This refers to the Dutch model –

Tony: and we can do it, I think within some sense of morality, and ethicality and yeah, I think it's the right thing to do. I can't see it travelling to [laughs] Ireland too easily, but I think it will eventually.

It is interesting how confident Tony feels in his suggestion that it is only a matter of when and not if euthanasia will become commonplace, even in the implied less liberal Ireland – the inference being that the process of rational solutions to the 'problem' of extreme old age and terminal illness are almost a foregone conclusion, even in less traditionally secular places than the Netherlands. The individualising tendencies that stress placing a positive emphasis upon retaining autonomy, management and control, up to a point beyond which the forms of life involved in terminal illness, sometimes associated with extreme old age, cease in a sense to be a life and are highly emotive issues. One interviewee poses a difficult question regarding the issue of maintaining or switching off life support systems, which could also be viewed as an extremely rational solution to the cost of keeping people in hospital, whose logic could equally apply to older people facing long periods of incapacitation, with little chance of recovery:

Jack: [It's] totally immoral that you should want to keep somebody alive – it's like people that have accidents and they're on life support systems – it's the family that are saying, you know, keep the machine switched on, indefinitely, for how long? Someone in a coma, how long should you keep them alive, how much money should be spent on that? I mean, o.k. say, there must be a period of time when they say its o.k. you know. The longer you can have somebody kept alive, then who cares – the expenditure and its more hospital facilities being used where it might be people desperately needing that, who will recover quickly you know. I don't know, it's a contentious subject isn't it. But people who are on life support machines for years and years, it seems ridiculous, you're supposed to die you know, you've gotta accept the fact – we're not machines are we – we're human beings, blood and flesh.

Applying cost/benefit analysis to judging the value of a person's life is 'contentious' as the interviewee is well aware, where two different and opposing outcomes would likely result, depending upon who was making the judgement – the incapacitated person's immediate relatives, or hospital management committees - given that each would have different priorities in making their assessments. Complaints that human beings are being assisted in such ways, only regarding the end of their lifespan, as the result of life threatening accident (or applying the same rationality to illness associated with old age), reveals more about the level of value attributed to the different points of those life-spans, where what may be the final stages appear to be judged as measurably inferior and therefore, less deserving of assistance. Beauvoir's (1972) 'bad faith' is particularly significant here for those close to the end of their life, given the high level of the stakes involved in not identifying with the other person, for those entrusted with the power to end it.

The lack of recognition of how technology, loosely defined, may have already contributed to maintaining, or extending a person's healthiness and existence, points to processes which could be regarded as forming part of a naturalisation of not getting old. Technology is not recognised as contributing to both increases in lifespan and the perception of more youthful levels of healthiness, in comparison to earlier generations. Nevertheless, they produce different, or heightened expectations regarding quality of life and health, with corresponding negative evaluations of life that no longer responds as well, to such interventions. Thirteen of the fifteen¹⁰ interviewees answered that they would not use technological developments to increase their lifespan, regarding them as 'unnatural'¹¹, or posing too great a risk to their overall health:

Tony: we can replace body parts, but are we going to replace mind parts, erm, what sort of older people are we gonna have, that might be living longer, but still, their brains might go. Er, is there not just a natural order, and ok we live longer now, due to better health, but I'm not so sure that we're making the right decisions, that we're gonna try and replace all our body parts, but the mind goes.

In Tony's scenario, he takes it for granted that 'we live longer now, due to better health', pointing to a naturalisation of not getting old. Viewing the mind as being very separate from the body also has

¹⁰ Of the two who said they might, this was with conditions attached, regarding their effectiveness in relation to risk to health and cost.

¹¹ The perception that the body can be managed and controlled, rather than being a biological given, has increased, through certain technologies and expert knowledge, particularly with regard to diet and exercise. The social body has not been completely 'emancipated' from nature (Giddens, 1991) however, as uncertainty about the risks in using new technologies and the barrage of new and conflicting information about them, make the interviewees wary of attempting to control them. Paradoxically, the greater the increasing and conflicting information or knowledge for potential control of the body, the greater the reflexive uncertainty about how to apply it (Giddens, 1990), reflected in the interviewees distrust of 'unnatural' seeming technologies, producing inaction, rather than control.

consequences, where tampering with the body, via biotechnology is not 'right' in terms of his sense of a 'natural order' - in that it is ethically misguided to prolong physical life, when his idea of a mind has significantly diminished. This is rooted in his fear that he is:

Tony: not so sure, unless like, I was in a lot of pain, that I'd want some surgeon inserting something that would prolong my life, er, because I figure if I hit a hundred, yeah my body could be fairly active as a result of all sorts of biotechnological developments, but I'd be really shit scared that my mind, wouldn't get it. I don't want to end up in a wheelchair, with somebody really looking after my mental welfare. I want to be vital until the day I die. [And] I want to die pretty naturally, pretty quickly and pretty painlessly.

Although most would probably agree that they would prefer to die quickly and painlessly, they may not share the same level of expectation regarding being 'vital until the day [they] die', without some form of technological intervention. That Tony expects to be able to live to old age and being 'vital' until his death, points again to a naturalisation of technological processes that may help facilitate this, that he takes for granted and is unaware of. His vitality at an advanced age has probably already benefited from some form of 'technological' intervention, such as for instance improvements in medical care and access to a varied diet, or fitness facilities (his rugby training), which are likely to have increased his 'vitality' and lifespan. The naturalisation of not getting old contributes to high expectations regarding only being content with elevated energy levels, in some cases, with everything remaining in full working order up to the point of death. That Tony thinks using technology to 'prolong' his life 'should' not happen, reveals both the naturalisation of not getting old, in his non-recognition that utilising it breach's his sense of a 'natural order' (that already comprises many technological interventions which may have already increased his lifespan in relation to if they had been unavailable) that in turn influence ethical evaluations. Such evaluations regarding someone else having to look after his 'welfare', viewed as a compromise of his individuality, further contribute to negative evaluations of forms of life where individuality is compromised, often associated with extreme old age.

The very concept of prolonging life via technology, is less clear cut for some:

Jack: I think, you know, with modern medicine for one thing, its obviously made it possible for us to live much longer than our forefathers. Just with things like penicillin and certain drugs, so obviously er, its been an advance and it's benefiting everybody, you know.

This highlights how differing notions of what qualifies as 'technological', impact upon conceptions of what counts as 'natural' and the perceived level to which life spans have been influenced by

technology. Thus the developments in 'health' that Tony refers to, or the lack of recognition by other interviewees generally, of the more low-tech developments which have increased lifespan that Jack refers to, are so taken-for-granted that they appear to be natural. It is not only 'medicine', but even relatively simple improvements in sanitation and the provision of clean water, via chemical treatments have already dramatically extended life-spans.¹² All of which contribute to the naturalisation of not getting old and dissatisfaction with bodies that are already categorised as old.

What is interesting regarding the possibility of further increases in lifespan facilitated by technological means, is that they are viewed here with extreme scepticism - being pointless at best in the case of cryogenics 'if you're not living in the moment, then I can't see the point of it', or almost a form of curse in some cases - being 'confined' to a wheelchair. Individual notions of acceptable levels of quality of life in the present are of paramount concern, as the future is an unknown factor, whatever level of desire they have to occupy it. None of the interviewee's expressed positive reactions to the prospect of significantly increased life-spans or youthfulness, via biomedical technologies - encapsulated in comments such as not being prepared to:

Susan: risk my health for something that hasn't been proven to work. [And] I'm not a big believer in taking any kind of drugs - if somebody said oh, there's a wonder drug here that'll make you feel ten years younger, you'd have to prove to me really that it was safe.

The overriding concern was with retaining and extending health and non-impairment, playing it safe by using more trusted techniques¹³, such as:

Susan: going to the gym, or that type of thing.

Although six of the interviewees accepted cosmetic procedures as a viable means of improving their aged appearance [rather than extending lifespan] should they feel bodily changes merit it, if not for themselves, then seeing it as acceptable for others - their overriding concern was this was only acceptable, as long as it did not compromise overall health. In the case of botox for example:

¹² Although these processes are arguably as 'unnatural' as cryogenics or stem cell research, they are almost invisible in their recognition as such. What is perhaps even more surprising in the taken-for-granted aspects of such technologies, is the lack of recognition of their influence in successfully contributing to huge increases in average life-spans, in an extremely short historical time frame, to the extent that reaching old age is 'less of an achievement', through 'technologies to enhance survival - vaccines, antibiotics, water purification systems, electricity and so on', which can lead to seeing eventual, extreme old age as an 'affront' (Kirkwood, 2001).

¹³ Anxieties concerning the unintended consequences of technology posing a risk to health are projected onto the body, contributing to it being viewed as a project that has to be managed. This has been theorised as a feature of late modernity (Beck, 1992) that affects all individuals, in a variety of social locations.

