

Examining the Role of Natural Environments through Retirement Transitions:

A Longitudinal Narrative Study

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**Abstract**

Increasing longevity in Western society means that older adults will spend more of their later lives as retirees, or as older workers. In this respect, what it means to live as an older adult represents a shifting landscape, where the health and well-being of older adults are guided by the socio-cultural narrative of decline (*being aged passively*), and ageing in the era of the Third Age (*actively growing old*). As such, there is a need for research to examine how older adults can *age well* as retirees, or as older workers. To date, research in this field has seldom considered the role of the natural environment in this respect, despite a burgeoning body of research that indicates the beneficial impact of natural environments upon health and well-being. The aim of this research, therefore, was to examine the role of natural environments in the lives of older adults during the retirement process, and in the lives of older workers, and the potential implications for *ageing well*.

Pluralistic methods were utilised within a longitudinal design in order to generate narrative data. Specifically, 7 retirees and 3 older workers were interviewed in 3 stages, over a time period of 2 years.

Narrative analysis revealed that, initially, pre-retirees' stories were guided by notions of *being aged passively*, facilitated by a relational narrative and often illustrated by *dys-appearing* body-self relationships. In contrast, older workers' stories were driven by notions of *actively growing old*, facilitated by an individualistic narrative. In the later stages of data collection, retirees' stories developed to also be guided by *actively growing old*, where embodied decline was overshadowed by aspects of *being* such as spirituality, intellectual stimulation, and mindfulness. Such stories were complemented by a developed sense of self, highlighting the importance of self-awareness in later life.

Natural environments played a role by providing a multi-dimensional platform from which to age well. For example, on a physical level, spending time in natural environments often involved being active in a non-prescriptive way coupled with a sense of autonomy, calmness and relief from stress. On an emotional level, pleasurable memories from childhood were re-ignited when in natural environments, which participants found invigorating. On a cognitive level, whilst in natural environments, participants were able to engage in a spiritual and intellectual process of negotiation whereby selves were re-discovered from the past, contemplated in the present, and constructed for the future.

Implications of these findings for policy and practice, and the original contribution to knowledge made by this research, are discussed within.

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## ***Chapter One: Introduction***

The purpose of this chapter is to outline my motivation for undertaking this research, and to briefly introduce the subjects under study.

### **1.0 Introducing Myself**

I identify myself as a white British female in her mid-twenties. I was born in Shoreham-by-Sea, but brought up in Cornwall, England, where my parents raised me to be both physically and intellectually active. This led me to study Sport and Physical Education at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, during which time I became fascinated by socio-cultural studies of health and well-being. The prospect of completing research in this field motivated me to apply for this PhD project, which was based in my home county of Cornwall.

Cornwall is well-known for its places of nature, such as coastal paths, woodlands, and beaches; places which I have experienced throughout my life. This project examined why, when, where, and how such places of nature were engaged with over time, and the potential implications for older adults' health and well-being. Whilst this interested me on a personal level, the project also involved an analysis of the *personal, social, and cultural foundations* of lived experiences, thus taking *context* into consideration, which complemented my interests on an academic level.

### **1.1 Introducing the Research Project**

The unique focus of the project was that it considered experiences of nature, health, and well-being during *retirement* - a significant transitional period in the ageing process. Following an initial review of literature, I began to recognise ageing as a diverse and complex subject. Indeed, the study of ageing, or

*gerontology*, can be approached from a range of angles, such as physiological, biological, social, and cultural (discussed in chapter 2, section 2.3).

In everyday life, I observed the subject of ageing as a popular topic often framed by self-deprecation or the degradation of others. Media representation of ageing, such as in magazines, on television, and in newspapers, also seemed to frame ageing in an undesirable way with a particular focus on the body. Companies commonly presented ageing as an embodied decline that must be fought, primarily by women. For example, *Olay's* messages about ageing told a story focused upon youth and beauty, where ageing was the enemy, and anti-ageing products were the heroes (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Anti-Ageing Advert (<http://www.olay.co.uk>)

In this sense, the consumer culture within Western society can be seen to promote the story of ageing as a problem to be feared and avoided in order to sell products. Yet it does more than this, as at the centre of this ageing story is the body, and if taken on board, individuals can become 'prisoners of biology' (Kontos, 1999, p.680), trapped in an inevitable process of decline. How this can impact upon an individuals' sense of health and well-being was an important aspect of this project.

I had many 'ageing conversations' with my mum in an effort to gain a more informed insight into what ageing can mean, especially from the view of an older person. The story of ageing as decline seemed – at least for my mum – to have detrimental consequences for her sense of self, her confidence, and her perceived access to well-being. I found that these conversations encouraged me to think about my own beliefs about ageing, which, arguably, are significant to how I interpreted my research findings (as such, I have included an excerpt of one such conversation in Appendix 1). They also motivated me to communicate alternative stories of ageing that attribute to well-being rather than detract from it. This project provided an opportunity for me to do so by examining older adults' interactions with *nature*, as places of nature have long been presumed to be beneficial for health and well-being.

Several academic theories exist as to how and why nature can benefit health and well-being (see chapter 2, section 2.1). Yet, few studies have illustrated how individuals' interactions with nature throughout the life course, and during the late life transition of retirement, impact upon health and well-being in later life (if at all). Furthermore, research on the relationships between nature and well-being are dominated by a *hedonistic* interpretation of well-being. Fewer studies adopt a *eudaimonic* view, whereby well-being is considered to be a continuous process, and examine how interactions of nature feature within this process.

The unique aspect of this project, and the consequent addition to knowledge it provides, is centred upon how interactions with nature *during retirement transitions* can impact upon health and well-being in later life. From a eudaimonic angle, the process of well-being can be disrupted by transitions, as the changes they involve can disrupt what is meaningful in an individual's life. Retirement in particular is a major life course transition, given that employment is often used to define an individual in terms of what they do and how they spend their time (Kim and Moen, 2001). As such, examining how individuals experience retirement transitions can expose what is meaningful to them in relation to their well-being. Retirement transitions, therefore, present an apt focal point from which to examine the role of nature within the health and well-being of older adults. The aim of this research, therefore, was *to examine*

*the role of nature in the lives of older adults during the retirement process, and the potential implications for health and well-being.*

Central to this aim were the themes of nature, health, well-being, ageing, and retirement transitions. These are discussed in the following chapter, which acts to provide a foundation from which I formulated the specific research questions used to guide this research.

## ***Chapter Two: Literature Review***

I begin this chapter by evaluating what can be meant by the terms *nature*, *health*, and *well-being*. I expand upon this by reviewing theories that relate nature to health and well-being, whilst drawing attention to lacunas within this field. I follow this by evaluating what can be meant by the term 'ageing' and review theories of ageing.

Connecting with the review around nature, health and well-being, and incorporating older adults into this literature, the latter part of this chapter discusses older adults' relationships to space and place, with a focus on places of nature in particular. Building upon the discussion of nature and ageing, retirement transitions are then drawn upon in relation to health and well-being, which, crucially, highlights the need for this research. Collectively, this chapter acts as a foundation from which I generated two specific research questions:

- 1) What role (if any) do interactions with nature play in older adults' experiences of the retirement process?
- 2) What can nature offer in aspirations to 'age well'?

## **2.1 Defining Nature, Health, and Well-Being**

### **2.1.1 Defining Nature**

According to Clayton and Opatow (2003) nature, or a natural environment, is commonly perceived as an environment which has not been manufactured or influenced by humans. Arguably, little can escape from human influence, and as such, a definition generally accepted in the literature describes nature as living features (flora and fauna) which exhibit 'little or no apparent evidence of human presence or intervention' (Hartig et al., 2014, p.208; also see Gómez-Pompa and Kaus, 1992). Whilst this definition can be aptly applied to places such as wilderness (see Rosenberg, 1994), other places of nature such as

outdoor environments near water (*blue space*), and environments which include green plant life (*green space*), the definition becomes debatable. Blue environments, for example, can be represented by the artificial beach in Malé, Maldives, which was constructed by humans. Similarly, green environments can be represented by artificial creations such as Hyde Park in London, England, or the use of plants indoors. How nature is defined, then, is subjective in that it depends upon the interpretation of the perceiver.

Scholars, such as Cronon (1995), have gone so far as to say that nature itself is a social construction. Epistemologically, social constructionism adheres to the notion that knowledge [of nature] is based upon interpretations constructed within the ethical, cultural, economic and political dimensions that exist within society (Proctor, 2010; also see chapter 3). From this viewpoint, all places of nature are, to an extent, a human creation, thus the existence of nature in a 'pure' form of wilderness is rejected. That is not to say that objective elements of nature are disregarded as non-existent, but rather to say that the *meaning* of these elements is constructed. As such, there is no dichotomous divide between humans and nature; conceptually, nature cannot escape the influence of humans, and human interaction with nature can vary significantly between individuals. As Hartig (2014) noted, 'opportunities for contact with nature, ways of encountering nature, and experiences of nature vary across sociocultural contexts' (p.209).

Accordingly, nature can be researched in diverse ways (Reid and Hunter, 2011; Hartig et al., 2014). Amongst the various theoretical viewpoints that have been developed by researchers regarding interactions with nature, the dominant concern of this field relates to how nature can contribute to human health and well-being (Reid and Hunter, 2011; Hartig et al., 2014). Before presenting a review of such research, the following sections necessarily operationalise the terms *health* and *well-being*.

### **2.1.2 Defining Health**

Health is a term that is widely used in both policy and practice. Yet, there is not one singular definition of health that is agreed upon across such domains.

Complexities arise due to the multi-dimensionality of health, as noted by Larson (1999), who identified four conceptual models used to define health; medical, holistic, wellness, and environmental models. Table 1 provides an overview of how these models depict health.

Table 1. Definitions of Health (adapted from Larson, 1999, p.125)

| <b>Model</b>                                   | <b>Definition of Health</b>  | <b>Strengths</b>   | <b>Criticisms</b>   |
|--|--|--|---|
| Medical model                                  | The absence of disease or disability.  | Biological objectivity useful within the practice of medicine.   | Overlooks emotional, social, and economic factors. Those who have disease are considered definitively ill, yet advances in nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation have alleviated suffering over time, allowing people to live with diseases and without illness.   |
| World Health Organisation (WHO) holistic model | State of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.                        | Considers multiple dimensions of well-being as part of health.   | 'Complete' well-being is impractical, as a 'complete' state cannot be operationalised or measured. 'Complete' well-being is an unrealistic, utopian view that implies that we are all invalids. Implications include the unnecessary expansion of the healthcare system, and the potential for higher levels of medical dependency (and the eternity of the WHO). |
| Wellness model                                 | Progress toward higher functioning, energy, comfort, and integration of mind, body, and spirit.                                      | Integrates mind, body, and spirit within a functional process. Considers positive health and health promotion. | Difficult to operationalise and measure the subjective and broad conception of health. Difficult to determine overall health as biological functioning and emotional/spiritual wellness can contradict each other.  |
| Environmental model                            | Continuous adaptation to physical, social and other environments to create a balance free from undue pain, discomfort or disability. | Adds an environmental dimension to biological and social elements of health.                                   | Difficult to operationalise and measure the subjective and broad conception of health. Adaptation dependent on context and, therefore, not generalisable worldwide.   |



The WHO definition of health represents the most popular definition worldwide (Larson, 1999). Recently, two internationally renowned medical journals (*The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*) contributed to debates regarding whether this definition is still fit for purpose. *The Lancet* (2009) clearly demonstrated an opposition, arguing that ‘health is not a “state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being”. Nor is it “merely the absence of disease or infirmity... neither definition will do in an era marked by new understandings’ (p.781). Within the *British Medical Journal*, Jadad and O’Grady (2008) invited comments as to how health should be defined in light of these ‘new understandings’. A discussion of the multiple meanings of health unfolded.

Within the debate, contributors advocated health as a personally constructed concept, as opposed to one that is professionally prescribed. As a personal construction, health would depend upon an individual’s interpretation of their changing circumstances over time. Other comments highlighted the need for a greater insight into the spiritual dimension of well-being as part of health, and the importance of having a harmonious relationship with the environment.

These viewpoints echo Canguilhem (1943, cited in *The Lancet*, 2009), who argued that health represents an individual’s ability to adapt to their environment, and is, therefore, a dynamic self-determined concept that varies for every individual. The need for spiritual and environmental well-being as fundamental aspects of health are also evident within the 1986 Ottawa Charter – a proposal made in 1986 with the intention of adapting the WHO definition of health. As detailed on the WHO (1986) website, the Ottawa Charter maintains that the fundamental conditions and resources for health are: peace, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, shelter, education, food, income, social justice, and equity.

Huber et al. (2011) noted that the Ottawa Charter, amongst other proposals to re-define health, have not been taken up by the WHO. Pursuing an argument closely related to the environmental model of health, Huber et al. argue that health should be considered as a concept based on resilience and the restoration of well-being. More specifically, they propose a reformulation of health as ‘the ability to adapt and self manage in the face of social, physical, and emotional challenges’ (p.1). Arguably, an individual’s ability to adapt and

self-manage the various challenges they face relies upon how health is made sense of on a conscious level.

