

Grandfatherhood: Shifting Masculinities in Later Life

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Abstract

Drawing on qualitative interview data, this article examines how grandfatherhood relates to the assertion and transformation of masculinities in later life. Recent attention to ageing and masculinities has identified how older men are challenged to successfully present themselves as maintaining active and youthful lives through complicity, if not adherence, to hegemonic masculinity. We consider men's engagement with grandfatherhood as a means for so doing, illustrating how men make sense of the role through continuity with masculinity. While grandfathers describe intimate and affectionate relationships with their grandchildren, their accounts of their involvement reflect desires to re-affirm their previous connections to masculinity. Attention to the way individualised masculinities are re-negotiated in later life can help to explain how men are making sense of the new family opportunities that arise from being a grandparent. Such an analysis of grandfatherhood, we argue, also offers significant critique of hegemonic masculinity and its distinction to non-hegemonic masculinities intersected by old age.

Keywords

Grandfathers; Masculinities; Age; Family

Introduction

This article addresses how grandfatherhood relates to the assertion and transformation of masculinities in later life – a theory that to date has rarely been applied to studies about grandparents. Recent attention to ageing and masculinities has identified how older men are challenged to successfully present themselves as maintaining active and youthful lives by way of maintaining complicity, if not adherence, to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). The dominant image of the grandparent remains one that is synonymous with old age and grandmotherhood (Attias-Donfut and Segalen, 2002: 281), and, therefore, potentially at odds with dominant or hegemonic styles of masculinity. Yet being a grandparent also provides men with capital – to be fit and active; to be needed and significant family figures – which whilst challenging traditional stereotypes of grandfathers as distant and authoritarian figures, also serve to reconcile hegemonic masculinity in later life, particularly after retirement.

Drawing on qualitative interview data, we consider men's engagement with grandfatherhood as a means for maintaining connections with masculinity in later life. Providing a case-by-case analysis of six individual grandfathers purposively selected from a larger corpus of interviews, we examine individual accounts of becoming and being a grandfather but in the context of different family circumstances. Our analysis illustrates how, in each case, doing grandfatherhood is made sense of through asserting continuity with masculinity. Our analysis suggests that while grandfathers describe intimate and affectionate relationships with their grandchildren, their accounts of their involvement reflect desires to re-affirm their previous connections to

masculinity, for example, by acting as father-like figures, or by developing relationships with grandchildren via sport, or advising on school and career. Conversely, grandfatherhood may conflict with continuing interests in leisure and paid employment. Attention to the way individualised masculinities are re-negotiated in later life can therefore help to explain how men are making sense of the new family opportunities that arise from being a grandparent. Such an analysis of grandfatherhood, we argue, also offers significant critique of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) as a conceptual framework for understanding how longstanding and transitional masculinities associated with caring and family co-exist in later life.

Making Sense of Grandfatherhood

It is difficult to make an assessment about grandfatherhood from previous scholarship (see Bates, 2009; Author A; for critical reviews) precisely because there are so few specific studies of grandfathers (both Cunningham-Burley, 1984 and Kivett, 1991 were pioneering in this regard). Much of our existing understanding has been derived through comparing and contrasting grandfathers with grandmothers within studies of ‘grandparents’ (Dench and Ogg, 2002). Accordingly, grandmothers have been viewed as having ‘warmer’, more involved, relationships with their grandchildren (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1986; Roberto and Stroes, 1992). In contrast, grandfathers have been associated with more authoritarian and distant styles, for example: in overseeing the development of grandchildren or providing a ‘reservoir’ of knowledge and wisdom (Neugarten and Weinstein, 1964). Grandmothers, in particular, have been regarded as ‘kin keepers’ (Hagestad, 1985; Dubas, 2001). One reason for this is the acknowledged ‘matrifocal tilt’ in which grandmothers and adult daughters act as mediators of

grandparent-grandchild relationships (Chan and Elder, 2000). These assumptions about grandfathers as deficient to grandmothers, as well as the treatment of grandparents as an entity, have arguably shielded researchers away from considering grandfathers as a separate topic.