Amanda: I sort of wonder about the safety in the long run, a bit like the breast implant controversy. Where they have those sort of things really – ahmn whether we know enough about the long-term effects to trust technology to that extent – so I go more natural.

Practices which form part of the naturalisation of not getting old, are only performed if they pose no threat to health and are not performed to increase lifespan per se, or to remain 'forever young'. Quality over quantity of life is of far more value to them and what their differing practices of extending their period of youthfulness are oriented towards.

Conclusion

Each of the above themes reveal individual differences in terms of their evaluation of the quality over the quantity of a life. Not only does quality of life appear to be of paramount importance over quantity, but also that the unimaginability of the idea of extreme old age and decrepitude says something important regarding the possibility of being in the future, in the present. What each of these themes address and stress are how the interviewees wish to live now. This only becomes problematic when they are asked to think about life in a chronological way, as they do not know how they will be in the future, only that they will die eventually. Extreme old age, with its loss of autonomy, is the repository of their fears of the unknown. It is perhaps unsurprising that the majority here find the option to end their own life an attractive one, as long as it is done as quickly and as painlessly as possible. Whether their views will change should the situation ever become a reality for them, is purely conjecture - but there is evidence in some of the narratives here, that it is by no means an easy choice, however inured with the right to choose an individual might be.

What is most significant is that these various fears are associated with old age, which becomes synonymous with a vastly inferior form of life, making it something to be avoided through practices of extended youthfulness for as long as possible. This would not necessarily mean to remain the binary opposite and be 'forever young', rather to avoid becoming extremely old instead, with all it appears to entail for the interviewees. This is a concept that is also gaining currency within the medical profession, in a movement referred to in terms of the 'compression of morbidity', whose aim is to drastically reduce the period of time between the first signs of infirmities and death. As this period is also often associated with extreme old age, it is easy to see this movement as another potentially

negative force, that may function, however benignly, to deny or even erase traditional associations with old age itself; leaving those who for whatever reason are still regarded as, or become defined as old, with even more prejudices to face.

Ageing in the present moment, when divorced from chronological projections, is far more about doing things, to preserve a level of quality of life, through particular practices to prolong being non-old. The common element of such practices that increase youthfulness, or prevent extreme old age - are that they aid feeling better in the present. This is believed to be able to be achieved through their practices of extended youthfulness, where maintaining or improving their quality of life, functions as a buffer between extreme old age and death. Distinctions between the differing practices relate to individual ideas of quality of life, rather than to age per se – so they predominantly reflect how they want to be now, and hopefully continue to be in the future. As it is impossible to be in the future, they can only do things to improve their being in the present moment that contributes to their disassociation from, or the unimaginability of being old.

Interestingly, in the case of the only interviewee who chose not to answer the final question directly ('should we be able to choose not to continue life indefinitely and why?'), who unusually and as a rejoinder to the last interviewees comments on being comatose, felt that she had actually experienced 'los[ing] her life' as she put it, as she had:

Liz: a dreadful [motor] accident. I was twenty-one. And er, so – and I lost my memory for two weeks I suppose – brain injuries...

This has led her to feel that:

Liz: most people fear erm, [being] incapacitated – that sort of thing. There is another side to it, is that ahmn, having been er, neurologically unconscious. And being sort of semi-oblivious I do now [laughs] realise, you know, being on the other side is worse for the people on the outside looking in, than it is to you. I don't know whether its just me, but I suppose its cos if you've lost your life once, you feel like – I mean sort of being a production industry where you time and cost every minute. You know, every minute that you [unclear] you know, sort of like circuits wasting cos you've only got one life.

Having come close to losing her life once, she appears to have a greater appreciation for it, including its limitations, since regaining consciousness (despite the challenges she faced regarding her altered

appearance through facial disfigurement). There may also be a similar aspect for other, perhaps older people, that when they are facing immanent death, that the life they have left becomes more precious and in some aspects, possibly gains in quality. Even though Liz has a high level of appreciation for the life she has left and did not express a preference either way for euthanasia, she would not want to continue it indefinitely, finding the idea 'awful' (none of the interviewees desired eternal life), as people 'come to a natural end', where they are 'too tired at the end to carry on', or 'even stay awake'. She preferred instead to make the most of the life she had left, in the knowledge of a limit, or finitude. It is appropriate to offer her scenario as an alternative, to the more fearful, but equally plausible, other way's that a life might end, with the proviso that although she may arguably have been the closest amongst the interviewees to experiencing death, that it is likely to be as individual and subjectively different a matter as any other life experience. The general support for assisted suicide and euthanasia shown amongst the majority of the interviewees, none of who reported experiencing life-threatening situations themselves, could also be a contributory factor to their negative evaluations of the final stages of life and disassociation from it. Each position demonstrates the unimaginability of extreme old age in different ways, where the variety of practices relating to delaying or avoiding it, in some cases reveal the other side of extended youthfulness. The facticity of extreme old age has replaced death as the existential limit, for many of the interviewees. Maintaining and improving quality of life is the buffer between them and what is strived for, via the practices of extended youthfulness. Variation in the affects produced by holding the different positions stated, are likely to impact upon how people at the end of their lives regard themselves and others, and are treated in turn by others, particularly if they are very old. This is not without significance or consequence and is worthy of pause for thought, regarding whether or not it is better to burn out, than to fade away.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Introduction

Baby boomers are said in academic and popular discourse to be particularly distinctive in terms of their being a source of resistance, who are claimed to be notable for challenging forms of discrimination in their youth through active protest. This was my rationale for choosing to examine them as a group in the first instance, in order to explore their relation to age and ageing. Here I examine 'resistance' and consider the implications *for so-called grey activism of the ways in which the interviewees conceive of ageing and old age.* I do this through an exploration of both the interviewees' claims about activism – largely unlikely in the present; and my own claims about their activism – its ambiguity related to identifying, or not identifying with old people and difficulties in accepting signs associated with mortality; and situate both sets of claims and their implications with reference to the findings from the study as a whole – that the desire for extended youthfulness may effectively result in their choosing against themselves by not engaging with such activism. The discussion of activism is given further depth and richness, through being informed by the overall analysis of age and ageing presented here. I proceed by dividing this chapter into two halves. In the first half I put Featherstone and Wernick's (1995) claims about baby boomers' generational resistance into a productive tension with Giddens (1991) regarding lifestyle choices, which emphasises individuality and individualism. The interviewees (with some exceptions) confirm the accent on lifestyle, choice and individuality, that mitigate against collective activism on the basis of generation. In the second half I discuss the unthinkability of old age and explore the implications of this in relation to activism. The discussion of euthanasia links the two halves together, by vindicating the analysis in the first part, in that as old age is unthinkable, individual choices, including how and when to die, must be extended to the final moments between life and death.

Generational resistance, choice and individuality

In this section, claims made about baby boomers (Featherstone and Wernick, 1995) relating to generational resistance, are examined in relation to Giddens' (1991) concepts of lifestyle and choice

and the accent on individualism, regarding the implications for collective generational activism. A cultural analysis of ageing shows that people who can plausibly be defined as being members of the so-called baby boom generation, are doing ageing in a particular way, oriented towards practices of extended youthfulness. Here extended youthfulness refers to the desire to retain what are regarded to be the best aspects of both youth and maturity (bodily appearance, health, energy, confidence, independence and so on) and that, in following such practices, the interviewees believe that they will facilitate their remaining non-old. Giddens (1990; 1991) commentary upon individualization and the reflexive project of the self in late modernity has been instructive to the analysis in this regard. He analyses the relationship between death, self-identity and the body, in social conditions where traditional forms of social order and systems of meaning have been swept away at an unprecedented pace, provoking an acute reflexivity regarding life and death and what they mean. In the absence of ritualised, conferred identities, attached to the status of social positions in traditional societies, the late modern individual is faced with the problem of creating and sustaining an identity through reflexively questioning and re-ordering self narratives from a bewildering variety of choices, with no coherent moral coordinates to follow. In this scenario, both the body and self-identity become 'reflexively organised projects' (Giddens, 1991). Under such conditions, meaningful self-identities are constructed in relation to what Giddens (1991) refers to as '*lifestyle*'. This is not only conceived in terms of its popular association with the 'superficial consumerism' of advertising imagery:

there is something much more fundamental going on than such conceptions suggests: in conditions of high modernity, we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so – we have no choice but to choose. A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self identity (Giddens, 1991, p.81).

The core routines individuals follow in late modern settings - regarding how they dress, adorn themselves, style their hair, what they eat, the modes of speech and acting they adopt, where they like to socialise, what music they listen to, how they may attempt to sculpt their bodies in line with particular ideals and so on - are all reflexively open to change in the on-going re-creation of self-identity. Each of these aspects involves a level of compulsion, regarding making decisions and negotiating choices over how to act and appear, in order to give form to narratives of selfhood and how, ultimately, to be.