When questioning what it means to be healthy, Frank (2006) asked, 'what are the limits of its possible meanings? ...'healthy' includes everything...all things become good once they get themselves under the sign of *health*' (p.436, emphasis in original). What health means to an individual, then, could encompass a wide range of variables consisting of what that individual regards as beneficial. This is potentially problematic, as it may lead to individuals striving to reach an undefined state of health, and, consequently, trying to 'attain the unattainable' (Jones and Higgs, 2010, p.1518).

As such, it is beneficial to promote the message that health is dependent upon *individual circumstances* and, therefore, recognise the importance of having the physical measures of bodily health but complementing those with individual understandings and perceptions of their own health. Ultimately, this means that health is a diverse and subjective concept, inclusive of how individuals interpret themselves and the world around them. Yet, it is often the objective side of health (such as measures of heart rate, blood pressure and weight) that is given primary focus within health studies. Whilst these measures are important, they are limited in understanding the complexity of mental health.

As Frank (2006) has argued, stories about health highlight its subjectivities, which are not empirical evidence as such. Yet they are salient for understanding health as they tell of what has become meaningful over time. Within stories of health, experiences and meanings of what it is to be healthy persist or are dismissed, passed down from generation to generation. The overall guiding story, known as a narrative, has significant power in shaping attitudes and behaviour (see chapter 3, section 3.2).

From a narrative perspective, Huber et al.'s (2011) concept of health can be re-presented as the ability to adapt and self-manage the *stories* we live by when we are faced with disruption in the form of social, physical and emotional challenges. Having this ability may well enhance how good an individual feels about their life and their sense of well-being. What this means is arguable, however, as there is not one correct way to define the term *well-being*, as discussed in the following section.

### 2.1.3 Defining Well-Being: What is the *Good Life*?

Before I wrote this section, I asked myself this: If health is inclusive of social, physical and emotional dimensions of being, are (good) health and well-being not one and the same? If not, what is it that differentiates them? Concepts of health and well-being are certainly intertwined, but can also be discussed separately depending on the disciplinary focus. For example, health is often discussed in isolation when the focus is on biological aspects of human functioning. Well-being, on the other hand, is often considered separately to health when the focus is upon psychological functioning. I do not intend to communicate this as a definite rule, nor does this dichotomy represent my own conceptual interpretation of health and well-being. Rather, this is an observation attained from my review of literature, which I expand upon in what follows.

Ryan and Deci (2001) define well-being as 'optimal psychological functioning and experience' (p.142). What is considered to be 'optimal', though, is subject to individual interpretation, and is dependent upon personal, social, and environmental circumstances. Traditionally, well-being has been interpreted from two differing perspectives, namely, the *hedonic* perspective and the *eudaimonic* perspective. Knowledge of these two perspectives is crucial in order to understand how well-being can be interpreted. Table 2 displays the main characteristics attributed to well-being by the hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives, which are then expanded upon in the remainder of this section.

Table 2: Hedonic and Eudaimonic Perspectives of Well-Being

| Characteristics of Hedonic Well-Being   | Characteristics of Eudaimonic Well-Being   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Satisfaction Scales</li> <li>• Subjective Well-Being:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- presence of positive state of mind, absence of negative state of mind</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Pleasurable Experiences</li> <li>• Momentary state</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological Well-Being:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- autonomy, self-management, relationships with others, purpose/meaningful life, self-development, self-acceptance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Self-Determination Theory:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- autonomy, competence, relationships with others</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Morally congruent behaviour               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- virtue, authenticity</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Existential living</li> <li>• Lifelong process</li> <li>• Mindfulness</li> </ul> |

### 2.1.3.1 The Hedonic Perspective

The term hedonic can be defined as ‘of or relating to pleasure’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2015). In relation to the hedonic perspective of well-being, pleasurable experiences are seen to affect individuals in positive ways by maximising pleasant emotions, feelings and thoughts (for example, joy, affection, or happiness) and minimising unpleasant emotions, feelings and thoughts (for example, guilt, anger, or worry).

Peterson et al. (2005) attributed the roots of the hedonic perspective to the Greek philosopher Aristippus (435–366 BCE), who aligned happiness with ‘immediate sensory gratification’ (p.25). The historical development of hedonism thereon involved the notion of ethical hedonism, that is, pleasure as a moral obligation (Epicurus, 342–270 BCE), the importance of ‘non-artificial’ modes of experiencing pleasure (Erasmus, 1466–1536; Moore, 1478–1535), and the formation of utilitarianism (Hume, 1711–1776; Bentham, 1748–1832) and, most recently, hedonic psychology. Diener, Kahneman, and Schwarz (2003) appreciate that factors such as crime and poverty rates contribute to well-being, yet maintain that ‘the experience of pleasure and the achievement of

a subjective sense of well-being remain at the center [sic] of the story [of hedonic well-being]' (p.x).

A major characteristic of subjective well-being is the presence of a 'positive' state of mind (such as joy, elation, contentment, pride, affection, and ecstasy) and an absence of a 'negative' state of mind (such as guilt, shame, sadness, anxiety, worry, anger, stress, depression, and envy) (Diener et al., 1999). In this sense, well-being is measured based upon what individuals feel in the moment, by way of scales that refer to individual evaluations of life satisfaction (Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2001). Indeed, the *OECD* (2013) refer to subjective well-being as: 'Good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences' (p.10). What this illuminates, however, is that the hedonic perspective of well-being assumes that there is only one pursuit of happiness, and that experiential living can be reduced to the dichotomous categories of 'positive' and 'negative'. As such, research in this field only measures certain, limited aspects of well-being (Reid and Hunter, 2011).

The dominant research method employed within this field is surveys that aim to collate data en masse in order to generalise results to the wider population (Diener et al., 1999). This type of generalisation incorporates an assumed cause and effect relationship, such as Wilson's (1967) proposal that a young, well-educated, well-paid, and married individual (cause) is more likely to be happy (effect). The use of cause and effect relationships within subjective research can create problems insofar as they assert an over-simplification of what is a complex and dynamic process.

Against this knowledge, qualitative research methodologies that do not seek to generalise findings to wider populations can be of great value with regards to developing how subjective well-being is understood. Regrettably, this is not always recognised in the literature, as reflected by Luhmann et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis of studies that considered subjective well-being in the context of adaptation to life events. Their review purposefully *excluded* all articles that only reported qualitative data, thus suggesting a mis-recognition of the value of this type of research in the field of subjective well-being. Mis-

recognition of this type has implications for research, as aptly noted by Angner (2010, p.362):

existing literature fails to capture the degree of diversity, and disagreement, among proponents of subjective measures. The result is a false impression of homogeneity and an obstacle to fruitful communication and cooperation within and across disciplinary boundaries.

This observation is crucial when considering how to best utilise research methodologies for the study of subjective well-being, and illuminates the need for qualitative methods that appreciate diversity and subjectivity (see chapter 3, section 3.4).

### **2.1.3.2 The Eudaimonic Perspective**

In contrast to the hedonic perspective, the eudaimonic perspective does not assume pleasure to be the dominant characteristic of well-being, neither does it assert that the two are mutually dependent. Whilst the hedonic view asserts that the presence of 'negative' experiences are minimised for well-being, the eudaimonic view regards both 'positive' and 'negative' experiences as part of a holistic process wherein *virtue* is key. Indeed, an underlying philosophical principle or 'noble truth' of Buddhism is that suffering is inevitable part of life, and that to achieve virtue and well-being, this suffering must be dealt with by adhering to an 'eightfold path' (developing understanding, positive intentions, skilful speech, action and livelihood, making the right kind of effort, cultivating mindfulness, and mastering meditation). Through a eudaimonic lens, well-being is viewed as morally congruent process of living, wherein individuals' with well-being live in ways that are harmonious with their beliefs, values, and genuine selves (Besser-Jones, 2014).

The two main methods used by psychologists to collate information about eudaimonic well-being are measures based upon the model of psychological well-being and self-determination theory. Reid and Hunter (2011) identified six dimensions of psychological well-being that can be used to measure eudaimonic well-being: autonomy, self-management, relationships with others, purpose/meaningful life, self-development, and self-acceptance. Three

dimensions were identified as relevant to self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relationships with others; here, autonomy is deemed most important for eudaimonic well-being. As such, Reid and Hunter argue that the eudaimonic perspective is more encompassing than the pleasure-focused hedonic perspective.

Furthermore, the need to satisfy pleasurable desires will not always attribute to long term well-being, as desires do not necessarily correlate with an individuals' moral standard. Indeed, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) considered hedonic well-being to be a 'vulgar ideal, making humans slavish followers of desires' (Ryan and Deci, 2001, p.145). This view has also been advocated by Wallace and Shapiro (2006), who stated that hedonic pursuits 'have their own merits, but a life that is concerned with such pursuits alone does not give rise to lasting well-being' (p.692).

From a eudaimonic point of view, pleasure is regarded as a state of mind experienced by healthy bodies via the senses. It is possible for pleasure to be felt by unhealthy (unwell) bodies, insofar as pleasure acts as a momentary catalyst for restoring health. This highlights the main argument put forward by the eudaimonic perspectives: pleasure is a *state*, whereas well-being is a developmental *process*. As such, the 'good life' consists of *doing* activities (that are morally congruent), rather than just *being* in a certain state (of pleasure).

The eudaimonic perspective posits that well-being is more akin to the actualisation of human potential, argued to be the ultimate goal of human functioning (Ryan and Deci, 2001), rather than the pursuit of pleasurable experiences. With reference to Aristotelian ethics (see Kraut, 2014), well-being is considered to be constructed by the practice of a *virtuous lifestyle*, that is, a way of living that involves activities that represent excellence of character. Crucially, virtue or excellence of character is relative to the capacity of human beings to function rationally and reasonably. Such reasoning is integral to self-reflection/awareness, wisdom, and moral development, which are necessary characteristics of eudaimonic well-being. In other words, reason and rationality construct moral values and virtue. If an individual's genuine self is not virtuous, and is not, therefore, constructed based upon reason and rationality, they will not attain eudaimonic well-being.

The work of psychologist Carl Rogers reflects a eudaimonic view of well-being. Rogers' (1990 [1961]) experience of humanistic psychotherapies led him to describe the 'good life' as follows:

for many people happiness, or adjustment, are seen as states of being which are synonymous with the good life. And social scientists have frequently spoken of the reduction of tension, or the achievement of homeostasis or equilibrium, as if these states constituted the goal of the process of living...If I attempt to capture [the good life] in a few words...the good life is a *process*, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination (p.411).

By listening to and reflecting on hundreds of clients' lived experiences, Rogers observed that the process of attaining well-being was a personal configuration inclusive of three main characteristics:

#### 1) An Increasing Openness to Experience

The first characteristic of well-being refers to how an individual approaches any experiences they may have. If an individual adopts an open approach to experience (as opposed to a prejudiced or assumptive approach), then any message received during an experience will be received freely, leading to a more informed and fulfilled experience overall. Messages can be received either in an internal, visceral form, such as memories, thoughts and feelings, or in an external, environmental form, such as impacts upon the sensory nerves. Taking this approach effectively creates a bi-directional relationship between an individual's willingness to develop their sense of self and their openness to experience. This is because the openness dissolves any potential perceptions of threat to the self, and defence mechanisms (rooted in a lack of self-awareness) become unnecessary. An individual who is open to experience, therefore, is more likely to welcome changes throughout their lives, based upon their willingness to develop their sense of self.

#### 2) Increasingly Existential Living

Rogers (1990) described existential living as occurring when 'the self and personality emerge *from* experience, rather than experience being



translated or twisted to fit preconceived self-structure' (p.413). For an individual who is open to experience and has no defensiveness, each moment would be new. Adaptability is considered essential here, in that individuals need to allow their self to be in flux in order to openly experience each new moment as it happens in the *now*.

The notion that each moment is new can be derived from a phrase attributed to the philosopher Heraclitus, that is, 'one cannot step twice into the same river' (Stern, 1991, p.581). The notion presented by Stern describes a riverbank that is not persistent, due to the water that is constantly flowing. The river is continually changing, and, as such, one cannot step into it twice. This implies that everything is momentary, and although things with properties exist, they are always changing into something else. The self, then, is never stable or static. Individual people are never completely the same from one moment to the next. Living with this dynamic necessitates a process over time; living well, therefore, is a process rather than a state.

When considering the hedonic/eudaimonic well-being debate, the river metaphor implies that any felt state, such as pleasure, can only be an aspect of the process of living well (well-being). This is consistent with Rogers' (1990) view that well-being is a direction, not a destination.