More recently we can point to a growth of qualitative research studies, which give separate, or at least equal, attention to grandfathers (Author C; Roberto et al., 2001, Author D, Author F; Waldrop et al., 1999). These studies highlight many previously unstated aspects of grandfatherhood, such as the salience of emotionality and caring in men's understandings of being a grandfather (Author C); their role in nurturing and mentoring grandchildren (Roberto, Allen and Bleiszner, 2001; Waldrop et al., 1999); as well as their engagement with grandchildren in outdoor activities such as gardening and walking (Author D; Author F). In addition to the grandparent literature, there is a case for bringing grandfathers firmly within the sociological analysis of men's family practices within Britain. There have been extensive analyses of the family lives and intergenerational relationships of older people (Brannen, Moss and Mooney, 2004; Chambers et al., 2009; Phillipson et al., 2002; Thompson, Itzin and Abrendstern, 1990), but little direct attention to grandfathers within these. The lack of attention to grandfathers can also be contrasted to the scholarship on fathers and fatherhood, which represents a significant growth area in the sociology of families over the last two or more decades. Morgan (2004) has taken issue with the sole focus upon fathers, pointing out that the parent-child dimension is but one of the many relationships that underlie transitions from boyhood through to advanced old age. He argues that 'the location of men in families and households is more than a question of the analysis of

fatherhood...it involves a variety of other family-based identities' which 'vary over the life course' (2004: 390).

However the need for a particular focus on grandfathers is not only because men's family practices and roles can vary. It is also because both men's *and* women's roles are gendered; and that men's family practices are, themselves, structured in relation to masculinity, ageing and generation. A particular contribution, then, would be to understand the continuities and changes in gender and masculinity that are associated with the family practices of contemporary grandfathers.

The Assertion and Transformation of Masculinities in Later Life

We argue that the analysis of grandfatherhood contributes to, and would benefit from, the theorising of how masculinities and gender identities related to doing family and caring shift as part of the transition to later life. The literature on gender and ageing identifies both continuities and discontinuities in how masculinities, tied to domestic, family and caring roles, are constructed in later life (Arber et al., 2003; Calasanti, 2004; Ribeiro et al., 2007; Van den Hoonaard, 2007). Arber et al. (2003) have argued that later life is characterised by a blurring of gender roles and identities with older men carrying out caring and domestic duties which, when they were in paid employment, would have previously been carried out by their wives. Retirement, in particular, they argue, necessitates a realignment of 'the traditional discourse of masculinity...to accommodate the changing roles and relationships created by altered life circumstances (2003: 5). Similarly, as Reich (2007) states, '...issues of masculinity and masculine competence in both public and private life arise as men age and lose access to traditional places in the family' (2007: 292).

The transition to retirement and the shift from ‘centre stage’ generates a gap between the idea and the reality of masculinity. It can be argued this makes space for the co-existence of multiple and alternative masculinities (Brittan, 1989), such as those centred on generativity, nurturing and caring. Hence, according to Hearn (1995), the social category of older men is contradictory. Thompson et al. (1990) state that ‘as men get older, the tough image of masculinity softens’ and ‘with this may come an opportunity to be more emotionally expressive and affectionate’ (1990: 190-1). Waldrop et al. (1999) argue that grandfathers depart from traditional male roles and express ‘an alternative discourse of masculinity’ based on strong desires to be emotionally involved with their grandchildren. Sorenson and Cooper (2010: 117) also suggest that grandfathering ‘offers the potential to counter the notion of hegemonic masculinity’ which defines the experience of fatherhood. Notwithstanding these insights, we suggest that men are re-negotiating grandfathering, not simply on the grounds of greater emotional involvement, but also precisely because grandparenting provides capital to be fit and healthy later life, post-employment, and, therefore, serving to reconcile hegemony masculinity in later life.