In order to maintain a coherent self-identity choices are made within the variable contexts of an individual's social location, restricting the possibility of some choices in one location, whilst enhancing the prospect of others. Different sources of information may offer conflicting, but equally plausible accounts, these can sometimes seem to change by the day, regarding advice on what to eat, how to exercise, what to believe, how to act and so on. At one level for instance, this could be deciding which low fat spread to choose, or at another, which scientific explanation of anti-ageing strategies to give credence to. This is not to argue that a multiplicity of choices are open to everyone, or that people are necessarily aware of all the choices that may be available to them, but that lifestyle patterns emerge which make some options and choices more likely than others. In this sense certain choices could appear 'out of character' for a particular lifestyle and could also be limited by others' opinions of choices made, in addition to other socio-economic factors. Reflexivity within modernity operates under conditions of chronic uncertainty, where information gleaned from what may be regarded as trustworthy sources, are held 'until further notice'. All this information is further filtered through the context of the mediated forms of communication through which it is presented, where different newspapers, internet sources or television programmes, can provide a host of differing interpretations of the same events - all containing the potential to further influence lifestyle choices.

Amongst differing lifestyle options it becomes imperative for the modern individual to plan for the future, in terms plotting a 'trajectory of the self'. What Giddens (1991) terms *life-planning* refers to the organisation and planning of events and lifestyle choices in order to realise the projection of a particular biography of the self, as projected into the future. Both lifestyles and life-plans are 'not just 'in', or constituent of, the day-to-day life of social agents, but form institutional settings which help shape their actions' (Giddens, 1991, p. 85). These 'institutional settings' are posited as an explanation for why, in the context of late modernity 'their influence is more or less universal, no matter how objectively limiting the social situations of particular individuals or groups may be' (ibid. p.85). He does not deny that differing life chances related to financial impoverishment for example, affect or 'condition' the possibility of making particular lifestyle choices, but, that even those suffering economic deprivation, experience being deprived of certain possibilities differently, in that they are experienced 'as possibilities – from those excluded by the framework of tradition' (Ibid. p.86). If it is the case that in some conditions of economic poverty, the grip of traditional forms of life have become more eroded than other places, then lifestyle and its creative formation, could be a defining aspect of such

positions, where habits related to lifestyle 'are constructed through the resistance of ghetto life as well as through the direct elaboration of distinctive cultural styles and modes of activity' (ibid. p. 86). In difficult economic circumstances that are able to restrict choice for some, Giddens (1991) argues that those people cannot help but be aware of social factors which may have improved aspects of the social situations of (affluent) others more generally, knowledge of which will modify their actions in some way – even in terms of being forced to attempt novel solutions to restricted circumstances, solutions that would simultaneously reflexively shape that identity. However, in situations of deprivation it is significant that such reflexive decision-making may be experienced as a source of despair rather than as an opportunity for self-improvement. Life-plans oriented towards the future and the control of time, and the creation of lifestyles that attempt to realise them, all indicate 'an increasingly dominant temporal outlook' (Giddens, 1991, p.87), a point I shall return to in my discussion of the body.

Many of the interviewees' accounts presented here support the notion of the self, outlined by Giddens as a feature of late modernity (and particularly of heightened individualization and reflexivity), as no longer being an unchanging, homogeneous nucleus, contained inside an individual (Shils, 1981). These individualized tendencies are also evident to a lesser extent, within certain aspects of Featherstone and Wernick's (1995) ambiguous account relating to some (but not all) of the aspects of their conception of the baby boom generation, whom they claim are formed in two distinct but powerful ways. It is interesting that on the one hand they are simultaneously described as being 'self-absorbed' and 'narcissistic' – features more in keeping with Giddens (1991) and Lasch's (1991) accounts of the rise of individualism. However, on the other hand, as the members of this generation are also represented by them as synonymous with being a young adult in the 'radical' 60's, and that they are also likely to be unified in being collectively 'socially critical', possibly in line with their (assumed) earlier radicalism, this proves problematic for Featherstone and Wernick's (1995) representation, when used to account for other, possibly conflicting aspects they associate with baby boomers, regarding their assumed unity *and* simultaneous individualism. Baby boomers can and have also been plausibly defined in terms of the wider demographic span between 1946-1964, where the earliest and latest members of the category occupied very different cultural landscapes as young adults - making a unified 'boomer' experience seem even more unlikely in these terms. As the earliest baby boomers in the wider definition would have been young adults in the late 60's, whilst the youngest members would

have been young children and likely to have had a very different awareness of the 'sixties' - this highlights an inattention in Featherstone and Wernick's (1995) account towards other situated aspects of being. This is further complicated however, by how they pose a relationship between Mannheim's (1952) collective 'sense' of generational formation, and the aspects of individuality they also attribute to baby boomers, when discussing their defining characteristics - where they regard baby boomers as being at the:

forefront of cultural attention throughout their lives, if for no other reason than its size and importance as a market. The radical experience of the sixties, moreover, has made it into a generation in Mannheim's sense: self-consciously formed by a relatively unifying historical experience. At once socially critical, narcissistically self-absorbed, and self-defined as forever young, what could be more natural, then, than that those of this generation with a professional interest in culture and society should now begin to turn attention to the next – and last – life-course experience we are collectively beginning to undergo? (Featherstone and Wernick, 1995, p.13).

Baby boomers are presented in the above account as being 'self-consciously' produced as a generation, in constructionist terms, through marketing forces, supporting Giddens (1991) position on the rise of individuality, yet are claimed simultaneously to form a generation as a result of other forces, namely their 'relatively unifying historical experience' of the 'radical' 'sixties' - fulfilling Mannheim's (1952) criteria for the more 'natural' generation-as-actuality. As a result of Featherstone and Wernick's (1995) specifying their definition of baby boomers in terms of being a young adult in the 60's, claimed to be experienced in collective, unifying terms and productive of a generation of separate individuals, where individuality and unity are both characteristics of that generation, does not adequately address the experience of those baby boomer interviewees here, defined in the wider demographic sense, of a population bulge between 1946-1964. Who's experience, in terms of the interviewee's accounts, has coalesced completely into an un-unified individualism, in all but the case of one woman. It is also significant that she was the only interviewee to describe herself as coming from a working class background, and who did not position herself in relation to individualistic narratives. Liz retained a collective sense of belonging to the sixties generation that continued to inform how she perceived herself and her fellow sixties cohort members, whom she believed would act together to compel 'consumer society' to resist negative stereotypes of older people, and particularly those that represent them as a 'burden on the state'. This may be more than coincidental, as Skeggs (1997) has argued in her study of white working class women, whose identities were not produced in relation to individualistic narratives, and whose reflexivity worked for and in relation to others, where work on the

self was not for self mastery in a Foucauldian (1988) sense, but often used in order to help and care for others. It is plausible that the forms of individualism assumed in Giddens (1991) and Featherstone and Wernick's (1995) theoretical accounts of subjectivity and the production of selfhood presented here, are generalisations on the basis of privileged groups, in specific historical and cultural circumstances, which facilitates work on the self, through access to different economic and cultural conditions, which do not adequately address Liz's reported experience.

Giddens (1991) and Lasch's (1991) theories of subjectivity were useful however in providing explanatory power in relation to the remaining interviewees, who, like the explanations of subjectivity themselves, were to a greater or lesser extent produced in relation to and addressed through a discourse of individualism, evident in the absence of reference to class position and the erosion or absence of reference to collective notions of generation through which to define themselves. For those other interviewees who experienced the 60's as young adults in the U.K. and U.S. their generational affiliation has subsequently dissipated or evaporated completely in some cases, challenging Mannheim's notion that a generation-as-actuality is resistant to change and also highlighting the complexity of attempting to specify links between generations and social change. This is not to argue that notions of generation are not still productive of identities in certain contexts, as generation is still a key way in which extended youthfulness is performed by the interviewees, who constituted themselves either as part of a 60's generation, or as a generation of separate individuals. Individuality thus becomes a characteristic of this generation, one that is sometimes deployed to set them apart both from each other, or from other generations (from - older less active parents, or younger, more selfish materialists for example). The concepts of generation proposed by Mannheim (1952) and Featherstone and Wernick (1995) do however presume homogeneity of experience. The homogeneity in their accounts can be contrasted with the interviewees accounts here, who are produced in a variety of different ways as discussed in chapter 3, where generational subjectivity has been in transition from the late sixties onwards; from shared optimism regarding generational potential in a minority of cases, to the preclusion of the very possibility of a shared generational consciousness, evident from the seventies to date. Notions of generation in the interviewee's accounts show it changing, from something to define themselves through, to something to define themselves against, as separate, un-unified individuals. These changes have emptied the term generation of its former content, to the point that it can now seemingly describe any grouping. Target marketing and increased desire for material

goods and consumer cultural lifestyles are identified by some of the interviewees, as precipitating these changes and are held responsible for diminishing the idealism, unity and 'rebelliousness' that is still retrospectively associated with the 60's generation, even by those too young to have 'been there'.