### 3) Increasing Trust in the Embodied State

The third characteristic of what Rogers (1990) called 'the person who is living the process of the good life' (p.414) refers to the relationship between what is felt in the body and what is practiced as behaviour. Individuals often adhere to expectations constructed by institutions or the judgements of others when deciding how to act during lived experiences. Yet, Rogers observed that individuals who act upon how they feel inside, that is, those that trust in their embodied state, are often much more satisfied with their behaviour. They learn to trust their reactions, are more aware of their feelings, and are more willing to express themselves genuinely.

Theoretically, the adoption of these three characteristics enables an individual to become a more fully functioning person. In consideration of Rogers' (1990) second and third characteristics of well-being, an enhanced awareness of the present moment is relevant to eudaimonic well-being. The ability to live in the moment has been suggested to be crucial for happiness (Killingsworth and Gilbert, 2010), and is pertinent to the concept of mindfulness, discussed in the following section.

### **2.1.3.3 Mindfulness**

Originally derived from the Buddhist 'eightfold path' to nirvana, *mindfulness* is a way of being that specifically refers to having a lucid awareness of the body and mind in the present moment (Bodhi, 2011; Williams and Kabat-Zinn, 2011). More specifically, Olendzki (2011) noted that mindfulness incorporates 'knowledge about how the mind and body constructs experience and how a person can use this knowledge to attain greater health and happiness' and is, therefore, of particular value to those 'who study human experience and have an interest in augmenting human wellbeing' (p.56).

Being mindful involves focusing on the present and living in that particular moment. This requires individuals to take the time to engage with what Olendzki (2011) refers to as six classes of consciousness. These six classes 'correspond to the five sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) and the mind as sixth, as well to the five sense objects (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches) with thoughts as the sixth' (p.57). If an individual engages with these six classes of consciousness, they can experience a state of mindfulness by way of allowing themselves to feel their bodies and recognise their thoughts.

According to Kabat-Zinn (2005), being mindful and paying attention to the self the present moment can have multiple benefits for the individual as well as the wider society. For example, if an individual is lacking in emotional well-being, they may experience what Gotlib and Hammens (2014) refer to as 'the depression syndrome', and become detached from their genuine selves, which

can have detrimental consequences for their social and physical well-being. Engaging with the act of mindfulness can help such individuals to re-connect with the self and bring their body back into focus via the senses. With this focus, individuals can become more able to identify the source of their being unwell, and this identification can raise their awareness of suitable treatments and future prevention (Kuyen et al., 2015).

The focus on self-awareness that mindfulness promotes reflects components of psychological well-being and Rogers' (1990) third characteristic of well-being (also see Hollis-Walker and Colosimo, 2011). In contrast, the medical approach to alleviate depression adheres to the notion that depression is a mental state that can momentarily be altered with anti-depressant drugs. This is relevant to the hedonic view that being well (and being unwell) is a state of mind rather than a process over time. Yet, depression is a condition that develops over time and, once experienced, is likely to recur (Kuyen et al., 2015). In this way, states of mind (for example, good and bad moods) are experienced as part of a *process* of depression (see Gotlib and Hammen, 2014). Adopting a eudaimonic view of wellness as a way of life, then, would imply that a momentary shift in the chemical balance caused by anti-depressant drugs would not enhance an individual's well-being. Thus, hedonic treatment of un-well-being is not productive in the long term. Rather, methods of treatment that reflect the multiple dimensions of well-being as proposed by the psychological well-being model, the self-determination theory, and the philosophical and existential aspects noted by Aristotle and Rogers (1990), can enhance an individual's life in terms of living and being well. For this reason, Grossman et al. (2004) and Kuyken et al. (2015) report that mindfulness is effective as an alternative treatment to anti-depressants.

The prevalence of conditions such as depression, obesity, and stress has prompted a resurgence of research interest in the relationship between space, place, and health and well-being (Rowles and Bernard, 2013). More specifically, there is a current research focus upon how engaging with places of nature can benefit health and well-being.

## 2.2 Nature, Health and Well-Being Literature

It has long been recognised that nature, human health, and well-being are interrelated. Indeed, an editorial article in *The Lancet* (2009, p.781) stated that ‘human health cannot be separated from the health of our total planetary biodiversity. Human beings do not exist in a biological vacuum’. Rather, Hartig et al. (2014) note that interactions between humans and nature (such as deforestation and extreme weather events) have an impact on human health, and as such, human beings rely on nature for health. In recognition of this, major theories and models have been developed over time, each of which attributes to knowledge of how nature can contribute to human health and well-being, a concern that Ryan and Deci (2001) regard as holding the greatest importance. Table 3 provides an overview of exemplary research relevant to this area of study (also see Maller et al., 2006).

Table 3: How Nature can contribute to Human Health and Well-Being

| <b>Nature-related component that contributes to Health, and Well-Being</b> | <b>Supporting References</b>                                  |
|--|---|
| Air quality  | Carinanos and Casares-Porcel (2011); DellaValle et al. (2012) |
| Physical activity  | Kaczynski and Henderson (2007); McCormack et al. (2010)       |
| Social cohesion  | Sugiyama et al. (2008); Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010)            |
| Stress reduction and recovery  | Parsons (1991); Ulrich, et al. (1991); Home et al. (2012)     |
| Attention Restoration  | Kaplan and Kaplan (1989, 1990); Berman et al. (2008)          |
| Healing therapy  | Smith (1998); Chalquist (2009); Stevens (2010); Liu (2014)    |

Four dominant theories can be drawn upon as a conceptual framework from which to understand relationships between nature, health and well-being (see Heerwagen 2011; Warber et al., 2013). These are the *biophilia hypothesis*, *attention restoration theory*, *stress recovery theory*, and *sense of place*. The

following sections describe each theory and their practical impact in terms of empirical research findings.

### **2.2.1 The Biophilia Hypothesis**

The biophilia hypothesis states that human beings have an innate interest in all that is living (Wilson, 1984). The notion of biophilia is grounded in the assumption that, over thousands of years of evolution, human beings have developed a genetic disposition to have a close relationship with living environments represented by nature. As noted by Bird (2007) and Heerwagen (2011), this affinity incorporates a bi-directional relationship that has enabled human beings, and the world they live in, to survive. Nature, therefore, is considered as a basic need that is essential for the sustainability of all life, as opposed to industrial urban environments that facilitate the technological progression of hyper-realities (Orr, 2004).

More specifically, Kellert (2007) identified nine types of interactions (see below) that human beings have with nature, which are suggested to be essential components of the health and well-being of our ancestors.

- 1) Utilitarian: the material and practical importance of nature
- 2) Dominionistic: the need for mastery and control of nature
- 3) Naturalistic: immersion and direct involvement with nature
- 4) Scientific: knowledge and understanding of nature
- 5) Symbolic: metaphorical and figurative significance of nature
- 6) Aesthetic: physical attraction and beauty of nature
- 7) Humanistic: affection and emotional attachment to nature
- 8) Negativistic: fear of nature
- 9) Moralistic: spiritual and ethical importance of nature.

These nine values are assumed to secure the affinity that individuals feel towards places of nature. Yet, Orr (2004) has argued that due to modernised lifestyles, an affinity for nature has become a choice. Orr's argument adheres to the notion that individuals feel most comfortable and connected to what is

familiar. As such, the places that individuals choose to interact with, and the beneficial impact of this interaction, is, in part, based upon what they are familiar with. Rather than having an affinity with all things living (biophilia), then, this notion refers to an affinity with particular places (topophilia, see Tuan, 1977).

If, as the biophilia hypothesis advocates, every human being has a genetically inscribed affinity with nature, everyone would want to live in close proximity to nature. This is not the case, however. Orr (2004) goes so far as to use the term 'biophobia' (p.186) to describe an aversion to nature, whereby individuals, such as filmmaker Woody Allen, take precautions to avert from contact with nature. According to Orr (2004, p.186):

Allen is known to take extraordinary precautions to limit bodily and mental contact with rural flora and fauna. He does not go in natural lakes, for example, because "there are live things in there." The nature Allen does find comfortable is that of New York City.

Biophobia represents a trend relative to burgeoning advancements in technological entertainment and urban lifestyles. Karsten's (2006) study of urban residential preferences revealed that preference for non-rural places is complex and context-dependent, involving factors such as daily activity patterns, range of facilities, social networks and identity constructions.

Despite the contextual elements involved with an individuals' interest in (and preference for) a particular place, studies that have sought to affirm the biophilia hypothesis often focus primarily upon visual elements. For example, Heerwagen and Orians' (1986) study considered the aesthetic value of nature by analysing the presence of nature in indoor windowless buildings. They reported that participants of the study had a preference for nature due to them using twice as many visual representations of nature (such as photographs) where there was no access to windows. Newell (1997) and White et al. (2010) also support the notion that individuals have a visual preference for natural environments. Areas of land near water are of particular value in this sense (Depledge et al., 2011).

The biophilia hypothesis and the aforementioned studies provide support for the argument that nature is important to human beings, and that interaction with nature can be beneficial. What is neglected, however, is a focus on what

nature can do for individuals. Two dominant theories that focus on the *whats* of human-nature interaction are concerned with the capacity to focus attention (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995), and the reduction of and recovery from stress (Ulrich et al., 1991), as described in the following sections respectively.

### 2.2.2 Attention Restoration Theory

The attention restoration theory (ART) is concerned with the role of nature in human effectiveness, insofar as how aesthetic features of nature can restore the capacity to focus attention (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). Central to this theory is the notion that focusing attention on activities that are important, but not desirable, utilises voluntary or *direct* attention. The cognitive processes associated with direct attention require psycho-physiological effort and energy (Kaplan, 1995). Over time, therefore, maintaining direct attention can become difficult, resulting in tiredness, decreased productivity and increased stress. Kaplan (1995) describes the activity of viewing nature as one that does not require direct attention, due to natural scenes consisting of fascinating features that are 'intrinsically compelling' (p.172). As such, viewing nature utilises involuntary or *indirect* attention, which does not require effort.

The ART is based on the premise that direct attention can be restored whilst indirect attention is being utilised. In this way, viewing nature can replenish energy, lessen the likelihood of stress, and increase productivity. Kaplan (1995) considers nature to be restorative due to four components, as follows: *being away* – nature provides a contrast to normality and a sense of 'getting away from it all'; *extent* – nature provides a sense of magnitude that can create escapism; *compatibility* – nature holds resonance, in that individuals often feel at ease functioning in natural environments, compared to more civilised environments; and *fascination* – features of nature are wonderful and intriguing, capturing attention in a way that enables opportunity for thought yet is not conceptually consuming. *Fascination* represents the dominant component of attention restoration, whilst the other three properties act to enhance or sustain fascination.

ART is a popular concept often cited in literature, yet supporting empirical evidence for this theory is unclear. Studies based upon this theory have examined whether interspersing direct attention (such as cognitive tasks, physical activity) with indirect attention (interactions with nature) can help individuals to remain cognitively and physically attentive for extended periods of time. For example, Herzog et al. (2003) found that nature settings generally followed the predictions of ART but with some variation. White et al. (2010) also reported an association between scenes of nature and higher perceived restoration, especially when water was present (also see Depledge and Bird, 2009; Depledge et al., 2011).

Criticisms of ART highlight a crucial area that is overlooked by this theory, namely the context and complexity of lived experiences, feelings, states of mind and consequent reactions to environments. Individual, social and cultural experiences are seldom taken into account when assessing ART and human-nature interaction. This represents a crucial lacuna in the field, considering studies such as O'Shea and Walsh's (2013) that have identified choice, personal autonomy, connectedness to people, meaningful activities, and social and physical environments as key for well-being (also see Hernandez and Blazer, 2006; Marmot and Wilkinson, 2006; Wallace and Shapiro, 2006; Bell et al., 2014). Ohly et al.'s (2013) systematic review has begun to address this lacuna, by seeking to understand if attention restoration values of nature vary for different groups of individuals, prior demands on individuals (such as stressful jobs), different places of nature, different types of exposure or engagement, and individuals with different opinions about nature.

### **2.2.3 Stress Recovery Theory**

The stress recovery theory (SRT) posits that stressful states, such as those initiated by tiredness, pressure, and anxiety can be relieved by exposure to nature (Kaplan, 1995). Similar to the biophilia hypothesis, SRT is based upon evolutionary explanations insofar as individuals adapt (and therefore survive) by responding to and demonstrating a preference for places of nature (Ulrich, 1983). More specifically, according to SRT, exposure to places of nature initiates the parasympathetic nervous system in response to stress, resulting in



relaxation. This, in turn, reduces the sympathetic nervous system responses to stress, such as elevated blood pressure, heart rate, serum cortisol and urine adrenaline (Warber et al., 2013). Nature, therefore, can benefit health in a physiological way, as implied by Ulrich (1984) who found that patients' recovery from surgery was positively influenced by views of nature through windows.