In light of the co-existence and contradictions of both enduring and shifting masculinities, the distinction between hegemonic and alternative masculinities is problematic. Grandfathering may serve to privilege men through maintaining and re-affirming their previous connections to masculinity (for example, as a father). Yet it may also reveal the constraints and limits of hegemonic masculinity within later life, for example, when placed upon ageing bodies. This helps explain why men may be gender neutral, and no less emotionally literate, in their discursive accounting of

grandfatherhood, whilst also engaged in activities and practices which reflect the individualised ways in which ageing masculinities are performed and negotiated. We find that grandfatherhood provides opportunity for the construction of affectionate and intimate relations with grandchildren, and in ways that these men did not do with their own children as fathers. But motivations for involvement also reflect desires to maintain connections to masculinity through ‘being there’ and ‘being dependable’; ‘being noble’ and ‘heroic’. Furthermore, grandfathering also facilitates the reproduction of *hegemonic masculinity* through developing relationships via sport, activities, financial transfers and advising on schooling and career. In retirement, older men may report ‘having more time’ to spend with family and grandchildren. However, grandfatherhood may or may not coincide with retirement. In either case, paid employment continues to shape how grandfathers account for their relationships with children. Thus we argue for a sociology of grandfatherhood as premised not upon an *alternative* masculinity based on emotional involvement; but rather on a *softening* of the discourse and practice of masculinity and which is carried out in a more negotiated and reflexive way. These assumptions indicate significant critique of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) as a concept that has failed to address the importance of the intersection of old age and its impact on the performance on non-hegemonic masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2012).

Data and Analysis

We provide a qualitative analysis of individual grandfather accounts with the aim to highlight both continuities and transformations in masculinity that are associated with grandfathering. To achieve this we adopt a case-by-case analysis of a sub-sample of

five individual grandfathers – Alan, Brian, Will, Chris and Stuart - all selected from a larger funded study into grandfatherhood involving two of the authors¹. This approach allows us to go into greater detail about how masculinities permeate individual accounts but within their particular family and social contexts. Moreover, the case method enables us to ‘make visible’, the broader family contexts in which the grandfathers are situated. The approach thus reflects our theoretical emphasis on *individualised* masculinities but in the context of broader family circumstances.

As stated we draw on data collected for a funded study into contemporary grandfatherhood in Britain. This included 60 qualitative interviews with grandfathers². The majority of the grandfathers were contacted through the parents of children attending two schools in the south of England. Initially, contact was made with parents via an address list of students attending the schools. Through the parents contact was made with those grandfathers consenting to take part in an interview. A further 14 were then subsequently recruited through various other methods including advertisements in community centres, grandparent newsletters and through personal contacts. This approach ensured a heterogeneous sample in terms of age (range: 48 to 94), lineage (maternal and paternal), geographical proximity and socio-economic background and employment status.

All 60 interviews undertaken for the studies were transcribed and then coded and analysed using NVivo. Six main themes were identified in the analysis: biographical accounts of continuity and change in relationships (including how being a grandfather relates to previous roles as father, or of their own fathers as grandfathers); the situated and relational context including family circumstances, employment, geographic

proximity and distance; practices involving grandfathers and grandchildren such as caring, educational, sport and outdoor activities; their self-understanding and accounting of their involvement (such as being a substitute father, providing fun, being there, stepping in); emotions and feelings attached to their grandchildren and family; and the limits and boundaries to their involvement including those which are physical (ageing bodies, ill-health), or to do with sexuality and gender.

The individuals discussed in this paper should thus be regarded as exemplifying – rather than set apart from – this broader analysis. The particular cases have been selected because together they capture the different displays of masculinity in relation to grandfatherhood. But they also reflect different family and socio-economic circumstances. For instance, Alan and Brian both have grandchildren whose parents are separated or divorced, whilst Will, Chris and Shaun have themselves re-partnered following divorce. Alan, Will and Shaun are retired. Chris is in full time employment. Shaun is also retired but exemplifies leisure pursuits.

1. Alan

Alan is 71 years old and has three grandchildren: a 12 year old granddaughter from his older daughter; and a ten year old granddaughter and eight year old grandson from his son. In understanding Alan's case, it is significant that his daughter was a single parent for some time before re-partnering. Alan describes at length the 'very close' relationship he has had with his oldest granddaughter since she was three years old, and which he puts down to having been a father figure. He reflects on his feelings on becoming a grandfather in the following way:

I will be perfectly honest with some trepidation and some misgivings. I've always been a very conventional person and there was a daughter just about to have a baby, not married, you know, just at that time had a partner, which didn't last very long, which is when we had to step in. So there was a certain amount of 'oh my goodness' and it wasn't the norm from my experience. So there was a little apprehension I suppose. But very soon she was a young one, she was the apple of my eye. We have spent an awful lot of time with her doing things. I spend more time with her than I did with my own children because I have the time. I was retired.