Although the identification of changes in the significance of generation and the erosion of characteristics popularly associated with the 60's, appears to support the individualizing tendencies that Giddens identifies, whilst casting doubt over the unified, Mannheimian aspects identified by Featherstone and Wernick (1995), they do not confirm the alleged ubiquity of the reflexive project of the self in Euro-American modernity. In addition to working class women who may be limited, or excluded from relating to individualistic narratives of the self; national, geographical and spatial boundaries also challenge the homogeneity of notions of the 60's being characterised by particular events, and that the project of the self constituted all Euro-American experience in late modernity - as witnessed by some of the accounts from Ireland.

Homogeneous characteristics associated with baby boomers, that are assumed to have formed their 'self-conscious[ness]' in their youth, and now manifest as 'self-absor[ption]' in unified generational concerns in the present; are posited by Featherstone and Wernick (1995) (when referring to the baby boomers' collective experience of the so-called counter culture and radicalism more generally) as inspiring them to be 'socially critical' as they reach retirement age. The implication being that their 'socially critical' faculties will be deployed in the service of their generational concerns, regarding incipient social unrest and activism, such as challenging negative stereotypes of old age. There is some evidence of this in the rhetoric of prominent baby boomers in the media such as Eve Pollard (1999) regarding resisting negative stereotypes of old age – 'beige cardi-hood', and one interviewee here who believed that the baby boomers of which she still felt a part of would force 'consumer society' to 'change tremendously'. It was, however, problematised by the responses of the other interviewees. The repression of existential questions in late modernity and the sense of personal meaninglessness engendered by endless lifestyle choices would, Giddens (1991) theorised, give rise to new social movements of life-politics, organized around specific moral dilemmas. With regard to this piece of research, this could refer to new social movements, or interest groups, related to particular campaign groups focused upon issues to do with ageing and the treatment of older people, that can be seen in

the U.S. context in terms of the Gray Panthers and American Association of Retired Persons and Age Concern and the National Pensioners Convention in the U.K. Whilst there is recent evidence of increased activism amongst those already retired – witness the marches (08-09-04) on Parliament in the U.K. by supporters of the National Pensioners Convention to present the first ever ‘Pensioner’s Manifesto’ (Seniors-Network, 2004) - there was a significantly ambivalent response from the interviewees, regarding such activism. In reply to the question ‘is so-called grey activism significant and why?’ just over half the respondents had heard of the term ‘grey activism’, often attributing its origins to the U.S. with the remainder correctly guessing that it referred to older people becoming more ‘actively’ involved in pursuing ‘their rights’ or interests thought to favour older people, and raising awareness of issues to do with age-related discrimination in the process. All but two of the interviewees generally approved of such activism, thought it would become increasingly significant and were in favour of it. The interviews presented here took place approximately eighteen months ago and at that time, large organised demonstrations by groups representing older people, such as those of the National Pensioners Convention above, were still in their embryonic stages. One interviewee was pessimistic regarding the success of such campaign groups, as she believed other people would always be able to impose their views on others, which may not be in line with how that person might wish to be treated. Of the two interviewees who did not approve of such activism, one thought it was not significant in Ireland’s national context (disputed by other Irish nationals) citing different demographic factors concerning an absence of a population bulge or baby-boom, which he believed did not ‘spontaneously generate’ such activism as it may have done elsewhere, arguing that Ireland was more focused on ‘youth issues’.

The other had vaguely heard of it in the U.S. and expressed no interest in it, as he was an individual who followed his own path and that it had little relevance to him anyway, which is also significant insofar as five of the interviewees further claimed that they would not participate in such activism themselves; two said they would participate in non-age related activism, totalling almost half the respondents. Of the eight remaining interviewees, two said they ‘might’ become involved with it in the future, three said they would probably become involved with it in the future, with the remaining three replying that they would participate in the present. Importantly, although ‘grey activism’ was seen as a good thing in principle by the majority, when it came to putting it into practice themselves, in all but two cases, the common denominator preventing them was that they were hampered to differing degrees

by their lack of identification with what they perceived to be a homogenous group of 'older people'. This had the effect of producing little awareness of or interest in such issues in the present, and was seen to have little significance to their immediate concerns. If they were receptive to it, most interviewees viewed it as something to do at some point in an indistinct future. This 'us and them' scenario is revealing in terms of part of the 'othering' process that categorises older people as homogeneous and unconnected and, in some cases, being viewed as of lesser importance. The accent on lifestyle, individuality and choice outlined above, appears in the majority of cases presented here, to mitigate against collective action on the basis of generation.

Of those three other interviewees who said they would do 'something' related to grey activism in the present, one would attempt to verbally challenge discrimination against another person related to their being elderly if she directly witnessed it - but so far had not 'come across' any such discrimination, nor did she entertain the possibility that she herself might be the recipient of it. Again, the notion that such types of discrimination may only happen to other, older people is revealing in terms of the lack of identification with being perceived as the 'aged homogenised other' herself, evident in all but two of the accounts. Of the remaining two who would participate in 'grey activism', one would do so in line with his current activism, but commented that it would be good if everyone felt 'empowered' to protest about a variety of issues, which he believed potentially concerned everyone and were not just a 'grey thing'. Rather than view older people as entirely other, with concerns that had little or nothing to do with him in his current situation, Tim viewed old people as having similar, legitimate concerns as non-old people and it was this that facilitated his sense of possibility of joining such age-focused groups in the present. The final interviewee who claimed he would and did support grey activism in the present, including directly protesting 'grey issues', attributed his view, which he believed was relatively unusual, to his daily interaction with a variety of different older people in his job. This he believed enabled him to see 'them' as individuals, as he was himself, where the prefix 'old' had little relevance with regards to his appreciation of their individual characteristics as 'human beings'. The fact that he was able to identify himself with people older than him points not only to the importance of recognition of common interests as a feature of interactions with older people, but also to the extent of their absence from both public and many peoples day-to-day private lives. Jack believed that the lack of interaction he perceived between young and old, restricted the appreciation of both differences and commonalities

between people, which he thought placed limits on the 'respect' shown to one another within the old/non-old dichotomy.

The scope for day- to-day interaction with older people seems very restricted (mainly to immediate family members, given that the majority of those approaching old age's exit from the workforce after the age of 65) in comparison with potential interactions with other age groups. For a variety of economic, social and cultural reasons, multi-generational extended families living under the same roof within Euro-American societies are the exception rather than the norm. Aged parents who begin to lose independence can be seen as burdensome and even if they are independent, can generate fear that it is only a matter of time before they are not. Retirement homes and communities that are set up to deal with this 'problem' serve to segregate and restrict daily interactions with older people even further. This is not to argue Jack's strong claim that prejudice towards old age exists 'because they haven't met any' older people. Rather, that contributory factors towards the 'othering' that seems to occur towards older people are influenced by a variety of interrelated factors, including the possible lack of day-to-day interaction with a variety of older people. Paradoxically, it is this othering towards older people that seems to be a potent force in preventing active participation in the activism that could be a force to resist negative age discrimination. Resistance in the present by people of a variety of ages could potentially be of benefit to everyone in the long term, rather than leaving it to retirement - when, as suggested by one interviewee, it may be 'too late' in terms of being active and healthy enough to participate and when the status attached to this group's 'voice' may have diminished.

This is not to argue that there are not other equally effective forms of resistance strategies to ageism, as party political fears over the potential strength of baby boomers approaching retirement, regarding their potential numbers at the ballot box attest (BBC, 2003). The fear of the self-interested voting potential of baby boomers is partially based upon their perceived activism in their youth and also regarding their predicted future voting behaviour, where their interests may clash with those younger people of working age - the accuracy of which has been challenged (Coughlan, 2004). Other forms of resistance in addition to voting, do not necessarily rely upon the largely, middle class approved revolutionary style 'marches' and protests. Such as, for instance, laying siege to Parliament in order to challenge society's 'dominant values' - do not adequately address the complexities of

power, nor do they adequately heed those voices whose views regarding ageing contain elements of a desire for 'incorporation as well as subversion' (Lawler, 2000, p.169). A model which views power as domination, would not adequately address the subtleties of the following examples over what was power, or what was resistance. Nor would it necessarily 'approve' of strategies, which equate incorporation with regression or defeat. This raises the question of which 'classed' groups voice is acknowledged as the arbiter over what counts as domination or resistance (Skeggs, 1997) and (Lawler, 2000). Definitions of which, are often implicit, but insufficiently examined within accounts of resistance. The above points can be illustrated with reference to the differing levels of resistance to the 'double standard of ageing' (Sontag, 1978). Such double standards refer to the perception of some women feeling that they are subject to an extra layer of discrimination above that of men. This discrimination refers to perceived unwelcome evaluations of their appearance, in addition to that of their age, and the desire not to be valued in terms of their looks, but in terms of their abilities. The women in the interviews acknowledged that such evaluations do happen, but were differently positioned in terms of the degree to which this was positively anticipated, either in terms of looking forward to a future when their aged appearance would make their being evaluated in such a way less likely. Or, in terms of those other women who were aware of strategically deploying their looks, who pragmatically accepted that their ageing would increasingly restrict them in this manner.