As with ART, SRT assumes that restorative benefits can be gained from passive exposure to nature, which acts to frame nature as a resource that can be used to enhance health and well-being. This somewhat disconnected approach presents nature as an object to 'be used any way the favoured among the present generation see fit' (Orr, 2004, p.131). This view overlooks the diversity of individual circumstances over time (for example, see Joye and De Block, 2011, Joye and Van den Berg, 2011) and the complexity of meanings attached to places of nature, such as memories that can affect how individuals identify with and form attachments to place (see 2.1.4.4).

Perhaps the neglect of subjective dimensions of experience in relation to the aforementioned theories echoes the difficulty of measuring subjectivity, thus reflecting a limitation of the methods currently drawn upon to research ART and SRT to understand human-nature interaction. Indeed, Clayton and Opatow (2003) have argued that environmental research usually seeks to answer questions of cause and effect in relation to human-nature interaction. Consequently, when drawing conclusions about why people engage with places of nature, the focus tends to be on objective perceptions and measurements on a generalised scale.

#### **2.2.4 Space, Place, and Identity**

Human-nature relationships can be understood from a more subjective viewpoint by considering how individuals interact with *space*, the consequent construction of a *sense of place*, and how places become relevant to self *identity*.

## Space

Rowles and Bernard (2013, p.xii) define *spaces* as 'locations within a Cartesian world that, in and of themselves, have no meaning'. Space, therefore, represents something non-relatable and unidentifiable. From a slightly different perspective, however, Soja (1996) argues that space is most commonly interpreted by way of mathematical and physical measure (also see Löw, 2008). Similar to Lefèbvre's (1991) notion of *representations of space*, measurable spaces provide order for practice, that is, everyday actions reinforced by routines that adhere to spatial structures (see Massey, 1995). Representational space can be informative of the ways in which individuals function within space, and therefore relates type of space to behaviour.

Two types of representational space discussed within human-nature literature are that of *green space* and *blue space*. Whilst various definitions exist, green spaces generally refer to environments which involve green aspects of nature such as gardens, fields and parks. Blue space incorporates environments where water is a visible feature, such as riverside locations, coasts, and beaches. Engagement with both green and blue space can potentially enhance various aspects of well-being (for example, see Pretty et al., 2005a, 2005b; Hillsdon et al., 2006; Depledge and Bird, 2009; White et al., 2010).

The majority of studies concerned with green space consist of large-scale observational studies undertaken in epidemiology. Such studies have identified associations between green space and self-reported health (de Vries et al., 2003), perceived general health (Maas et al., 2006; van den Berg et al., 2010), the prevalence of cardiovascular and respiratory disease (Richardson and Mitchell, 2010) and overall life satisfaction (White et al., 2013a). Smaller scale studies such as Guite et al. (2006) and Sugiyama et al. (2008) have reported associations between green space and physical and mental health. Bell et al. (2014) noted that in order to add to the current knowledge of how interactions with green space benefit individual well-being, qualitative health studies need to consider what natural environments mean to individuals, the implications this can have for well-being, and the role of life circumstances within this.

## Place

When considering what a space can mean to an individual, the subject changes from *space* to *place*. This is because, as stated by Rowles and Bernard (2013), places are:

‘those same locations transformed through processes of habitation and life experience into sites of great meaning...converting something that is neutral and often alien into something that is a meaningful expression of our identity’ (p.9)

In this sense, a place can be defined as a meaningful, relational space (Adams et al., 2001). According to Warber et al. (2013), place-related theory focuses upon how individuals form attachments to particular places based upon their lived experiences. Cattell et al.’s (2008) research on how individuals engage with public places led them to argue that the relationality that creates (and is created by) places is central to the role of place in promoting well-being. For example, places that encourage social interaction have been found to initiate physical activity outdoors and facilitate physical and psychological benefits of exercise (see Takano et al., 2002; Guite et al., 2006; Thompson, 2007; Cattell et al., 2008; Maas et al., 2009; Mitchell and Popham, 2008; Thompson Coon et al., 2011).

When attachments are formed, a *sense of place* is constructed, which involves how an individual feels whilst in a particular place and the level and type of interaction they have with that place. Strong attachments (or detachments) can, therefore, contribute to the extent to which an individual identifies with a particular place, that is, their place identity.

## Place and Identity

Throughout academic literature (and the remainder of this thesis) *identity* is widely used interchangeably with the term *self*. Acquiring a sense of self incorporates characteristics of an individual’s personality, as well as their active engagement and involvement in society (Adams, 2007). Identity is, therefore, a complex term that relates to both the personal and the social.

What kind of person an individual deems themselves to be is associated with what activities they engage with, and the areas of life that they involve themselves in via a process of choice. That is not to say that a freedom of choice underpins identity. Rather, an individual's identity depends somewhat upon choice as a product of self (agency), and choice as a product of society (structure). What individuals choose to believe in, their image, and the ways in which they act represent expressions of self. Clothing, hairstyles, religion, and habits are all examples of self-expression. As individuals experience the world, their ideas about who they are and what they want to associate with may change. Identity construction, therefore, is considered to be a fluid and emergent process that takes place over time (Jenkins, 1996). As such, Giddens (1991) regards the self as a constructed, reflexive project. Importantly, material, physical, and social constraints can limit the amount of agency individuals have with regard to how they are able to express their identity. Nevertheless, an individual's identity, as indicated by symbols and representations, communicates the similarities and differences they have with others and has implications for their everyday interactions.

The role of *place* within an individual's identity consists of dimensions of the self 'that develop in relation to the physical environment by means of a pattern of beliefs, preferences, and transforms through lived experience' (Manzo and Perkins, 2006, p.337). Following the aforementioned notion that places are relational spaces that are meaningful, Butler's (1988) theory of performativity highlights the cultural elements of social interactions in particular places, and how place can influence how identities are acted out or performed. Whilst some places carry cultural restrictions that can limit self-expression, other places can be liberating, allowing genuine selves to be realised. As such, certain behaviours are accepted in some places more than others.

For example, if a place communicates a sense of authority and power, such as the work place (see Massey, 1995), it can represent a structure that encourages self-surveillance. Within these places, individuals may feel conscious of, and restricted in, their self-expression (see Foucault, 1979). Integral to this is how *bodies* relate to place.

Little (2013, p.47) illustrates the role of bodies in places of self-surveillance with the example of health spas. The centrality of the body and physical health within health spas positions the body as constantly subject to a disciplinary reflection of the self and gaze of the other. As such, power relations held by particular places can act to raise an embodied sense of self-awareness.

The embodied sense of self-awareness initiated by power relations inherent in places of *nature* can bring a sense of humility to the fore, illustrated by the development of ecocentrism over centuries (Radkau, 2008). As humility is an integral part of a virtuous life (Grenberg, 2005) and, therefore, a characteristic of eudaimonic well-being, being in places of nature have the potential to enhance well-being. How an individual feels in a particular place, though, is more than just the recognition of a position amongst power relations.

Bodies are central to how the world is experienced by way of the senses. Indeed, Rowles (1983) noted that attachments to place are formed through experiencing that place. Crucially, Phillips (2013) noted that 'it is the quality and intensity of experience that matters more than simply its duration' (p.206), and that:

'how people experience place is diverse and not necessarily only through the visual but through other perceptions – smell, taste, touch, and hearing...How we imbue such places with meaning will depend on how we perceive our environment and make sense of space and place' (p.219)

As such, Thang and Kaplan (2013) consider familiarity to be salient when establishing a sense of place. The consequent construction of memories, and associations with cultural, social and historical meanings, allow individuals to identify with place. This is exemplified by Rowles and Bernard's (2013, p.10) comment below:

'The room in our residence where a relative died, the site of an accident on the way to work, the coffee shop where we first met our spouse, all, over time, become part of the rich landscape of place that forms the backdrop to the tapestry of our life and a constant source of reinforcement of identity'

Theoretically, this supports the premise that in order to understand place identity, the multi-dimensionality of lived experience must be considered with regards to *place integration* (see Hanlon et al., 2014).

The notion of place identity implies that *where* we are is relevant to *who* we are. Arguably, then, where we are can alter how we feel about ourselves and our well-being (as advocated by ART and SRT). This has been discussed in relation to human interaction with nature by Stevens (2010), under the terms *embodiment* and *embedment*.

### **Embodiment and Embedment**

The term embodiment refers to the generation of thoughts and feelings as a sensory process facilitated by the body. This process is deemed natural, when natural refers to systems that are self-organising. Stevens (2010) argued that the body is:

a complex physical system interacting through a variety of... processes...that extend far beyond the skin-defined boundaries, affecting other organisms around us...everything we can know of the world comes through physical interactions (p.266).

In this way, human beings have a bi-directional relationship with nature which they cannot detach from; nature is a part of human identity. This concept is known as embedment.

Drawing upon what has been said in section 2.1.4 so far, human beings have a connection with places of nature because, theoretically, places of nature are living environments deemed fascinating or beautiful, and as such, they effortlessly attract attention and are physiologically relaxing as a result. As this connection develops by way of embedment, the human-nature boundaries merge into one alongside a sense of kinship. Consequently, *place* becomes a salient aspect of an individual's sense of self (Stevens, 2010).

Following the notion that space, place and identity are concepts intertwined, Stets and Biga (2003) argue that in order to understand individual's attitudes towards places of nature, we need to also understand their attitudes towards themselves.

This is exemplified by de Medeiros et al. (2013), who focused upon the *environmental positioning* of older adults. In the context of the study of the meaning of place, Medeiros et al. considered place to be a co-construction formed between the researched and the researcher. Constructions are made by way of interpreting and associating meanings in relation to subjective personal experiences and socio-cultural context. The position from which interpretations are made has direct implications for what is regarded as important and irrelevant, the reasons why certain things are of value, and the extent to which an individual can relate to certain situations.

Upon these conceptual foundations, Medeiros et al. (2013) examined how older adults attributed meaning to environmental features in the context of their home environment. They found that place identity varied depending upon the environmental position of the individual, and concluded that a sense of belonging and agency in relation to place was perceived as crucial for well-being of older adults, when considered in context.

The burgeoning interest in how place relates to health and well-being is reflected by the production of a substantial body of literature within the discipline of health geography. One specific area focused upon by literature concerned with how place can potentially contribute to the maintenance of health and well-being is that of *therapeutic landscapes*.

### **2.2.5 Therapeutic Landscapes**

Gesler's (1993) definition of a *landscape* is similar to the definition of *place* in section 2.2.4, in that it represents a meaningful environment that is dependent upon human interpretation. A landscape becomes *therapeutic* when 'the physical and built environments, social conditions and human perceptions combine to produce an atmosphere which is conducive to healing' (Gesler, 1996, p.96). Such an atmosphere has been noted in places with religious and spiritual significance (Foley, 2011), as well as spas (Gesler, 1998; Little, 2013)

and the wilderness (Fredrickson and Anderson 1999; also see Krakauer, 2007; Strayed, 2012).

Within health care, the idea of therapeutic landscapes as 'conducive to healing' has translated into the design of hospitals so that they include views of natural environments, and the practical use of natural environments to aid recovery from being unwell. For example, Caddick, Smith and Phoenix's (2015) research reported that blue space can act as a therapeutic landscape by way of the activity of surfing, which provided respite to military veterans experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The role of *activity* in relation to the potential of therapeutic landscapes was central to Pitt's (2014) study. Pitt focused upon the activity of gardening and, therefore, the therapeutic potential of green space. A key finding was that the activity of gardening was beneficial as it enabled physical and mental detraction from stress (also see Conradson, 2005). Similarly, Wright and Wadsworth (2014) note that (gardening) activity in green space can be beneficial to the ageing process in later life, as it can facilitate personal contentment, artistic expression, community awareness, and inter-generational networks.

Focusing more on blue space, Völker and Kistemann (2013) examined the therapeutic potential of aquatic areas in urban environments. They found that blue space was 'health-enhancing' insofar as it enabled restoration from everyday stresses, supporting Ulrich's (1983) stress recovery theory. Crucially, they concluded that place needs to be considered as a constructed space situated in a socio-cultural context in order to further understand the concept of therapeutic landscapes. Similarly, Coleman and Kearns' (2015) study of older adults' relationship to blue space illustrated that the therapeutic experience of place depended upon how place was interpreted by those experiencing it. In addition, they highlighted how meanings attached to place change over time, noting that:

the therapeutic experience of bluespaces varies not only according to the relational dynamic between self and place, but also that the valences of therapeutic experience of places change with age and ability to engage with place itself (p.215)



Whilst implying the usefulness of longitudinal research in this field, Coleman and Kearns (2015) did not utilise a longitudinal research design. Their study did, however, utilise pluralistic, participant-driven methods that gave participants access to agency within the research process. This was significant in relation to the credibility of their findings, in particular the argument that aspects of therapeutic landscapes were symbolically significant for emotional well-being and aiding a process of self-development in later life.

The majority of studies that consider experiences of therapeutic landscapes in later life focus upon green space and urban places, with findings particularly centred on social benefits (see Riordan and Williams, 1988; Wells, 1997; Ousset et al., 1998; Milligan et al. 2004; Predny and Relf, 2004; Larson and Hockeberry, 2006; Gardner, 2011, Detweiler et al., 2012; Rowles and Bernard, 2013). As such, there remains a need to further this field of research with studies that consider diversity in relation to places of nature and their potential benefits to health and well-being in later life.