Alan expresses ambivalence (Mason et al., 2007) about the circumstances in which he became a grandfather. The context in which he became a grandfather conflicts with his 'conventional' understanding of family. In acting as a 'substitute father', Alan has developed an intimate relationship with his eldest granddaughter, one that is certainly not as peripheral as previous evidence indicates (Author A). For sure, he maintains a role in 'overseeing' his granddaughter, for example, in ensuring she maintains good school grades. His relationship does focus on 'masculine' activities such as sport and teaching mathematics and there is a desire on his part to instil the 'right sense of family'. He also describes mutual interests in activities such as sport whilst disregarding his granddaughter's interests around music and theatre, which have little appeal to him. Interestingly he emphasises sports so that his conception of care is highly masculine, even with a female grandchild:

I did spend an awful lot of time with her. I mean I taught her to ride a bicycle. I took her on bicycle rides, encouraging her in her sporting athletics and even started her playing golf for a while. I am very much 'hands on' or as much as I am allowed to be. As she is getting older and grown more independent I have had to stand back and make myself stand back a bit. I can't do the things that I used to do. I sort of see myself as a surrogate father and it's not easy to start retracting from that situation. But I realise I have to because it's the way of things; it's the normal way.

In these extracts, Alan talks of the need to 'stand back' which is 'the normal way' and of 'jealousy' regarding the time his granddaughter spends with the biological father. What is of significance however is how he describes himself as a 'surrogate father'. Grandfathering, it can be argued, is not as clearly recognised as a masculine role compared to being a father (see Lupton and Barclay, 1997 on fathering as masculinity). Yet he tries to reclaim this form of hegemonic masculinity by describing himself as a surrogate father – which is about being needed, as well as being a provider. In doing so he demonstrates the difficulties and tensions that the grandfather role, as a potentially gender neutral, or non-hegemonic role, raises for maintaining continuity with masculinity in later life. Nevertheless, this discursive adherence to hegemonic masculinity is softened through his desire to maintain emotional involvement:

It has given me great satisfaction. I think I have learnt to appreciate my family more with the grandchildren than I ever did with my own. Although I love them dearly I just didn't get the involvement with them because of work. I did spend long hours working. Yeah it's made me look and appreciate family more is the short answer.

This relationship with his older granddaughter is also different to the relationship he describes with his other grandchildren. With his other grandchildren, Alan has not felt the need to 'step in'. He does not see them so often: 'They're busy with school activities...they come along give you a hug and they're off again. But it's nice to see them'. Yet it is by acting the way he does, as a surrogate father, that he maintains a connection to masculinity. As a result, the relationship he describes with his other grandchildren is more distant and the time he spends with them more limited due to

their involvement in other school and social activities. Alan thus has a particular connection with his granddaughter, which results from the felt need to ‘step in’.

2. Brian

Brian, aged 64, describes intense involvement with his ten-year-old grandson. Like Alan, this also emerges in the context of an absent father, Brian’s biological son, whom the grandson has never met. Concerned with their grandson’s welfare, Brian and his wife moved closer to him, not long after his birth. Since he was four, the grandson has been living with his grandparents. Thus at the time of interview Brian and his wife were the main carers. Brian describes an acute sense of being a ‘substitute father’:

I suppose because dad’s not there I’ve got to be more far more involved than say, um, a normal granddad would be. I mean the granddad bits are on a daily basis. I wouldn’t say 24-7 but it’s mostly that intense. My wife, he talks to her. But unfortunately now I’m the hero. And he even tells his mates at school, oh if that’s broken, ‘oh grampy will fix that’. I play football, I play swing ball. The other thing, of course, is that I’ve got to be the one that he plays with which is getting a little harder you know. If he wants to play fight or whatever or wrestle it’s got to be me so I suppose he keeps you fit.