This also highlights a related point regarding facticity, in that it not only applies to biological limits (as will be examined shortly), but also to the limits/constraining effects of interactions with others. In this sense practices of extended youthfulness are also highly subject to interactions with others, and this influenced the interviewees' opinions as well as their ability to extend feelings of youthfulness, irrespective of their bodily condition. Notions of age and youthfulness are relational, in terms of the different physical environments they occupy and the different people encountered in them, through their interactions. Tensions between facticity and choice regarding practices of extended youthfulness in the aforementioned contexts are able to limit how the interviewees may wish to age. These tensions can be negotiated however, but also work in conjunction with gendered age, regarding differences relating to the extent to which choices are held to be individual, or are limited by others perceptions – particularly in the case of gendered notions of attractiveness.

As baby boomers have been repeatedly categorised in academic and popular discourse as offering particular kinds of resistance, to a variety of 'isms' along the lines of 60's activism and protest movements, as a distinct feature of that generation, it was a discourse I felt justified in examining. As the likelihood of such activism in the present was absent in all but two cases (although one cannot and should not predict the future, as their actions may change) this was revealing in terms of the othering aspects related to older people, and the majority of interviewees difficulty with identifying with them in the present. Beauvoir (1989) is instructive here, regarding the interviewees' ambiguous position towards their own and others ageing, where their psychology, education, desire and, I would argue, generational position, are so shaped by social influences that in a sense they may choose against themselves. This is revealed in the ambiguity of believing grey activism is a positive thing and of benefit, whilst simultaneously choosing in the majority of cases (if at all), to continually defer taking part in such activism themselves. Again, this is not to argue in relation to Lawler's (2000) earlier point regarding the approved status of who gets to define what counts as 'resistance', but to note that given the marginalized status of extreme old age, there appears to be little resistance of *any* variety. For the interviewees to participate now would involve some level of identification of themselves as 'old', which is perilous for the sense of self engaged in practices of extended youthfulness. The status of 'marginalized other' for Beauvoir (1989) – in this case the aged, produces 'social influences' – the desire for extended youthfulness, that in a sense can lead to choices effectively being made against themselves. In the sense of not supporting one another, regarding the aged people they may become (at least in other eyes, if not their own), and also those who already occupy that category. How the form of resistance attributed to this generation is put into practice in terms of old age is further problematised. Where the difficulties involved in recognising other, older people as the same is hampered by the difficulties for many of the interviewees in accepting their mortality and the signs of ageing that are perceived as heralding it. This highlights the issue of temporality and the difficulty in identifying with something they see as being far removed from them, in a possible future, which doesn't concern them now.

The unthinkability of old age and activism

The subsequent discussion of mortality and euthanasia, links with the above points regarding lifestyle choice and the emphasis upon individuality and individualism, in that the unthinkability of

'extreme old age' necessitates the extension of individual choices (how and when to die) until the final moments of life, which has implications in relation to resistance and activism. Putting off thinking about old age, mortality and death is arguably a relatively recent feature of modern life. Lasch (1991) argues that this was not always so, as in earlier historical periods in the west death was seen to strike at almost any age, whether young or old. Thus old age and death were not as linked, as they have come to be in the late modern, Euro-American context. Giddens' (1991) view on temporality and the control of time in late modernity compounds this putting off thinking about old age and death, emphasised in The reflexive project of the self's attempts at managing the facticity of the 'unfinished' body through lifestyle regimes, evidenced in the interviewees concern with health and fitness. With the inherent until-further-notice aspect of late modernity threatening the security of a stable self-identity, the body can *seem* a relatively stable entity upon which to found it. However, this seeming stability is argued by Giddens (1991) summarised in Shilling (1993) to be undermined by the technological developments and expert systems related to the body, reaching their zenith in late modernity, that have the effect of destabilising any fixed sense of what the body is, through the possibility of its greater control and regulation and its seeming 'emancipation' from the control of 'nature'. In such highly reflexive circumstances regarding our knowledge of the body and how to control it, uncertainty is produced over how it should be controlled (Giddens, 1990). These factors in combination are able to alter what the body is. Alongside a greater knowledge and success at controlling the limitations imposed by the body, is a corresponding rise in doubts over the actual ability to control nature, where the examples of the spread of AIDS and the recent MRSA 'superbugs' expose medicines limits.

The absolute limit to the reflexive project of the self is still death, despite ongoing research to extend lifespan, placing the modern individual in circumstances of 'existential contradiction', where the promise of increased technological control of the body, through the implementation of particular lifestyles and regimes, are thrown into doubt by the persistence of death. If, as Giddens (1991) argues, the late modern period is characterised by an unprecedented degree of orientation towards control over the body, via the construction of relatively stable self-identities through the adoption of particular lifestyles, then he argues, death represents the final and absolute loss of control in this regard. In the analysis presented here, such a loss of control is unacceptable. For the interviewees, the unrealizability of 'extreme old age', with its associated loss of autonomy, functioned as the repository of fears of the unknown. The notion of conceiving of any form of worthwhile life, from this,

the final stage of the lifecourse, seemed to be unimaginable. In effect, old age has replaced death as the existential limit. Giddens (1991) argues that 'ontological security', or the 'confidence and trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity' (Giddens, 1984, p.375), enables individuals to go about their day to day social lives. Ontological security is always threatened however, by the ever-present possibility of disorder, particularly during 'fateful moments', when the meaning and reality of their social world is called into question. The definitive anxiety provoking threat for Giddens to this security in such moments is death itself, where its inevitability represents the ultimate loss of control, which is able to threaten what is real and valuable.

In conditions of late modernity, a feature of which is a particular focus upon temporality, 'life planning', orientated towards a 'colonisation of the future' (Giddens, 1991, p.86) is crucial, in that it facilitates a form of keeping death at bay for many of the interviewees here. This is achieved through their practices of extended youthfulness, regarding their choosing particular 'healthy' and 'active' lifestyles - which in some cases permits their 'putting off' of death seemingly indefinitely. In this sense there is a tension between facticity and choice, where the facticity of their bodies is negotiated in terms of choice, where ageing is not so much about the facticity of the body anymore, given their belief and investment in its control. In this scenario, the terms of the facticity of the body are shifted, in that the interviewees perceived that the kind of body a person had was not fixed, but largely down to individual choice. However, such life planning is completely undermined by death, and for the interviewees here, increasingly undermined by 'extreme' old age, or the point at which for them, such life planning is no longer perceived to work, or the point at which they envisage their bodies will effectively refuse to cooperate with their goals and any interventions technology can muster. In this manner, this phase of the lifecourse that has been referred to here as 'extreme old age' literally meant that for one interviewee this was a point where life 'no longer made sense'. There are problematic knock-on effects of such dis-identifications, particularly in relation to grey activism and also regarding the support for euthanasia. Following Kierkegaard (1941) the death of the subjective self can be viewed as an 'absolute uncertainty'- what Beauvoir (1972) refers to as the 'unrealizability' of death, and significantly for the argument presented here, the unrealizability of old age itself. This new relation to extreme old age, as a point where life becomes meaningless, has meant that old age has replaced death effectively as *the* existential limit, or the point at which the body is perceived to have become out of

control, regarding their being able to choose to avoid extreme old age, beyond which life is unrealisable. Or, to put it another way, the 'absolute uncertainty' of death, has been supplanted by the 'unrealizability' of old age, in that the majority of the interviewees could not conceive a life worth living if they no longer had reflexive control over it, preferring, for example, the ultimate means of control via euthanasia rather than the absolute uncertainty of death – hence the unrealizability, or unthinkableness of extreme old age.