The notion that nature itself is a therapeutic landscape gives way to the idea that healing places can be found in the everyday, rather than in exclusive, historically sacred places (see Gesler, 1996, 1998). This has been considered by Cattell et al. (2008) who discuss the *therapeutic potential* of places that are interacted with on a frequent, everyday level for the maintenance of health and well-being. As a conceptual development, this provides a more inclusive view of how place relates to health, and as such, is more relevant for long-term health promotion (Bell et al., 2015). Furthermore, research has seldom considered the potential of therapeutic landscapes for health and well-being as individuals experience significant changes over time, known as *life course transitions*, in later life.

To date, research has seldom considered interactions with nature throughout the life course, inclusive of transitions experienced over time. As such, there are a lack of *longitudinal* studies that consider the therapeutic potential of places of nature for health and well-being (for an exception see White et al., 2013b), especially with regards to later life. This is despite literature that denotes that engaging with the natural environment throughout the life course has been a Government priority over the last decade (for example, see Newton, 2007; Defra, 2010), and remains in current policy. For

example, Natural England's (2015) policy states that knowledge needs to be developed regarding how and why older adults visit the natural environment, and 'what impact current changes to the population structure (in particular ageing) will have on patterns of use and support for the natural environment' (p.2). Similarly, the mission statement of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (2014), aims 'to discover how the environment affects people in order to promote healthier lives'.

The plan devised by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences to meet this aim is structured around pathological, biomedical research, and focuses on wide scale issues such as environmental threats to health. Yet, the consideration of lived experiences and what the natural environment means to people are omitted from the plan. This is significant because, as argued by Clayton and Opatow (2003), how individuals relate to and identify with the environments can have a significant influence on their identity, health, and well-being.

Given that, by 2050, there will potentially be 58 million more people over the age of 65 (Fésüs et al., 2008), the long-term health of the ageing population is of timely concern. Indeed, Suzman et al. (2014, p.484) note that 'the ageing of populations is poised to become the next global public health challenge'. Research that promotes the long-term health of older adults, such as studies that examine the therapeutic potential of places of nature in later life, are necessarily salient. As such, how and why older adults interact with nature and the potential benefits of this represents a lacuna to be filled with further research (Sykes and Pillemer, 2009).

How individuals experience the ageing process is relevant to health and well-being on a worldwide scale, as well as being relevant to everyday experiences. Due to the diversity and complexity bound in what *ageing* can mean, the following section is dedicated to the conceptual multidimensionality of the ageing process. This is followed by a more specific discussion of literature regarding older adults' interactions with space and place in section 2.4.

## 2.3 Ageing

In a basic sense, ageing can be defined as ‘the process of growing old’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2015a). Whilst the ageing process is something that every living person has in common, what it means to grow old can vary significantly. Indeed, ageing can be understood from a multitude of perspectives, such as biological, sociological, psychological, narrative, and environmental perspectives. Each perspective provides a different way of seeing what ageing involves. As such, there is not one ‘true’ story of ageing (Kenyon and Randall, 1998). Rather, ageing can be known as a multifaceted subject that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

Definitions of ageing are dependent on perspective, and, as such, there is not one definition of ageing. Rather, developments within disciplines and in everyday life mean that definitions of ageing are continually changing (Jones and Higgs, 2010) ‘with scholars and older people alike questioning and challenging the constructions of ‘growing old’ (Grenier, 2012, p.3). This makes it difficult, and not entirely useful, to present information regarding one specific definition of what ageing *is*; it is instead more relevant to discuss various ways in which ageing can be understood. Arguably, ‘any research on ag[e]ing is based on specific understandings of time’ (Bomhoff, 2007, p.113). Time, as a fundamental physical quantity, is measured by way of planetary movements, producing the dominant way in which it is understood: clock time. Ageing, as living in time, becomes a matter of chronology.

### 2.3.1 Chronological Ageing

Chronological time represents the most popular understanding of time in relation to the process of ageing. Critically, Baars (2012) perceived chronological ageing to be a ‘popular but over-rated – and bureaucratic – approach to classifying people’ (p.1), which contains little meaning other than generalised, standardised expectations of ageing. For example, an individual’s chronological age is currently relied upon to determine when they can get married, drive a car, consume particular products such as alcohol, watch

particular films, and retire. Gullette (2004) argued that when chronological age is used to create boundaries and divisions, it 'is being used as race and gender have been, to construct unarguable and unbridgeable relations of difference; to create misinformation, subjective inferiority, disrespect, and animosity between groups' (p.32).

Understanding ageing as chronological time can be useful, however, as it provides a structure to the life course. This structure can guide individuals in terms of how to behave at particular stages of their lives. In this way, chronological time is often used to define individuals, to organise and regulate acceptable ways of living, and to shape expectations of the ageing process (Baars, 2012). As a result, a monolithic and homogenous perception of ageing is reinforced by chronological ageing, and meanings of ageing become institutionalised (Baars, 2007).

Whilst the institutionalisation of ageing can be beneficial for age-related legislation and policy, it assumes a static representation of ageing that (re)produces ageing norms. Jones and Higgs (2010) argue, however, that *normal ageing* 'takes on a multiplicity of forms; from an extended working life to a retirement of leisure; from grand-parenting to late parenting; from sheltered housing to beach-front retirement communities' (p.1515). Consequently, ageing is 'in the midst of rapid deinstitutionalisation' (George, 2011, p.249). As such, individuals' experiences of ageing throughout the life course do not necessarily follow the chronologically-based structure provided by institutionalised ageing.

As Bomhoff (2007) noted, ageing as chronological time has been attributed great value 'at the expense of other more subjective time perspectives that can be measured through the recording of personal experiences and narrative articulations' (p.113). Defining individuals by way of their chronological age has decreasing relevance in a deinstitutionalised society. For this reason, it is necessary for research on ageing to consider subjective time perspectives, and acknowledge the complexity of ageing as more than just a chronological measurement of days, months, and years.

As Ricoeur (1990) has argued, time is 'by way of the mind as well as by way of the world' (p.14). As such, a subjective dimension of time exists (Bruner, 1991; Shipp and Fried, 2014), associated with phrases such as 'long hours', 'quality time', and 'wasted time'. Ageing, as living in time, becomes a subjective matter of perception. Kaufman and Elder (2002) examined subjective time

perspectives by considering how individuals self-identified with their chronological age. They did so by enquiring as to how old participants *felt* (their subjective age) in relation to how old they *were* (their chronological age). According to Kaufman and Elder, an individual's subjective age, is a feeling related to social and cultural meanings of ageing. They found that chronological age does not necessarily correlate with subjective age, rather, the distance between the two is likely to widen the older an individual becomes (see Tulle-Winton, 1999).

This finding was explained by the notion that the ageing body can become a threat to a person's sense of worth (both on a personal and social level) if they subjectively associate themselves with an age that is less than their chronological age. For example, an individual may associate their sense of self with norms attached to being young and say 'I feel like I'm still 20 years old', when in chronological reality they are older than 20. When 'the ageing body implies an ageing self' (Katz, 2010, p.359), chronological age can represent a threat to the self. As such, in a youth-orientated society, asking an individual for their chronological age can be considered as impolite or rude (see Waters, 2012).

This is particularly relevant to the aesthetic and physical aspects of ageing bodies. In an attempt to deflate the threat of physical ageing to self, technologies have become available, such as cosmetic surgery, in the hypermodernity of advanced Western societies (Varga, 2005). This form of body manipulation can alter the appearance of the body in an attempt to maintain characteristics of youth and defy physical signs of older age. Indeed, Slevin (2010, p.1009) noted that many people 'express satisfaction with their lives...as old people, but issues of appearance are a different matter; they do not see the old body in a positive light'.

Similarly, Hubley and Russell (2009) and Öberg and Tornstam (2001) explored how older people experienced *feel age*, *ideal age* and *look age*. Findings implied that images of youthfulness were internalised, which led to body anxiety in older age. Reasons for this can be said to be rooted in the 'consumer culture equation of youth = beauty = health' (Featherstone, 1991, p.179). This equation can be inflicted onto bodies socially through a sense of self-surveillance (see Foucault, 1979).

Further explanation can be provided by Featherstone and Hepworth's (1989) theory of 'the mask of ageing'. For them, when we look in the mirror and see an ageing body that is not a reflection of the self, that is, when our chronological age does not resonate with how old we *feel*, the body is said to 'mask' our self-perception of ageing. The 'mask of ageing' theory therefore highlights a distinction between the body and self-identity. The mask reflects an individual's (embodied) location within socio-cultural understandings of ageing.

### 2.3.2 Socio-Cultural Ageing

Studies concerned with socio-cultural ageing often adopt the view that ageing is 'the overall trajectory across the entire period of one's life' (Grenier, 2012, p.8), known as a *life course* perspective (see Elder, 1975, 2003). Putney et al. (2005) discussed the life course perspective as the most widely cited theoretical framework within gerontology. Sometimes referred to as a theory, it represents processes at both macro (social) and micro (individual) levels and is consequently described as dynamic rather than static (Dannefer, 2003). There have been recent calls within social gerontology, that is, the 'social perspective and analysis of ageing' (Phillips et al., 2010, p.1), for future research to incorporate a life course perspective. This is because, as Bengtson et al. (2005) stated, gerontological research from a life course perspective explores: 'the dynamic, contextual, and processual nature of aging...how aging is related to and shaped by social contexts, cultural meanings, and social structural location...age-related transitions and life trajectories' (p.14).

According to Twigg (2004), 'aging is a social and cultural category, rooted in the wider structures of society and taking its meanings from them. It cannot simply be read off from biology' (p.70). Research that considers ageing as a social and cultural category is often concerned with the meanings that are applied to the concept of ageing, and the consequences this can have for everyday life. For example, Jolanki, Jylhä and Hervonen (2000) understood ageing as a socially constructed concept, whereby 'age is constructed in social

interaction and bound up with a certain culture and a certain historical era' (p.360). With a specific focus upon 'old age', their research considered how meanings of ageing constructed in talk related to either necessity or choice. To illustrate this, they asked older adults what ageing meant to them. Some focused upon the inevitable decline associated with age (necessity), whereas others told more progressive and varied stories of ageing, where definitions of ageing depended upon the individual (choice). Life story interviews were used as methods of inquiry so that participants could tell their stories of ageing in their own words, therefore allowing the subjectivities of ageing (that are overlooked by objective research methods) to be seen. The analysis applied to the interviews, however, reflected a limitation of this study. The analytical focus was purely on *what* was being said about ageing. Yet, as Fivush (2004) noted, the holes in the sculpture define the shape - what is left *un-said* can be just as significant to the whole story as what *is* said.

A more inclusive analysis of interviews was performed by Feldman et al. (2004) by way of *narrative analysis*. This analytical approach is useful for exploring alternative ways to understand ageing, as,

'through the events the narrative includes, excludes, and emphasizes, the storyteller not only illustrates his or her version...but also provides an interpretation or evaluative commentary on the subject...the sequencing of narrative form...reveals what is significant to people' (p.148).

As such, it is beneficial to understand ageing as a multi-dimensional and diverse concept. Sharing experiences and stories of ageing can provide alternative views of ageing. From this, more informed interpretations can be made regarding perceptions of how ageing is experienced by others and ourselves (Schank and Berman, 2002). Despite this, the diversity of ageing is often overlooked within gerontology (Nelson and Dannefer, 1992).

Recognising the multi-dimensionality of ageing broadens the notion of 'normal' ageing, thus helping to communicate the heterogeneity of ageing and consequently illuminate the lack of basis for stereotypes. Indeed, Jones and Higgs (2010) have suggested that the traditional meaning of 'normal' ageing could be eradicated if we instead advocate older adults' rights to choose from a range of alternative ways to age. In this sense, diversity would become the norm. However, this increases the sense of responsibility placed upon older

adults who are expected to deal with this choice and decide how they will/should age. Whether certain ways of ageing are an obligation (by way of social prescription) or choice (individual responsibility), remains a topic of debate. The theories of ageing discussed in the following section contribute to this debate in different ways.

### **2.3.3 Theories of Ageing**

#### **2.3.3.1 Disengagement**

One of the major gerontological theories, developed over fifty years ago, posits that older adults socially and psychologically withdraw from activities as they age, forming a divide between the young and productive, and the old and disengaged (Maddox, 1964). The *disengagement theory*, according to Cumming and Henry (1961), views a diminishing contribution to society as an inevitable obligation of the ageing process.