Brian describes being ‘far more involved’ as a grandfather than a ‘normal’ grandfather would be, because ‘dad’s not there’. While uncomfortable about being considered a hero, his response is to adopt masculine practices and to adhere to a normalised version of grandfather, which is to fix (see also Author F). This particular relationship is contrasted to his other grandchildren whom he sees only a few times a year, and who do not ‘need’ him because their parents are intact. The coinciding of

grandfatherhood with retirement has also provided Brian with opportunities for a new involvement in family life, something he embraces:

I think its better. The simple reason is I'm here. When my own two were growing up I was teaching, I was teaching 30 miles away. But by the time I got home in the evening when they are very young, they were either in or just going to bed and I would leave about ten past seven. I also took three night classes a week to try and bolster the money. So this has been far better because I've got more involved. I'm here, I've got more patience and I'm not as tired.

For Brian, grandfatherhood has brought about involvement in family, which was not undertaken when he was a father. In Brian's case, there are acute reasons for treating his grandson differently. Brian describes being highly involved in caring for and looking after his grandson, but also in ways that are masculinised. There is a continual referral back to sport and keeping fit and to building confidence through outdoor and physical activities, which also relates to Brian's main previous employment as a secondary school physical education teacher. In the context of an absent father, it is the particular relationship with his grandson that is emphasised, rather than a sense of equal involvement and responsibility to all his grandchildren.

3. Will

Will, aged 68, is divorced and recently re-partnered. He has three children and four grandchildren as well as one step-grandchild from his current partner. His oldest daughter lives some 40 miles away, and is married. His second eldest daughter lives in Switzerland, whilst his son lives a short distance away in the same town. He has spent most of his working life as an art teacher in both secondary and tertiary

education. Will rejects the previously identified role of grandparents as distant and authoritarian figures (Neugarten and Weinstein, 1964) highlighting awareness of the contemporary socio-cultural context and revealing how men's practices of family are negotiated in response to this and reflection on being grandparented. These are roles, which he associates with his own grandparents and with a different era:

I mean my grandparents never took us for walks or played with us. They were quite authoritative. I mean I constantly play with my grandchildren and look after them and enjoy their company immensely. Nothing like that ever happened with my grandparents. They are the joy of your life and you can't wait to take them out and spoil them. But I can't remember anything like that with my own grandparents. Also my brother has eight grandchildren. We play constantly with them, go on holiday with them and look after them when mums and dads are either ill or got to go to work.

Will has no initial ambivalence towards becoming a grandfather, but states being 'absolutely delighted, I was thrilled to bits'. It is significant in this account that his children lived with him, rather than with the biological mother, after their divorce, and there are particular undisclosed reasons for this. Consequently, and while he acknowledges the tendency towards matrilineal relations in other families, that have been identified elsewhere (Timonen and Doyle, 2012), Will considers himself to be more involved with his children and grandchildren than his ex-wife, both as father and grandfather:

That is very often the case. But I suppose in my case it is the reverse. I am more involved with the children. I mean I know they spend more time with me than they do with their grandmother. Yeh absolutely without a shadow of a doubt. If there is any sort of question it has always been me ever since because they lived with me.

Will reports how his children would more often turn to him than to their mother as someone to depend on and talk to about family and relationship issues. He rejects a traditional view of grandparents as distant and authoritarian. Yet through notions of being there, being dependable and noble (see also Miller, 2010: 56-7 on fathers 'being there'), Will continues to rely on a masculinised view of men's family involvement in order to make sense of their grandfather role. Unlike Alan and Brian, his interests are less specified to sport and fitness, and can involve a wider range of activities such as playing imaginary games, gardening, teaching how to draw, sitting and watching children's television programmes. Yet they no less provide avenues for successful ageing through maintaining a degree of fitness. He also describes times when he has 'looked after' his grandchildren, but also how this can be constrained by living further away:

I always make a point of saying, you know, 'I'll look after the kids and you go out if you want to go out to the theatre or something'. I mean two of my children live in different towns. If I were living in the same location then yeh I would be only too happy. When they are older maybe and want to go back to work or something or study when in that situation I can say 'don't worry I'll pick the kids up'.