This dis-identification with this phase of life has profound consequences for those already constituted as occupying the category of extreme old age, in that they are produced as radically Other. This also highlights that the dualism evident in Giddens' argument regarding the body in late modernity – in which the body is understood to move from the pole of the influence of nature to that of culture, cannot adequately address how both biological and cultural processes are enmeshed within one another. In the case of ageing, 'nature' is seen to intrude all the time, it is a constant struggle, for some, to contain and control it. Although the body 'is increasingly open to reconstruction in high modernity, [it] still provides the basis for the social relations and technological advances which facilitate that reconstruction' (Shilling, 1993, p.185). This is particularly evident with regard to extreme old age, where the flesh is regarded as no longer being willing as it were, to be reconstructed in line with the individual's demands. The enthusiasm shown amongst the interviewees for the legal right to access to euthanasia, may have grown in popularity¹ precisely because it reinstates the seemingly all important control that is missing from the final stages of life, re-infusing the life they currently have with meaning as, in this scenario, they would get to choose the final option - effectively giving them the last word in control. If the lived experience and practices of extended youthfulness produce such aversions to identifications with extremely old people amongst baby boomers, preferring instead to resist the facticity of the ageing body until some indistinct point in a hazy future, this makes claims concerning their collective action/activism in support of old people unlikely, as this would require an element of

¹ BBC News (2004) reported that an NOP World survey poll of 790 people, sponsored by the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, found that nearly half the people they interviewed would break the law as it stands, to assist a terminally ill 'loved one' die, if they thought they were 'suffering'. Eighty-two per cent supported changes in UK law to allow such terminally ill people to receive assistance in dying from the medical profession; whilst fifty-one per cent of the respondents said that if they themselves were terminally ill and suffering they would want someone they were close to and/or a doctor, to help them die, whilst a similar number would consider going abroad for medical help to do it, if unavailable in the U.K. These figures were used by a representative of the VES to present a case for reform of UK law to facilitate this, in a regulated environment, which would permit the exercise of "choice" in this matter. This was countered by arguments from a representative of the ProLife Party, who dismissed the surveys 'representativeness' and stressed the effectiveness of palliative care, who's beneficiaries were claimed to 'reject' notions of euthanasia. Fear of the legalisation of such practices were argued to expand the boundaries where such choices could be made and an appeal was made to let 'death come naturally'(BBC, 2004). Again raising questions over the status of 'natural' in the light of the application of technology.

identifying themselves as 'old' in the present. To re-iterate my point from the start of the chapter, baby boomers are claimed in both academic and popular discourse to be a source of resistance (my original rationale for choosing to explore this groups relation to age and ageing) however, the ways in which the interviewees here conceive of ageing and old age, makes the prospect for and of such 'grey activism' problematic to say the least. Primarily because this is something many in this sample are not prepared to do yet, if ever, given their present relation to old age, where the majority at their current stage of the lifecourse claim they would choose death, rather than 'suffer' the prospect offered by extreme old age. If the subject positions old and extremely old were not so systematically marginalized categories, then things might be different. Making recognition of other, old people as the same and resisting forces that prevent this recognition, imperative. As aged peoples ambiguous 'situation' in Beauvoir's terms, in what can plausibly be argued to be ageist societies, limits our freedom to be an older person, this further emphasises our dependence upon social situations that mediate our freedom. Therefore recognition as such could give further impetus to attempts at social change. Hence the significance of recognition of the aged other as the same, and the importance of resistance strategies that actively supports this in the present, rather than in a future that never arrives.

(86,879 words)

BORN BETWEEN 1946 - 1964?

If so, would you (or anyone else you know of) like to take part in a **focus group** in order to discuss a series of photographs representing notions of **generation** and **ageing**?

This will form part of a sociological research project for a doctoral thesis at Goldsmiths, University of London. It aims to examine some of the meanings and values we attach to growing older today.

A one day travelcard, light refreshments and bottle of wine will be provided for those attending.

This will be a single two hour session between 6.30-8.30pm, taking place around the **end of March/beginning of April** in the Deptford Town Hall Building.

Interested? Contact Neil on **sop01nmb@gold.ac.uk** for further details.

BORN BETWEEN 1946 – 1964?

If so, would you like to take part in an interview to give your views on issues relating to notions of ageing and generation?

This will form part of a sociological research project for a doctoral thesis at Goldsmiths, University of London. It aims to examine some of the meanings and values we attach to growing older today. Previous scholarly research into ageing has focused primarily on issues relating to either social policy or demography, whilst broader cultural concerns relating to lifestyle, beliefs, goals and values in later life, have largely been left to the popular press. This research will contribute toward addressing the gap that currently exists.

The interview will last approximately one hour and will be recorded. To begin the discussion, you are requested to bring a photograph of an older person you find interesting with you. It is a single event and a bottle of wine will be provided for your attendance.

Interested? Contact Neil on 07905838487 and leave a message, or e-mail me at sop01@gold.ac.uk for further details and to arrange a meeting to suit you.

Appendix 2

- Thank you, for coming.
- I'm Neil - I've been studying different aspects of ageing since doing an undergraduate thesis at Lancaster about seven years ago.
- V.little research on cultural meanings people attach to notions of generation and ageing.
- I will say at the end of the session a bit more about what I'm interested in
- Currently, I want to use your ideas about generation and ageing to develop a set of questions for individual interviews I'll conduct at a later date. This is to hopefully make them relevant to those taking part and also to rectify omissions regarding topics that I inevitably will not have considered before.
- Can everyone say who they are and where they are from
- Can everyone say what their photo is of, and briefly what they found interesting about it in relation to notions of generation and ageing (if you couldn't find one, don't worry – maybe you could describe one you've seen before and what was interesting about it).
- If everyone takes a page of flip chart and writes down 3 basic topics they feel should be included in an interview concerning ageing and generations.
- Can everyone select three or four sheets of photo's, have a look at them and write down any topics they suggest to you on your paper, however loosely connected – regarding ageing and generations. Don't worry – its not a psychological test and you don't have to think too long about it.
- Once finished – I will put each in turn on the flip pad – and describe the accompanying photo – ask for further suggestions re. brainstorming.
- Lay each sheet out on the table
- divide into two groups and take half of the sheets.
- decide between you category headings that similar suggestions could be grouped under and write them (with headings) on separate flip paper.
- Put each new category up on chart and see if anyone has anything else to add to the categories.
- put all category sheets on the table
- hand out ballot paper and ask each person to pick five topics that they feel I should be sure to include in my interviews and write them down.

What's it all about?

Previous research into ageing has largely focused on issues relating to social policy or the consequences of demographic changes in longevity and the proportion of young people to old. Broader cultural concerns such as those of lifestyle; beliefs; goals and values in later life have largely been left to the popular press, whilst notions of generation tend to assume everyone born in the same period will form a homogenous group.

This research will investigate these areas and assumptions. In particular I want to examine the some of the effects of access to consumer cultural lifestyles. I will also look for evidence of resistance to norms that construct ageing as an inevitable period of decline; to see how this might be occurring and some of its possible effects, such as, for example a paradoxical contribution to increased ageism.

- Once I have compiled the interviews, I will contact you to see if you'd like to take part. This time I'll meet people individually.
- Thanks again for coming, if any thing gets published from this, I'll let you know. Help yourself to a bottle of wine and an envelope.

Appendix 3

Slide 1]

George Melly - **idiosyncrasies/eccentricity more acceptable in old age**; Sitting woman with head in hands - **old age as despair and impoverishment**; **Nostalgic images of elderly** - Couple with grandchildren in 'Sunday Best' at seaside.

Slide 2]

Dora Bryan in bath; Bath lift ad; scooter ad - **Products for elderly featuring youthful models** (who would probably have little need for such products).

Slide 3]

Grey pride on the net; Vavo.com members; Rural rip off; women's rights - **Positive images of ageing**.

Slide 4] x2

Levis ad - cowboy and long haired woman (rear view); Ab Fab; Jane Fonda; Guardian cartoon; long haired woman (front view) - **extended youthfulness**

Slide 5]

Birds of a feather 'mutton-dressed -as-lamb'; White haired 'granny'; Victor Meldrew 'grumpy'; 'Ugly Models'; Alf Garnett 'reactionary'; Albert Steptoe 'dirty old man' - **Ageist stereotypes**

Slide 6]

Old people from different ethnic groups - **Diversity of ageing**.

Slide 7]x2

'Last few days'; 'Aloha'; R.V's welcome; white wine/hair; Age Concern funeral ad; Sun City ad; 'Senior' railcard ad - **Unequal access to resources permitting the re-fashioning of identities in later life**.

Slide 7]

Old man and buckets; Walt Whitman; Timothy Leary - **representations of elderly (men) from preindustrial, industrial and postindustrial eras**.

Slide 8]x3

'Role Models'; Beryl Knight; Velma Davis; Honor Blackmon; Louba Roubens; Daphne Self; Shirley Grubman; Rosie Cole - **Current trends in representaions of older people – beautiful AND old!**

Slide 9]x2

Vitamins ad; dancers; swimmers; surfers; runners - **Active retirees**.

Slide 10]

Two elderly women in state retirement home; two elderly women in garden with nurse- **Elderly as marginal and at mercy of state provision**.