Traditionally defined by chronological age (60 years for women, 65 years for men), retirement marks a significant turning point relative to the disengagement theory because it is commonly represented as a detachment of older adults from socio-economic participation. That is to say, at 65 years, older adults were seen to no longer be able to contribute to the economy and the development of society. Indeed, Phillipson (1998) has argued that the fear of a losing a sense of belonging, and becoming disengaged from society, is particularly prominent at age 60 or 65. In a practical sense, then, disengagement theory had most impact for older adults who were retired. As such, later life is depicted by the disengagement theory as a slippery slope framed by loss, upon which older adults disassociate from social groups, activities and, ultimately, life (Powell, 2001; Gilleard and Higgs, 2007).

The majority of the research methods used to evidence the disengagement theory are based upon large-scale, cross-sectional surveys that produce generalised results. Hochschild (1975, p.560) noted that 'Cumming



and Henry did not collect much data on the actor's own conception of aging, and when they did, they did not accord that evidence importance'. A major criticism of this theory, therefore, is that the empirical support overlooked older adults' *individual* experiences of society and their engagement with it.

Consequently, the heterogeneity of ageing in later life is disregarded by this theory. This is problematic because social, cultural and personal contexts impact upon how we age, and as such, they need to be appreciated to gain any comprehensive understanding of what it means to be an older adult in everyday life (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1998; Tulle, 2008; Carr and Komp, 2011; Grenier, 2012).

### **Bio-Medicalisation of Ageing**

The disengagement theory of ageing complements the field of biological and medical (bio-medical) science, which represents a powerfully influential site of knowledge which associates the ageing process with problematic deterioration. Indeed, 'through its medicalisation the ageing body has primarily been seen as a malfunctioning body, a body in decline' (Tulle, 2008, p.2). Phoenix and Smith's (2011, p.628) comments further illustrate this point:

'biologically driven knowledge has consistently spoken "truths" regarding the decline element of adult aging, which has led us to understand the aging body as an ill body that needs to be "treated." Accordingly, much research originating in this framework has set out to address the apparent need for a "cure" by investigating methods that might "fix" the "problem" and "postpone" aging'.

The subject of 'growing old' is consequently associated with objective medical terms where the focus is upon reduced functional capacity and the onset of ailments (Powell and Owen, 2005; also see Deeks and Phillips, 2009, Barrick et al., 2010, Chance et al., 2011). Indeed, the focus of bio-gerontology as an area of academic study is on 'efforts to understand, prevent, cure or minimize age-related impairments' (Rattan, 2000).

Bio-medical science plays a particularly dominant role in relation to how the ageing process is understood in Western society (Higgs and Jones, 2009). Bio-gerontological research is valuable for advancing certain aspects of knowledge within the broad field of ageing; however, the perspective of ageing

that it promotes can be problematic. Whilst the biological reality of the body cannot be denied, a bio-medical view of ageing can shape expectations of ageing with harmful and oppressive implications. Indeed, bio-medical research can reinforce the message that ageing is an inescapable, inevitable problem that is embodied and worsens over time, positing human beings as 'prisoners of biology' (Kontos, 1999, p.680). This message creates a narrative that can promote a fear of ageing, idealise youth, and subordinate old age (see Faircloth, 2003; Gullette, 2004; Twigg, 2007; Schau et al., 2009). Consequently, individuals can become increasingly dissatisfied with their ageing bodies if this narrative is all they live by, reflected by a perceived inability to partake in physical and cognitive activity in later life (McGowan and Smith, 2010; Phoenix, 2011).

### **2.3.3.2 Ageing as Decline**

Within Western society, ageing is commonly understood as an inevitable process of biological decline (Gullette, 1997). For understandings to be common, a general consensus needs to be constructed at a socio-cultural level, producing dominant storyline or *meta-narrative* to guide how sense is made of everyday life (see chapter 3, section 3.2).

As such, a storyline exists that posits ageing as decline, accompanied by a pessimistic tone with reference to deterioration, loss and isolation (Phoenix and Smith, 2011). Tulle (2008) emphasised how the story of ageing-as-decline is manifested in the body. This is exemplified by Trethewey's (2001) study of older women, who reported their experiences of ageing as 'struggles with weight gain, graying hair, menopause' and 'aging faces' (p.198).

The meta-narrative of ageing as decline is powerful as it can affect individuals of all ages, such as those in their twenties (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006) as well as those in their nineties (Hurd, 1999). Vertinsky (2002) emphasised that the narrative of decline is particularly relevant to women, yet, Trethewey (2001) and Gullette (1997) have argued that it can inform stories of ageing for both females and males throughout the majority of adult life.

To counter the master narrative of decline, we need to embody and craft resistant age identities (Gullette, 1997). Phoenix and Smith (2011) employed a narrative analysis to examine how older adults resisted the meta-narrative of decline by way of alternative stories of ageing. Specifically, in-depth life story interviews were conducted with older adults who took part in physical activity (13 natural bodybuilders aged between 50 and 73 years). Their study revealed that all of these older adults challenged stereotypical expectations of ageing by telling stories that countered notions of natural ageing and decline. Individually, their alternative stories highlighted multiple dimensions of ageing.

For example, one participant maintained his physical ability and fitness in later life to keep himself 'looking good' and to distance himself from others of the same age that looked 'past it' (p. 632), thus highlighting the *aesthetic dimension* of ageing. Other participants believed that physical activity in later helped them to avoid being a 'burden on society' (p.634), reflecting the *social dimension* of ageing, as well as a way to 'fight off' (p. 634) the ageing process, illuminating the *biological* (and problematic) *dimension* of ageing.

For the older adults in Phoenix and Smith's (2011) study, the story of 'natural' ageing that is traditionally framed by the meta-narrative of decline contradicted the stories by which they knew themselves (for example, as physically active older adults). This can also be said of the participants in Dionigi and O'Flynn's (2007) study, in which older adults recognised that natural ageing narratives relayed the message that Western society imposes a bias towards healthy, youthful, functional bodies which, in turn, acts to depreciate older bodies. As illustrated in these particular studies, physical activity in later life can act as a resistance to this message.

Another way to resist the narrative of decline is exemplified in Trethewey's (2001) study of middle-aged women's stories of entrepreneurialism and identity. Trethewey found that, from the angle of entrepreneurialism, which posits individuals as responsible for their own ageing process, some women articulated midlife as 'a time of increasing freedom, prioritizing, increasing acceptance of self and others, decreasing concerns about the opinions of others, and reaping the benefits of experience' (p.209). This alternative and progressive view of midlife was, however, intertwined with the meta-narrative of decline, particularly in relation to bodily appearance with some women engaging in a process of 'passing' as an 'age-appropriate' woman (p.204). Rather than

dichotomise progressive ageing and ageing as decline, then, participants in Trethewey's study were able to 'embody and narrate a both-and story' (p.216), representing 'messy identities' (p.218). This highlights the multiplicity of narratives, that is to say, more than one narrative can inform an individual's story at any given time (Sparkes, 2005).

Indeed, it is useful to consider the concept of ageing on multiple levels. Trethewey's (2001) findings illustrate that in order to counter the meta-narrative of decline, the socio-cultural meanings attributed to lifestyles, such as working lifestyles, need to be taken into consideration. Meanings of ageing exist on multiple dimensions; in Western society ageing is primarily related to loss and challenges, yet ageing is also associated with increased subjective well-being. This creates a paradox of ageing (Kunzmann et al., 2000), which is salient for understanding the dynamics of well-being as it questions the hedonic perspective, in that subjective well-being is not necessarily equal to wellness.

Whilst a bio-medical perspective of ageing as decline may be prominent in Western society, it does not represent the 'truth' of ageing, as there is not one true story of ageing (Grigsby, 1996). Importantly, Milligan et al. (2005) argue that 'ageing is not reducible to processes of physical decline as if these occurred in a bodily vacuum sealed off from the social contexts in which people live' (p.51). As such, Holstein and Minkler (2003) have noted that 'biomedicine, as important as it is, does not see the luminous moments that offer promise despite uncertainty and the proximity of death' (p.795). Acknowledging alternative, subjective perspectives of ageing that do 'see the luminous moments' can add more pieces to the ageing puzzle, creating a more detailed understanding of the ageing process.

### **2.3.3.3 Continuity**

A critical development of the perception of ageing associated with disengagement theory and decline is illustrated by Atchley's (1989) *continuity theory of ageing*. Specifically, Atchley (1989) acknowledged individual responsibility in relation to ageing and theorised that a satisfactory way to age is to maintain internal and external continuity. That is to say, older adults sustain

a sense of self-identity and continue to contribute to society by taking part in social, physical and cognitive activities or behaviours that have been practiced beneficially throughout the life course. Whilst continuity is the focal point, the changes that individuals experience over time are also appreciated. As such, a strength of this theory is that it acknowledges subjectivities of time, illustrated by Atchley's (1989) description of ageing as:

'a basic structure which persists over time, but it allows for a variety of changes to occur within the context provided by the basic structure...With the introduction of the concept of time, ideas such as direction, sequence, character development, and story line enter into the concept of continuity as it is applied to the evolution of a human being' (p.183).

In contrast to disengagement theory, continuity theory assumes older adults will remain active in later life, based on the assumption that the 'maintenance of activity is critical to high levels of life satisfaction in old age' (Putnam, 2002, p.800). From this angle, ageing is seen from a processional view of living, wherein individuals live with a sense of familiarity akin to living continually in the presence of their future selves (see Laslett, 1996).

Adopting a processional view of ageing reflects a strength of the continuity theory, as the familiarity acquired by individuals over the life course is perceived to aid their ability to adapt to changes with little disruption (Diggs, 2008). This contrasts with the disengagement theory in that it promotes the ability of older adults based upon past experience, producing a progressive picture of ageing.

The assumption that individuals are able to remain socially and physically active as they age, however, is also a limitation of continuity theory (Diggs, 2008). For example, assumed physical ability overlooks disabling conditions, and assumed social ability overlooks individuals who do not have an established social network. In addition, having internal continuity assumes that an individual has had high levels of self-awareness throughout their life and has been congruent throughout. The impact of events that can disrupt an individual's sense of self, such as life course transitions, significant loss, and trauma, are overlooked by the continuity theory. External continuity also relies upon an assumed capability which can be limited by financial, relational and physical restraints. Promoting continuity can also devalue progressive changes

that can benefit health, such as developments within the field of medicine. The theory of gerotranscendence, as well as Third Age theories, appreciate both continuities and changes throughout the life course, and therefore extend the continuity theory of ageing.

#### **2.3.3.4 Gerotranscendence**

Gerotranscendence is a psychosocial theory of ageing developed by Tornstam (1989) to mark a paradigmatic shift from positivist to phenomenological gerontology. Whether this shift is achieved by this theory is debatable (see Jönson and Magnusson, 2001). What is more certain is that this theory focuses upon how the changes older adults experience can lead to 'a redefinition of self...as well as a new understanding of fundamental existential issues' (Wadensten, 2007, p.290). More specifically, Tornstam described gerotranscendence as the experience of ontological changes on three dimensions: *cosmic*, *self*, and *social*. A novel aspect of this theory is that qualities of ageing, such as relaxation, play, creativity and wisdom are focused upon within the three dimensions (Jönson and Magnusson, 2001).

The *cosmic dimension* involves the development of the relationship between individuals and larger contexts that extend beyond the self. According to Tornstam (1989), this dimension consists of a decrease in interest in material things, an increasing feeling of a cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a re-definition of the perception of lived time, and a decrease in the fear of death.

The *self dimension* focuses upon how an individual's identity changes in later life by way of a decrease in self-centredness and a shift from egoism to altruism. Within this process, new or altered meanings are attributed to past experiences, and the value attributed to body image lessens.

The *social dimension* is concerned with relationships with others, and the meanings attached to these relationships. Within this dimension of

gerotranscendence, individuals experience an increased feeling of affinity with past and future generations and a decrease in interest in superfluous social interaction.

Theoretically, gerotranscendence lends itself to approaches that investigate 'narratives, life stories, life reviews and reminiscence of old people' (Jönson and Magnusson, 2001, pp.320-321). It is unique in its consideration of how an individuals' spiritual development can contribute to well-being in later life, as an alternative to activity focused theories of ageing, discussed in the following two sections.

### **2.3.3.5 Activity**

In contrast to disengagement theory, and in relation to continuity theory, Havighurst's (1961) *activity theory of ageing* advocates that, in order to age well, older adults should participate in activities in later life. This theory attributes value to the incorporation of new social, physical and cognitive activities in the lives of older adults in order to maintain well-being. Similar to continuity theory, the responsibility remains upon the individual for how they age.

Limitations of activity theory include the lack of attention given to aspects of living that can influence the amount of satisfaction that is gained from taking part in activities, such as status and intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. As older people are not a homogeneous group (Milligan et al., 2005; Grenier, 2012), these aspects could make the difference between an individual's participation in solitary activities compared to group activities, and the satisfaction they get from both. A more encompassing theory of ageing that appreciates both continuity and change, and focuses on (productive) activity in later life is the theory of the Third Age.

### 2.3.3.6 The Third Age

Third Age theories and appreciate continuity throughout the life course *as well* as changes that may occur as part of a developmental later life.