His sense of being the primary grandparent also relates to having been the primary parent whereby his children had lived with him after his divorce from his wife. This is less evident in the relationship with his grandson from his biological son, despite them living nearby: 'I see him sort of quite regularly perhaps once a week I might pop into see my son to borrow his lawn mower to do the lawns and I see Jack quite frequently then'. Thus while Will represents a primary figure as a maternal grandfather for his daughters' children, this does not appear to be the case with his grandson as a paternal

grandfather. Again, being needed and being a provider appear central to how these men understand the nature of their relationships.

In each of the three cases above, being a grandfather is associated with having more time to spend with grandchildren and family, post-retirement. In our next two cases, we develop our argument further by examining how grandfathering is negotiated alongside other defining roles, of paid employment, new relationships and also leisure.

4. Chris

Chris is 51 years old. He is in full time employment and is one of the youngest grandfathers to take part in the study. He is a professional, works long hours and retains ambitions in relation to this career. He is also divorced, remarried and has two grandchildren from his daughter and a step-grandson from his second wife's daughter. There are a number of features of his experience that are of note. He epitomises the sense of ambivalence in becoming a grandfather:

When I discovered that my daughter was first pregnant, I think we all struggled with it. Having a child in a situation where I suppose our overall view was that it wasn't very clever to have a child. I mean she is lovely. It is difficult practically to be a grandparent so we are not really ready to be grandparents. I mean pragmatically we both work long hours and it is difficult to really give the amount of time that we would like. But I don't think it has really affected the bond I've developed particularly with my granddaughter. We see them about once or twice a month and they stay over on weekends so we do spend quality time. There's a lot of affection and warmth but as I said we haven't really had that much time. We can provide the practical provisions nappies and push chairs and you know a fun role but the actual care giving demands can be tricky.

Like Alan above, Chris' sense of ambivalence in becoming a grandfather relates to the circumstances around the birth of the grandchild as well as the impact of motherhood on his daughter's educational and career aspirations. However, his ambivalence also relates to his own long working hours and feeling unable to spend as much time with his grandchildren as he would like. Equally, Chris draws explicitly on his experience of fathering in terms of care giving, for example, remembering how to change nappies, bathing and preparing food. He also describes contributing to his children and grandchildren financially through purchasing items. He actively manages being a grandfather with other important goals in his life:

I find it difficult to be the grandfather that I want to be and that is purely down to time. Not because I wouldn't have the opportunity I think they would value us having the kids more. But you try and have some time together with your wife as well as time with friends and then there is work and I do a lot of private work on top of that and, you know, there just isn't enough hours in the day. I suppose my hope is that I will go and retire when I'm 60, they will still be young and still stuff we can do together. But I'm a bit pissed off that I can't do more at this point because we don't see them that often and so the expectation is that you do not have the same level of responsibility. That might not be the same for my daughter's mum who is more involved in the care giving side. She will pick them up from nursery because she can you know. I can't because I don't have the time

Being a grandfather has to 'fit in' with what's going on in his life. Chris finds things like waking up in the middle of the night challenging because of his work and so talks about the need to regulate his involvement into short predictable spells so that he can manage it in relation to his career. In doing so, Chris puts paid employment first. Equally, he talks in detail about caring practices such as feeding, bathing, reading bed time stories, as well as trying to build a swing, watching children's television, and playing with children's toys. In addition, Chris describes ways in which

grandparenting has become part of his and his wife's day to day life, for example, through decorating their spare bedroom with furniture and toys, through keeping supplies of nappies, purchasing a push chair and fitting child seats to their car. Chris' account illustrates well, the contradictions between care-oriented and gender-neutral masculinities and continuity with hegemonic masculinity through work.

5. Stuart

Stuart is 65 years old and lives several hundred miles away from most of his grandchildren. He is divorced from his children's biological mother and has since been remarried over 20 years ago. He has two sons from his first marriage who have no children, and three step-children from his wife's first marriage. Together, Stuart and his wife have seven grandchildren. Because of the geographical distance, they see their grandchildren only a few times a year. Yet he considers himself to be more involved in the lives of his grandchildren than either of the biological grandfathers. This said, the physical distance dictates the nature and extent of contact that they have with their grandchildren:

We see them when they come down here and when we go up there. Just sort of a supportive in a sort of secondary sense I have a good relationship with all the grandchildren. I think it is important to have good conversation skills and develop a good rapport with them. They do ring us up. Well they ring Judy up. But there is much more email contact and telephone than face to face because of the distance. They will ring me up about homework, for example. But I have never thought about it as a role or a responsibility. It's just about providing them with some fun.