Slide 11] Backpacker; horse rider - **Lifestyle changes amongst the elderly**.

Slide 12]

John Glenn; 'holiday high kicks; Space Cowboys - **Anti -ageism/ageism**

Slide 13]x2

7 signs of ageing; gyms; old men with considerably younger partners; Iggy Pop; Germaine Greer - **Double standards of ageing re. gender, beauty, sexuality, male/female menopause**.

Slide 14]

Older woman carrying young child; older woman teaching girl to read - **Intergenerational harmony**.

Slide 15]x2

Blair; Bourgeois; Terkel; Sontag - **'Distinguished' older people**.

Slide 16]x2

Naked torso of older woman; 'golfer'; Age concern wonderbra style ad; Diesel jeans - **Old age as sagging flesh and wrinkles, possibly invoking disgust; old age and sexuality.**

Slide 17]

Native American; Trans age action - **Old people as a site of wisdom.**

Slide 18]x2

Hendrix; Joplin; Cocker; Hippy; Led Zep; Lydon; Turner and 'going grey' - **Notions of belonging to a generation.**

Slide 19]x3

Face pack; longevity = herbs; HRT; Viagra; the pill; face peel; Jane Seymore + repro techno - **Biomedicine and cosmetic surgery.**

Slide 20]

Mid-lifer meditating - **Middle age reconstructed as mid - life and a time for self development.**

Slide 21]x2

Twiggy; accelerated ageing and disease; 'young' and 'old' forty-year-olds - **Notions of biological and chronological ageing.**

Slide 22]

'Would you give this man a job?'; and Dof E age discrimination code of practice - **anti-ageism in the workplace.**

Slide 23]

'Tomorrow's poor'; stooping old people road sign - **Demographic time bomb and the new poor.**

Slide 24]

Alzheimer's sufferer - **Senility.**

Slide 25]

Oldest person on record - **'Deep' old age.**

Appendix 4

The following themes/questions were suggested to me after the focus group, in response to my request for the 'top five' topics that the interviewees felt I should be sure to include in my interviews. The use of *italics* signifies that the comment was taken from the taped discussion. Names removed to preserve anonymity.

1. Usefulness/purpose in society re. roles.
2. Care of the infirm.
3. Pressures to look young and stay young looking- *particularly from media. Attractiveness comes from within, eg. being vivacious and outgoing.*
4. Taboos of old age - things society won't address re. health/quality of life.
5. Ways of dealing with death - euthanasia and issues surrounding old people being allowed to die in hospital when its too costly to prolong their 'life' re. 'do not resuscitate'.

1. Identity - *Baby boom women did not want to look like their mothers, but favoured the pre-pubescent look of Twiggy. Everyone is judged to a certain extent by their looks. Pressure to look 'desirable' at increasingly advanced years is more about insecurity than vanity. Negative comparisons with older 'beautiful' women in fashion magazines - if they can be beautiful at 70, so can you. Psychological techniques used by marketing companies to work on people's insecurities in order to sell. Adverts from previous era seem more 'honest' and direct by comparison. I would prefer to feel reasonably desirable, but content not to do anything about it.*
2. Growth
3. Physicality - *Pictures of 'sexy' partially clad women - no male equivalent.*
4. Demography - *Baby boomers have shaped society by their sheer numbers as a market. They are generally affluent and have been targeted since the 60's. The emphasis on looks and materialist lifestyle is scary. It takes a lot of v.expensive makeup to still look good at 30+, 40+, 50+, 60+, 70+ etc. Marketing to this generation is cynical, eg. Alexander McQueen using young models with grey wigs. Limitless affluence is a*

lie - particularly for children of B.B's. Generational roles will get more broken up if increases in lifespan continue - families will start to contain great-grandparents in '1st world' countries who are still healthy - could lead to resentment in middle class families re. missing out on inheritance. Also grandparents in homes - inheritance will go quickly on their upkeep. Intergenerational relations - older people volunteering to look after young children - could be good as lots of 'nightmare' families. Grandparents often less strict than parents and less concerned with trying to form children's personalities the way they want it.

5. *Euthanasia - Lots of research into Alzheimer's and 'diseases of ageing', whilst sectors of the worlds population still do not have adequate drinking water/food and infant mortality is high. Seems decadent spending lots of money on old people in this way.*

1. *Reasonably paid employment for people who are able and want to work - ageism is a stumbling block for many employers (interviewee used to work in the job centre) in that many are unwilling to hire people over 40.*
2. *Realistic adverts showing sixty year olds and without the glamour - wear grey hair with pride.*
3. *Free entry to sports arenas and cultural events - keep fit, travel, explore with friends and family, have fun and enjoy age - through prudent investments whilst working (admits she is fortunate in this respect).*

1. *What do you fear most about ageing?*
2. *With the assumption that you are going to live for thirty years after retiring at 65 in perfectly good health (almost as long as your working life), how have you planned to use this time?*
3. *Margaret Thatcher became P.M. in her sixties, what ambitions do you have left and hope to achieve in your sixties or seventies?*
4. *It is still a fact that it is a male dominated world, with the only advantage women have over men being that they normally live longer (so they can dance on their graves) - how do you view a social life dominated by and outnumbered by women?*

5. The Conservative Party was dominated by women in the constituencies, but never had a big showing in parliament because their grass roots supporters gave preference to men. The Labour Party recognised the demographics of the future, so have taken the logical step of having women in place for the future. Unlike their mothers, baby boomers will not be prepared to just make the tea - so how active do you think the female grey vote will be in the future.
6. The pill and the baby boomer generation fostered the female revolution, but didn't necessarily benefit from the first wave of change, but their daughters did. The experience of inequality has led to women not committing themselves unnecessarily for conventions sake. Do you think they have now both lost out at both ends of the age spectrum? - *ie. some older feminists worked and had children, whilst campaigning for equal rights which their daughters now enjoy. Many paid equal pension contributions to men, but were only entitled to a full pension in their own right from 1995. Those who chose not to marry or are divorced, suffered as a result.*
7. 'Healthy mind, healthy body'...what sport do you intend to practice to insure you keep fit and health in your 'reclining' years?

Compensations of ageing for women are that they are no longer valued for their looks, but their abilities. Interviewee feels that this should bring equality, which is an advantage that she feels younger women do not have.

1. Is it for our own pleasure/vanity that we desire youth or peer pressure/conformity? - *should old age be a time to dress/appear according to our own preference?*
2. Are anti-ageing products a callous rip-off that profit from the wealthy but insecure.
3. Is it time to re-focus on the benefits of age that appear to be unappreciated today - (*older people may be regarded as less important in the west*) value of older people in society is represented by ways in which they can be economically useful (B&Q reliable staff, baby minders) - a store of knowledge and experience.

4. Is it worth extending life if it means years of chronic illness - are expectations of physical and mental ability in older age too high? Should we have a right to choose to die/not be resuscitated/not take medicines/drugs etc (HRT, possible gene therapy in the future etc.).
5. Is 'staying young' an absurd and decadent class/money issue that is only relevant to small sections of Western society?
6. *New career at 50*
7. *Is retirement an outmoded idea? Need more choice when to retire. Saving for a pension is boring - what if insurance company goes bust? Choose life without golf club membership and a car. Keep on learning and working. Forget funeral expenses, use a cardboard box and find a place to bury it. Don't have high expectations of affluent retirement - live frugally.*

1. Old age and perceptions of it e.g. in the media or through the media - *changes as ads get more sophisticated.*
2. Family elders, a burden or not...i.e. how, if at all, do they fit into/are a part of today's society? - *ie. they may be useful as they have more time to spend with grandchildren than they did with their own children due to work commitments. Also seem to have lost the idea of wisdom of our elders.*
3. Time and lifespan...what are its parameters?
4. The working man/woman - when should one retire and why?
5. Health and longevity (the need to remain youthful in body and mind). -

How does ones appearance reflect ones abilities. More integration of young and old in other countries, eg. Hong Kong - quite usual to see grandmothers carrying babies on their backs.