The Third Age is a current yet contested theory of ageing that focuses upon 'active engagement during later life' (Moen, 2011, p.3). Again, in contrast to the disengagement theory, and in harmony with both the continuity and activity theory, Laslett (1989) proposed that the Third Age constructs a more contemporary landscape of later life that highlights the changing meanings of ageing. Founded in America, Third Age theory is known throughout Europe as a key development in the transformation of later life in contemporary society (see Carr and Komp, 2011).

The theory of the Third Age was made popular by Laslett (1987, 1989). He discussed the Third Age as part of the life course, which he depicted in four eras, as follows: 'First comes an era of dependence, socialization, immaturity and education; second an era of independence, maturity and responsibility, of earning and of saving; *third an era of personal fulfilment*; and fourth an era of final dependence, decrepitude and death' (Laslett, 1989, p.4, emphasis added). Importantly, Laslett noted that these four eras are not defined by chronological age, and they can potentially overlap with one another. Due to this flexibility, 'the myriad conventional time clocks and calendars organizing days, weeks, years, careers, and lives do *not* yet include the Third Age as an institutionalized life stage' (Moen, 2011, p.16, emphasis in original).

Various authors have explored the Third Age (for example, Mein et al., 1998, Blane et al., 2004, Gilleard et al., 2005, Mein et al., 2005, Wainwright and Williams, 2005, Gilleard and Higgs, 2007, Jones et al., 2009, Gilleard and Higgs, 2010, Jones and Higgs, 2010, Leontowitsch et al., 2010, Carr and Komp, 2011). However, Rowles and Manning (2011) note that little is known about how people experience the Third Age in their everyday lives, and highlight the need for more research that explores the diversity of the Third Age in depth.

Gilleard and Higgs (2007) contrast two approaches of the third age. One approach, adopted by Laslett (1989), defines Third Agers in relation to those known as the 'baby boomers'. Gilleard and Higgs (2007) refer to this as a



cohort based approach, as it is based purely on age groups. They are critical of the cohort based approach because it 'fails to provide a convincing analysis of the cultural and social transformation of later life' (Gilleard and Higgs, 2007, p.15). Logically, they go on to contrast this with a 'generational' approach, which focuses on mass consumer culture and generational *lifestyle*. In contrast to the 'baby boomers' having access to 'an era of personal fulfilment' because of their birth cohort, the significance instead lies with older adults' 'generational habitus', making the third age seem 'a phenomenon of personal achievement as much as social transformation' (Gilleard et al., 2005, p.14). The difference between the two approaches is illuminated by asking, is it 'the times of their lives or the life of their times'? (Gilleard and Higgs, 2007, p.19).

Either way, the assumption that everyone can access the Third Age is carried through, representing a common criticism of Third Age theory. This is despite the Third Age being predominantly associated with characteristics of middle-class lifestyles, such as enhanced levels of education, wealth and health (Polyakov, 2009). It is, therefore, unrealistic to think that everyone has access to Third Age narratives, which can be regarded as exclusive rather than inclusive. Furthering this criticism, Holstein (2011, p.234) notes that age-related prejudices can be transferred to people 'who do not live up to expectations regarding' the Third Age, such as 'social contributions and vigorous good health'. This, in turn, puts even more responsibility on the individual. As such, Higgs and Jones (2009, p.64) note that 'Later life and the identities within it need to be seen as constructed around agency' if we are to encourage active, healthy lifestyles.

In the era of the Third Age, stories of active, healthy older adults are becoming more common. Tulle (2008, p.2) noted that research in Western society often emphasises the need for physically active, healthy bodies by focusing on the benefits of physical activity. In turn, policies on ageing are increasingly advocating health and well-being in later life by promoting social engagement and encouraging physical activity in later life. Such policies include: Active Ageing Policy Framework (WHO, 2002), the Physical Activity Policy Statement (Help The Aged, 2008), and 'Building a Society for all Ages' (HM Government, 2009). These government policies set out to enhance well-being, increase participation in physical activity to improve health throughout the

life course. Indeed, participation in activities is inherent in models of health and well-being in later life.

Furthermore, the House of Lords Scientific Committee promoted the message that 'inactivity and isolation accelerate physical and psychological declines, creating a negative spiral towards premature, preventable ill health and dependency' (Help The Aged, 2008a, p.2). As such, the 'fastest growing research area in life course sociology and related fields...concerns the trajectories of health outcomes' (Mayer, 2009, p.21). Indeed, Jones and Higgs (2010, p.1516) note that 'the will to health... becomes the normative 'ought' of ageing'. Help the Aged's (2008b, p.2) policy statement forefronts the health of older adults and focuses particularly on physical activity 'as a way to maintain good health and independence in later life'.

Being *productive* has been discussed by Morrow-Howell et al. (2001) as central to living longer and healthier lives, and includes activities such as volunteering, caregiving, and skill building. In the era of the Third Age, the concept of retirement as a period of life dedicated to leisure may well change to a period of life focused upon productivity, with older adults contributing to society by way of volunteering, caregiving and educating (Sherrandan, 2015). Retirement may even give way to older workers continuing employment. Whilst theories of ageing provide ways in which to judge how people might age 'successfully' or 'well', studies that exemplify how this is practiced by older adults themselves are lacking.

### **2.3.3.7 Successful Ageing / Ageing Well**

Amongst terms such as active, productive, positive, and optimal ageing, 'successful' ageing and 'ageing well' are well known rubrics within gerontological literature (Fernández-Ballesteros et al., 2010). The notion of successful ageing has been developed over the last three decades (see Maddox, 1987; Baltes and Carstensen, 1996; Bowling and Dieppe, 2005).

Kahn and Rowe (1998, p.39) identified three major characteristics of successful ageing as:

- Avoiding disease
- Maintenance of cognitive and physical function
- Sustained engagement with life

Bowling and Dieppe (2005) have since provided a more detailed response as to how successful ageing is defined. They note that the characteristics of successful ageing vary between disciplines, but the main constituents of successful ageing can be listed under the rubrics of *theoretical definitions* and *additional lay definitions*, as follows (taken from Bowling and Dieppe, 2005, p.1549):

*Theoretical definitions:*

- Life expectancy
- Life satisfaction and wellbeing (includes happiness and contentment)
- Mental and psychological health, cognitive function
- Personal growth, learning new things
- Physical health and functioning, independent functioning
- Psychological characteristics and resources, including perceived autonomy, control, independence, adaptability, coping, self-esteem, positive outlook, goals, sense of self
- Social, community, leisure activities, integration and participation
- Social networks, support, participation, activity

*Additional lay definitions:*

- Accomplishments
- Enjoyment of diet
- Financial security
- Neighbourhood
- Physical appearance

- Productivity and contribution to life
- Sense of humour
- Sense of purpose
- Spirituality

The characteristics presented by Bowling and Dieppe (2005) incorporate a multi-dimensional view of ageing by considering both objective (such as finance) and subjective (such as self-esteem) aspects. Significantly, perceived autonomy, control, and adaptability are noted here, complementing the environmental model of health and Huber et al.'s (2011) alternative definition of health as 'the ability to adapt and self manage in the face of social, physical, and emotional challenges'. As such, Huber et al.'s (2011) re-definition of health is seemingly applicable to the characteristics of successful ageing.

However optimistic the notion of successful ageing may sound, its value is a feature of gerontological debates (for example, see Scheidt et al., 1999; Baltes and Smith, 2003; Harris, 2008; Dillaway and Byrnes, 2009). Successful ageing is often determined by a lack of illness and high levels of participation in activities. Yet, as critically noted by Holstein and Minkler (2003, p.791),

How would it seem to describe a particular kind of childhood or midlife—as such—as successful because the person rarely became ill and participated in many social events? Why then is it desirable to describe this kind of aging (or more accurately, old age) as successful?

As such, the use of the term successful ageing can promote an oversimplification of what it means to grow old. This point is significant with regards to research that attempts to measure successful ageing, as the outcome dependent upon the individual researcher and their preferences for what encapsulates success (Bowling and Dieppe, 2005). In addition, the term creates a dualism in that it implies that there is an 'unsuccessful' way to age, therefore dichotomising older adults as successes or failures, with failure associated with inability and being unproductive (Dillaway and Byrnes, 2009). This places responsibility upon individuals to age successfully, as noted by Trethewey's (2001) study of older women, from which she argued that 'It is up to the individual woman to age successfully, largely through consumption (of

“age-defying” skin products, hair color treatments, cosmetic surgeries, and self-help literature’ (p.187). To some degree, the alternative phrase of ‘ageing well’ avoids this dichotomy and, therefore, incorporates more diversity.

For Ng et al. (2011), ‘ageing well’ requires an engagement with life as well as being able to avoid illness and loss of functional ability, thus resonating with the previously mentioned WHO definition of health. Theoretically, then, health and well-being are central features within any discussion of what it means to age well (Robotham, 2011). As with health and well-being, ageing well is multi-dimensional concept that is defined on the basis of physical, cognitive, emotional and social domains (Villar, 2012). More specifically, McKay (2003) described the concept of ageing well as ‘a mix of aspects relating to physical appearance, inner happiness, success and good relationships’ (p.179), with loving relationships surfacing as a particularly prominent finding.

The theories of ageing play a part in how the ageing process is conceptualised, and, consequently, they contribute to what it means to age successfully or well. The disengagement theory are a reminder of the inevitable physiological decline experienced in later life. The continuity theory highlights that later life is not a separate stage of life that we enter, rather, it is a later part of a continuous life course, within which we can continue to enjoy life as we did before. The activity theory illuminates that whilst later life may well necessitate a different lifestyle, this difference can create opportunities to learn and explore new activities, and new selves. A commonality of each theory is that activities are central to the notion of ageing well. Indeed, the importance of physical and social activity in later life has been well documented (for example, see Ho et al., 2007; O'Donovan and Shave, 2007; Wamp, 2009; Cedervall and Aberg, 2010; Keogh et al., 2010).

It is timely for research to take the subjective lived experiences of older adults into account, in order to develop theories of ageing and enhance models of ageing well. Doing so has the potential to uncover other nuanced ways of living that contribute to older adults’ subjective health and well-being in later life and meaningful ways to age, thus countering the meta-narrative of decline. One approach well-suited to research of this kind is that of narrative inquiry, explained by Phoenix and Smith’s (2011) comment below:

insights into the other side of the aging story—the progressive, growth focused thicker narratives...remain largely unexamined. Generating awareness of these alternative stories of aging—amplifying stories that would not otherwise be heard—is important if more meaningful ways of aging are to be imagined and lived (p.630)

Older adult's interactions with space and place represents an overlooked area of environmental health research, particularly in relation to older adults' interactions with places of *nature*. More specifically, environmental psychology has overlooked *why* older adults engage with places of nature and what *meanings* are attached to these environments in later life. This area also represents a lacuna in the field of environmental gerontology. Further research in this area can therefore advance both fields. The following section discusses what has been said about older adults, space, and place, and implications of health and well-being. In doing so, what has been left un-said, to date, is also highlighted.

## 2.4 Older Adults, Space and Place

We are on the threshold of a new era in our knowledge and understanding of older people's relationship to place, an era in which environmental gerontology has the potential to use deepening understanding of the manner in which older adults relate to place...helping us make progress along a path toward greater...awareness of the lived experience of older adults, which has the potential to improve quality of life for us all

(Rowles and Bernard, 2013, pp.19-20)

Early research that associates the environment with older adults dates back to Kleemeier (1959), who discussed the ageing process as a modifier of the relations between the person and the environment. In particular, he gave attention to the visual, auditory, and thermal environments. In line with Kleemeier's (1959) work, Lawton and Nahemow (1973) have considered the 'ecology of ageing', specifically, how the design of physical environments relate to the competencies of older people.

Wahl et al. (2012) note that whilst 'there is a consensus within gerontological literature that both personal and environmental resources

contribute to ag[e]ing well' (p.306), the role of the environment in relation to 'ageing well' has not been clearly defined in recent handbooks of ageing (for example, Laws, 1995; Bengtson et al., 2009; Milligan, 2009). Consequently, there remains a need for more research in this area.

When it comes to understanding how older adults experience physical environments and the implications this can have for their health and well-being, environmental gerontology is fundamental. Wahl et al. (2012) considered relationships between the environment and the notion of ageing well from a psychological stance. They were particularly concerned with the 'objective physical environment' that 'lies outside the skin' and is 'measurable' (p. 307). Following a systematic review of studies of environments, older adults and health, Van Cauwenberg et al. (2011) advocate the need for research that considers different contexts, utilise longitudinal designs, and are conducted in countries other than the USA (as they consider the majority of research in this area to be based in the USA). This is supported by Bartlam et al. (2013), who argue that 'Exploring the relationship between individuals and the environment(s) in which they live requires a range of perspectives and approaches in order to begin to capture its complex, multi dimensional nature' (p.254).