What makes a good grandfather? Always being available. Joining in what they are doing. Inviting them out. Taking the initiative. Talking to them about their homework. History, I am very interested in

history and they have rung me up to ask me questions. I try to get them engaged in discussions about history and things. What do I do in particular? I try to engage them in communication and discussion. The youngsters are pretty shy and find it difficult to discuss and so I try to encourage them in that and try to get them to do things

Because of the distance, Stuart places greater emphasis on email and telephone communication as he does on face-to-face contact. He does not view being a grandfather as a responsibility. Nor is it a role in which he is responding to the needs of his children/grandchildren. He tries to engage them in conversation about history, education, doing outdoor activities with them and providing them with a fun time. Like Chris, but unlike our other cases, Stuart associates grandfatherhood with having less, rather than more, time with family:

You haven't got the time as a grandfather. With your own children it is a full time thing and a full time responsibility. While with grandchildren, it's about giving them a good time. You know you can give them back. It's a limited period and that is quite crucial because when you are with them you always know that it is for a limited period and so that dictates the kind of things you do. It is more activity related. Maybe its an age thing but it is a relief to know that they are not yours and they are not your responsibility. I am not sure how I would feel if I was to have my own kids again.

Both Chris and Stuart emphasise the pursuement of interests outside of family. Stuart, in particular, maintains a view of grandfatherhood as quality time and as a fun role. In emphasising *active* grandparenting, Stuart also distinguishes the way he acts from his grandparents:

My memory of them is being old Doing things gently. Having rests. Acting and doing things as elderly people. It is difficult to describe but they just seemed old.

...as well as from his own parents as grandparents:

Well they would come and baby-sit and do parent things. But they didn't do anything active with them. They did bring them things and buy them things. For example, my father made a scale railway in the garden and liked doing things like that. But it was very much following the mould of their parents. Acting in the same way. They were their role models and just followed on in exactly the same mould as they were. Acting sedately and acting old and didn't relax like we do today. It is different. Both of us, we don't feel any different to what we were in our later 20s. Both of us are quite active and fit acting in that same way talking about and watching films, playing on the computer, going on picnics, playing games and things like that. But that might just be our personalities. I think we are still looking for excitement and stimulation in our lives and not just settling into old age. *We don't want to just be grandparents.*

Through Stuart, as with Chris, we see how being a grandparent competes with being in a new relationship. This is coupled with a positive assessment of greater individual choice based on being active and living life in retirement. This supports findings by Scruton and Holland (2006) who suggest that grandfatherhood and family time continue to be a source of 'work' for men that takes them away from their leisure pursuits. This can result in a continued gendered division of labour in family life where family is seen as women's domain. While noting some differences between himself and his wife as grandparents, he puts particular stress on doing things in partnership in ways which blurs the distinction between them. Hence the way they do grandparenting together reflects the organisation of their lives and the prioritization of a relatively new relationship within this.

Conclusion

This article has examined how a continuity of masculinity is drawn upon by men to make sense of the grandfather role. For some men, conceptualisations of new grandfatherhood, which challenge previous conceptions, are being constructed through softened masculinized notions as opposed to an alternative, or non-hegemonic style. The cases of Alan and Brian illustrate in detail how becoming a grandfather, coinciding with retirement, had brought about a changed orientation to family. Both describe having the time to engage with grandchildren in ways which were not available to them whilst working long hours as fathers. However work and being the breadwinner continue to define opportunities for family involvement and there is little association of their roles with care, still predominantly considered a female task. Chris, one of the youngest grandfathers interviewed, illustrates how grandfatherhood can be experienced and perceived as ‘off-time’ when coinciding with career. Ideally, becoming a grandparent should take place in retirement. Yet even in retirement, grandfatherhood can conflict with other active interests and aspirations. For Stuart, being a grandfather represents just one dimension of an active life. While enjoying spending time with grandchildren, Stuart doesn’t want to be defined by being a grandfather. Thus whilst the onset of retirement can be associated with greater involvement in family, it also provides new opportunities to pursue goals associated with leisure, travel and relationships, and so cannot be taken for granted. Grandfathering consequently enables men to maintain youthful and active lives, representing the continuity of masculinities.