1. Lack of positive views on ageing - The positive aspects of ageing are not emphasised by media or people's attitudes. Particularly for women, ageing is associated with loss of looks and desirability, invisibility and the loss of status. - *despite being affluent and a major pressure group, consumers of healthcare etc. Older people as an object of desire is taboo - yet older people are still sexual beings who can provoke desire. Why not have older people who are represented as being desirable? But the positive*

side - maturity, self-confidence and individuality is rarely emphasised. I was very interested in **** comments on invisibility re. it being a positive aspect of ageing for her. - re. *her relief at no longer appropriated as a sexual being and seeing this as a compensation for age and thus being treated on a par with men. George Melly commented that after age 70 his sexual desire disappeared and he realised that he'd been chained to a lunatic for the past fifty odd years.*

2. Increasingly negative views of ageing - Ageing is increasingly viewed as an illness or disability and something to be apologised for. There seems to be a loss of respect for older people and a devaluation of their wisdom and experience. My parents and grandparents viewed ageing as inevitable and natural, (most people got false teeth as a matter of course) whereas my generation seems to see it as something to be denied and resisted - *Modern notion that the past is of no value and old things and people must be disregarded - knowledge is not passed on through the generations.*
3. Ageism in the workplace - I think ageism in the workplace is replacing sexism and racism. In 1998 I worked in a large publishing department and was the oldest person there at 40, apart from the editor in his late 50's who had cannily got a clause written into his contract making it difficult to get rid of him (although they did eventually). I was made to feel very old, especially when people were promoted to editor positions in their mid 20's because of their youth - *Aware of a cull of BBC newsreaders to radio, to be replaced by younger, prettier people. Newscasters used to be associated with gravitas and what they appeared to know, rather than what they looked like.*
4. The world growing increasingly visual and aestheticised - I thought the points made at the focus group about advertising and media becoming increasingly sophisticated were very interesting. Without realising, we seem to have become much more visually aware and more visually demanding. People appearing in adverts have to be visually as near perfect as possible. If they are old people, they are always very visually pleasing and usually shot in soft focus. *After seeing the photo's of vogue style glamorous older women,, particularly the one of Louba Reubens (100) - interviewee commented that the fascination they made her feel, underlines how rare it is to see older women pictured in this way. That we are so brainwashed by seeing v.young women modelling clothes - these photo's were 'refreshing'.*
5. Age as a boundary - 10 year olds dress like 20 year old hookers and read magazines such as 'Mad about Boys', boys and girls have sex at 13 or 14, 30+ men are still lads, men and women in their forties are becoming parents for the first time, men and women in their fifties start new careers. In my lifetime the boundaries that come with age have completely changed. I'm not sure if there are any boundaries

anymore. I feel particularly sad for young girls who no longer seem to go through the phase of being mad about ponies or ballet or gymnastics...nowadays they just seem to move straight on to boy's. Robert Bly's book 'The Sibling Society' opened my eyes to this very negative development. We all seem to be living a parody of being 1970's teenagers and even children have to join in - *As B.B. parents behave like teenagers, their children are forced to grow up at an earlier age, become 'sexualised' earlier and take on responsible roles. Given that a lot of these children may not have had one of their parents present whilst growing up to model their behaviour on, this may confound age based roles.*

6. *What do young care assistants have to offer old people apart from care skills? Where have older women gone (probably doing a second degree) re. looking after even older women. Their presence used to provide a bridge to the old re. shared experience which presumably reduced feeling of alienation that older people might feel when being cared for.*
7. *Photo of Alzheimer's sufferer- expresses our worst fears about ageing - the person looks terrified and we the viewer are terrified of this happening to us.*
8. *Growing old as an experience can be like a series of questions being gradually answered, provoking a feeling of 'of course'.*
9. *Age is relative - people 200 years ago looked old at thirty.*
10. *No safety net in the future re .pensions.*

Appendix 5

Themes and questions I considered interesting from the literature review, written prior to the focus group, have been left as they are or modified - as the group raised similar concerns which they felt should be included. Additional questions relating to focus group concerns I had not considered before have been added in *italics*. Some of these have then been worded with the aim of provoking narrative responses.

- 1] Please can you say what you found interesting about the photo you brought in with you.
- 2] Can you remember a time when you felt a part of a generation?
How would you define the term generation?
- 3] Which generation is this? Why do you feel you belong? What characterises it?
- 4] What don't you like about the idea of generations? What do you feel about how they are divided up?
- 5] Do we all age in the same way? [Issues of gender, ethnicity, class and so on].
- 6] Will you become old in the same way your parents generation did?
- 7] *If 'the visual' is gaining in importance in society, what effects might this have on how we view ageing?*
- 8] *Does the availability of domestic photography and video effect our self image through self scrutiny?*
- 9] *Have the media and marketing techniques altered our perceptions of ageing?*
- 10] *Are there any double standards in the way that aged women and men are represented in the media?*
- 11] *Would you like to see ads. that 'realistically' picture those who are 60+ without the glamour and why?*
- 12] Does ageing only equate with decline? Do you fear getting old ? Why?
- 13] *Does ageing make one 'invisible' in terms of status or 'desirability'- what do you feel about this?*
- 14] *Are there any advantages to growing old?*
- 15] *Is there a lack of positive representations of ageing?*
- 16] Are there times/situations when you 'feel old' and other situations when you 'feel younger'?
- 17] When does middle age end and old age begin?
- 18] *Are the boundaries associated with different ages (in terms of appropriate behaviour) changing? What effects might this have?*
- 19] Is retirement changing and how?
- 20] *Is retirement an outmoded idea - what might be the consequences if it is?*
- 21] *What are your expectations of retirement?*
- 22] *Do you have any ambitions left that you would hope to achieve in your 60's and 70's, health permitting?*
- 23] Do all old people share similar lifestyles, beliefs, goals, attitudes and values?

- 24] Will there be equal access to aged lifestyles? [*issues of pension contributions and gender differences*].
- 25] Do you do anything to delay the physical signs of ageing? What would you do if money were no object?
- 26] Can all people participate in remaining youthful?
- 27] *How and whom should care for the infirm [if at all].*
- 28] *Are expectations of our physical and mental abilities in old age too high - inflated by promises of developments in bio-technology?*
- 29] *Is research into the 'diseases of ageing' a form of western decadence, or a triumph of human endeavour?*
- 30] Are there any consequences of more people living longer, being or appearing youthful, with fewer people being born ?
- 31] *What intergenerational effects might there be from families containing healthy great grandparents?*
- 32] *What roles [if any] are there for family elders in today's society and how does this compare with other countries?*
- 33] *Does wisdom come with age?*
- 34] *Is ageism significant? How might it be resisted - particularly in the workplace?*
- 35] *Will 'grey activism' become significant - who will it involve - would you consider participating?*
- 36] *Should we be able to choose not to continue life indefinitely?*
- 37] *Should there be any limits on remaining eternally youthful and why?*

The above themes formed the basis from which the final interview schedule was created – see appendix 6.

Appendix 6

There are no right or wrong answers as such. I'm just looking for your general thoughts relating to the questions I'm going to ask. Anything you can think of will be of value.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about the photo you brought in with you (describe it) and why you find it interesting?
2. When you consider your photo, or more generally the different forms of representation available to us today – do they effect how you view your own ageing and in what way's?
3. Have you ever had ay moments when you thought 'I'm getting older'
 - a) How did this come about; was it important and is it still personally relevant?
 - b) Have there been situations where you felt younger or older than your years and what were they?
 - c) Have you ever experienced any positive benefits in getting older?
 - d) Have you ever feared getting older – why?
 - e) Do you think you will become older in the same way your parents did – are age boundaries changing?
4. Can you remember a time when you felt part of a generation?
 - a) Which generation is it and why do you feel you do/don't belong?
 - b) What characterises it and makes it different from other generations?
 - c) What do you feel about how they are divided up – in terms of who belongs...is it a useful concept?
5. Do you know of anyone who has had a 'mid-life crisis' and what form did it take?
6. Can you describe what your expectations of retirement are and what you feel it might be like?
 - a) Is retirement changing and what might be some of the consequences if it is?
 - b) Are there any things you would like to do or achieve once you retire?
 - c) Do you think there will be any differences or limits in the type of lifestyles experienced by those who retire in the not too distant future and why? (Different from previous generations already retired).
7. Can you think of any roles available for older people today and what are they?
 - a) How do these compare with roles for older people from other countries?
 - b) Does wisdom come with age?
8. Demographic figures suggest that the ratio of older to younger people is changing. What might be some of the consequences of this?
 - a) Might this effect relations between generations and if so, in what way's?
9. Can you remember an occasion when you or anyone you know experienced ageism?
 - a) How might it be resisted, particularly in the workplace?
 - b) Is so-called 'grey activism' significant and why?
 - c) Who might participate in it – what about you?
10. Do you do anything to remain youthful, if so, what?
 - a) Have you ever thought about any of the technological developments that aim to increase lifespan – what were they and would you consider using them? What would stop you using them?

- b) Can we choose not to grow old?
 - c) Should there be any limits on remaining 'eternally youthful' and why?
 - d) What effects might the possibility of increasing our 'youthfulness' have on those not able to – either through choice or necessity?
 - e) Who should care for them?
 - f) Should we be able to choose not to continue life indefinitely and why?
-
- Are there any clarifications or rectifications you would like to make to anything you've said?
 - Are there any questions you would have liked me to ask, but didn't?
 - Thank you for taking part – please sign release – do you know of anyone else who might be interested in taking part – how can I contact them? Can I contact you to clarify any of this, if inaudible?

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