For reasons described, we have argued that grandfathers should be subject to renewed sociological attention in their own right. As the data shows however this is

complicated by the relational contexts of grandfathers' lives. Through our analytic approach, we have highlighted important differences in the family circumstances of individual grandfathers, and the way these circumstances shape their experiences of grandfatherhood and multiple performances of masculinity, or new masculinities (Author F). While retirement provides the time, their accounts are shaped by circumstances to do with the birth of their grandchild. As such, their involvements as grandfathers are intrinsically related to the absence of fathers, whether due to divorce or simply working long hours. Phrases such as 'stepping in' and 'plugging holes' are central to understanding their motivations. In particular, normal grandfathers should not be so involved, but being able to 'give the grandchildren back', whilst only 'stepping' in on occasions. Taken together, diverse family circumstances shape and transform the ways in which men diversely do and undo gender as grandfathers and in relation to different sets of grandchildren.

We also find strong desires to challenge traditional understandings and stereotypes of previous generations of grandfathers as inactive (for example, sitting back with pipe in chair, and acting old). Rather being 'active', 'hands-on' and 'not old' as a grandfather was asserted. In contrast these grandfathers saw themselves as surrogate fathers, as more fun, more active and fit, or indeed more sensitive compared to their contemporaries or to their fathers and grandfathers. Will in particular challenges the behaviours of his own grandparents as authoritarian figures and is more sensitive to the gender of his grandchildren in terms of the kinds of activities he engages them in. In so doing, previous conceptions of grandfatherhood are negotiated through the assertion of their sense of masculinity as older men. Nevertheless we also find strong instrumental concerns for the physical and mental development of their grandchildren.

In some cases it was primarily the grandfathers' *own* interests (e.g. in sport, history, science or the outdoors) that were pursued and this was often regardless of the gender of the grandchild. In other cases the grandfathers' interests were more sensitive to the gender and interests of the grandchild (e.g. creative art, gardening).

The analysis points towards both continuities and changes in the family involvements of grandfathers, as well as individual constructions and performances of masculinities. Care, intimacy and emotional literacy do not in themselves define the shifting nature of grandfatherhood. While describing intimate relationships with grandchildren, there is little evidence that the instrumental role of grandfathers as identified in the previous literature (Bengtson and Robertson, 1985) has changed. There remain strong interests in the instrumental development of their grandchildren, and in the transmission of their own sense of masculinity through activities. However, in light of contemporary public discourses of active and healthy ageing, grandfathers are also challenged to present themselves as active and youthful. In doing so, these grandfathers are also found to be challenging traditional stereotypes of grandfathers as passive and inactive. Motivated by new and changing family circumstances, grandfathers also demonstrate agency (see also Timonen and Doyle, 2012) by adjusting their role in order to meet the support needs of family members. Yet in engaging in active, fit and healthy lives in retirement, so the family involvement of new grandfathers cannot be taken for granted.

We consider grandfathering as a significant area for furthering understanding of the doing of masculinities within later life but also theoretically, for questioning hegemonic masculinities as a conceptual framework. Theoretically, Hearn (2011: 95)

for example points out that '[h]egemonic masculinity has limits as a framework for taking on board all the complexities of ageing (men). The complex picture, with men being both given status through ageing and old age but at the same time marginalized, is difficult to encompass or conceptualise within the frame of hegemonic masculinity'. An area for future theorising of ageing masculinity then might be to go beyond the normative accounts of grandfathering as fun and enriching, and to account for times in which this positive story of grandfatherhood is challenged by ageing masculinities; such as when bodies are pushed to far, when activity is less achievable or when relationships with grandchildren are physically constrained through ill-health and disability. This would move us beyond a focus on how men adhere to hegemonic masculinity to consideration of the embodied and lived realities of men's ageing that are shaping their identities and new and alternative performances of masculinities.

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Notes

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² For other published findings from this research see Author A, Author B and Author C.

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