The topic of environmental embedment has been considered within areas of physical culture (such as Anna Halprin's work on dance, see Ross, 2007), yet it has not been focused upon to any great extent in the field of gerontology. The studies that do consider older people and their relationship to place and space, such as O'Shea and Walsh (2013), have identified choice as salient for well-being, in addition to other dimensions, and have tended to focus upon structural and functional space (mobility, architecture, design), and public/private places (home, communities, ownership, attachments, and social aspects) (see Rowles and Bernard, 2013, for a collection of current studies).

Emotional dimensions of well-being have been largely neglected within the overall body of gerontological research (see Bytheway, 1995), as well as environmental health research (see Bell et al., 2014). Nature, however, has the potential to provide a place in which an individual's own emotional needs can be met. For example, Milligan et al. (2005) explored how places 'can be actively constructed in ways that facilitate an outward expression of older people's inner

emotional selves' (p.51). They found that older women in particular can take on an altruistic role in later life, which is typically feminine and encourages selflessness in a way that requires sacrifice for the sake of others, limiting outlets through which they can express their own needs. Helgeson (1994) argued that both agency *and* altruism are essential for optimal well-being, and that detrimental effects occur when one exists in the absence of the other. For example, by focusing upon altruistic attitudes in later life, Kahana et al. (2013) suggested that expressions of empathy and the dedication of time to others contributes to a social and enduring identity.

Gardening activities seemed to allow for greater self-expression and sense of agency, opposed to adhering to socially prescribed roles, thus fostering a sense of eudaimonic well-being. Gardens have been a focal point within literature concerned with environments and well-being in later life, with key themes inclusive of: lifelong learning, renewal of emotional, spiritual and physical well-being, achievement, satisfaction and aesthetic pleasure, social networking, stress reduction, connections with memories, and contributions to place identity (see Bhatti, 2006; Carman, 2011; Wang and Glicksman, 2013; Wang and MacMillan, 2013; Wright and Wadsworth, 2014).

Beyond gardening, the role of nature in maintaining a sense of eudaimonic well-being in later life has yet to be explored in depth. This is surprising given the potential benefits of nature highlighted in section 2.2. Furthermore, there is additional need to advance understanding of what can benefit older adults' health and well-being given the increasing longevity of older populations (Fésüs et al., 2008; ONS, 2012) and longer working lives of older adults due to the recent eradication of compulsory retirement (Age UK, 2011). Indeed, over the next 25 years, the number of people that are of chronological retirement age or older in the UK will increase by 50% (Academy of Social Sciences, 2010) resulting in a longer retirement period, meaning there will be more people living as retired older adults in the future. The health and well-being of the burgeoning retired population has been discussed in policy circles as a challenge (Fésüs et al., 2008). How health and well-being can be maintained during retirement has, therefore, become a particular research interest of late. This is significant because, as previously mentioned, subjective well-being is likely to increase with age due to increased opportunities for



agency and choice, which can, for example, accompany retired lifestyles. Increasing longevity has changed the concept of retirement (legislatively, at the least) which can impact upon how health and well-being are experienced in later life.

## 2.5 Life Course Transitions

The majority of studies concerned with human interaction with nature have a static focus. That is to say, environmental (human) health studies tend to focus upon one moment in time, rather than various moments *over time*. As such, the role of *changes over time* have been overlooked in their capacity to impact upon relationships between nature, health and well-being. Key life course changes are known as transitions. There is a current lack of knowledge regarding how nature is used during transitions, as well as how the accumulation of experiences with nature over the life course might shape how and why people relate to and engage with nature when life course transitions occur. This is surprising given the aforementioned potential of places of nature to enhance well-being and reduce stress that can be initiated by change.

A focus upon *later life* transitions is necessary in order to retrospectively explore individuals' experiences with nature over the life course *as well as* in the context of an on-going transition. As such, this section focuses upon what is meant by transitions and how they can impact upon health and well-being. The section afterward then focuses upon retirement as a key later life transition.

According to Lee, Simpson and Frogatt (2012, p.1), transitions are a process that occurs 'as a result of change in a person's life, lasting until adaptation occurs, and resulting in fundamental changes to an individual's role or identity'. As such, transitions can happen when a life course trajectory changes direction, such as when we depart from people, places and spaces (Grenier, 2012). These significant moments happen throughout the life course, and can influence our intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences, which, in turn, can have a significant impact on how we give meaning to and make sense of ageing and well-being.

When we experience transitions, it can be 'both challenging and stimulating, something to be anticipated: but it can also bring about feelings of

strangeness, insecurity or disappointment' (Hedges, 2005, p.16). Not knowing what to do can lead to a need for 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991) or 'recognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Giddens (1990) defined ontological security as the confidence that people have in the maintenance of their self-identity and their social and material environments. Similarly, people act to seek recognition, such as a name or a place, and it is this recognition that informs their identity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In Giddens' view, people act in accordance with their need for familiarity, safety and (ontological) security. When changes occur during the life course, our identity and ontological security can be disrupted, which can result in ontological *insecurity*, or *misrecognition* of self-identity (Howie et al., 2004; Gullette, 2004; Tulle, 2008). Pathways through transitions, therefore, can involve complex identity developments. The level of complexity, and the pathway itself, are dependent on context, that is, socio-cultural expectations and individual circumstances.

Van Genneep's (1960 [1909]) model of transition was one of the earliest models that depicted a general pathway of movement from one 'status' to another. His model comprised of three phases: separation, transition/liminality, and incorporation.

The first phase of *separation* is described as a withdrawal from current status and preparation to another. In this phase, individuals are aware of the changes that are yet to occur as they experience the initial changes brought on by transitions. Detachment is evident here. Accordingly, Turner (1969, p.94) reiterates that the separation phase 'comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual...from an earlier fixed point in the social structure'. Inevitably, to perform such behaviour requires knowledge of what is to come. As such, the separation phase is framed by expectations.

The second phase of van Genneep's model of transition is that of transition itself, where 'the individual exists outside society but is planning to re-enter it' (Grenier, 2012, p.41). By developing this model, Turner (1969) expanded the 'transition phase' from an outside state, to an in-between state known as *liminality*. The term 'liminality' refers to ambiguity or disorientation: a middle ground (Turner, 1969). Within this state, negotiations are had, and neither former nor future selves are realised. Indeed, 'liminality can represent a time of reflection, meaning and change on a social and cultural level...a space in which redefinition can occur – a space with potential for reinvention' (Grenier,

2012, p.196). The inclusion of liminality as part of the transitional implies that transitions do not represent a clear movement from one fixed point to another. Rather, transitions are complex movements with blurred boundaries.

In the third phase of *incorporation*, individuals supposedly reach a stable state where new selves have been successfully incorporated into daily life (van Genneep, 1960 [1909]). As such, this phase marks the completion of the transitional process, whereupon adaptation has occurred.

Based upon a life course perspective, the theoretical underpinning of van Genneep's model is useful to draw upon in relation to how older adults experience transitions, especially in relation to the notion of liminality (see Hockey and James, 2003). It is important to note, however, that the third phase of the model implies that there is a movement out of liminality and into incorporation, concluding the transition. Yet, this is not always the case, as illustrated by Donaldson et al. (2010) who argued that phases of transitions are not fixed, rather, they can occur at various and multiple occasions during the process. Yet, whether transitions should be regarded as fixed moments or a procession of constructed accounts is still debated within literature (see Dobouloy, 2004, Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2007, Ibarra et al., 2010).

According to Grenier (2012, p.20), a life course perspective has become a prominent way to understand change over time, in context. The consideration of context provides a greater base upon which taken-for-granted assumptions can be questioned in relation to the continuity and change inherent in lived experiences of transitions. As such, adopting a life course perspective of ageing can move beyond predictive and stereotypical stage based ageing and towards understanding the lived experiences in recognition of socio-culturally constructed meanings that contribute to the diverse and subjective interpretations made by individuals.

Life course studies with longitudinal research designs are particularly well suited to studying transitions as processes that occur over time. This is explained by Luhmann et al. (2012), who argue that:

'adaptation can only be studied adequately in longitudinal studies. These studies should consist of multiple measurements that take place not only after the event, but, if possible, also before the event to account for potential anticipatory effects' (p.26).

Bell et al. (2014) argue that longitudinal research designs would be particularly valuable in analysing the influence of different life transitions and interactions with place on the perceived benefits that places of nature have for well-being over time. They also note that mixed method studies concerned with varying levels and types of interaction with nature would enhance the current level of understanding of the role of shifting identities in shaping the significance of places of nature for well-being.

As noted by Bell et al. (2014) interactions with green space can benefit older people as they experience certain aspects of transitions. For example, gardening and allotment activities can provide structure and routine, establish social networks, and encourage new social identities. Activities related to communal gardening are considered particularly useful due to their accessibility (Aspinall et al., 2010). To date, studies concerned with nature, health, and well-being have not focused on *retirement* as a life course transition in relation to how lived experiences of retirement relate to (or do not relate to) interactions with nature, and the potential implications for health and well-being during this time.

### 2.5.1 Retirement

Retirement is a concept that amalgamates *life course transitions* with *later life experiences*, thus representing an apt focal point for further research in the field of nature, health, and well-being. According to Harris (2007, p.182), 'retirement is a relatively recent development made possible by the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, which changed many countries from agricultural to industrial societies'. Traditionally, retirement has been defined as the departure from paid employment and is considered to be a major life course transition (Grenier, 2012). Indeed, Gilleard and Higgs (2000, p.23) note that:

'in the past, retirement has been an enforced choice connected to a decline of productivity or the need to remove older cohorts from the workforce. The circumstances in which retirement occurs now are more fluid and much more connected to lifestyle'.

As such, different types of retirement exist, such as early retirement, phased retirement, bridge retirement, late retirement, multiple retirements, or individuals may not retire from work at all. Experiences of retirement vary depending upon personal circumstances and socio-cultural context (Grenier, 2012). This has led scholars such as Schlossberg (2004) to define retirement as a complex process that can involve *multiple* transitions over time.

Setterson Jr (2006, p.83) discussed how there have been significant changes in perceptions of retirement over the past century in relation to the 'education-work-leisure tripartition'. The emergent Western society has meant that the boundaries between education, work and leisure have shifted. Accordingly, the tripartition has become increasingly flexible and there is no longer such a divide between the three areas. For example, with reference to education, the compulsory school leaving age ranged from 12-15 years in the 1900s, changed to 16 years in 1997 (National Curriculum, 2010) and is likely to increase to 18 years in the future (BBC News, 2006). The extension of schooling years potentially makes an individual's working life shorter, in combination with a growing trend in early retirement (Banks et al., 2008). Alternatively, increasing life expectancy could result in longer periods of retirement.

Indeed, retirement marks a key life course change which is itself a dynamic concept that can be understood as a continuous developmental process (Nuttman-Shwartz, 2004, 2007; Donaldson et al., 2010). There is a current need to re-address the constitution of models of ageing and retirement, so that they incorporate context and the diversity of lived experiences, thus providing more relatable and better informed expectations regarding health and well-being in later life. Jonsson et al. (1997) advocated that a narrative approach can be useful in examining how people experience retirement, and that further research should examine how narratives evolve throughout a life course and throughout retirement.

As a specific life course transition, retirement often initiates major changes in the lives of those experiencing it (Wang et al., 2011). These changes can be relevant to finance (Baker et al., 1993; Department for Work and Pensions, 2009; Morrell and Tennant, 2010), health and ageing (Mein et

al., 1998; Gilleard and Higgs 2009; Pit et al., 2009; Stamm et al., 2010), physical activity (Mein et al., 2005; Henkens et al., 2008; Touvier et al., 2010), identity, and well-being (Kim and Moen, 2001a, 2002; Nuttman-Shwartz, 2004, 2007; Thompson et al., 2011).

According to Wang et al. (2011, p.204), two key questions for future research that is concerned with retirement are '(a) What is the general impact of retirement on the individual, and (b) What are the factors that influence retirement adjustment quality? In response to these questions, the majority of research in this area focuses on pre-retirement planning, transitional decision making and post-retirement adjustment (for example, see Baker et al., 1993; Sethi-Iyengar et al., 2004; National Statistics Online, 2006; Hill, 2008; Hinrichs, 2008; Morrin et al., 2008; Van Solinge and Henkens, 2008; Adams and Rau, 2011; Feldman and Beehr, 2011; Muellerleile, 2011).

Few studies in this area consider continuities and changes within lived experiences of retirement in-depth and over time. An exception is Nuttman-Schwartz's (2004, 2007) study of Israeli men going through the retirement process. Nuttman-Schwartz (2004, 2007) analysed participants' autobiographical narratives to examine relationships between their pre- and post-retirement experiences. By taking the cultural situation into account, the male participants' comments could be made in context. For example, Nuttman-Schwartz (2004, p.232) noted that, 'like most Israeli men in their generation, experienced hard lives'. This led to the interpretation that occupational roles within Israel are gendered, which was significant for the participants' experiences of retirement, as reflected in an interviewee's response: "A man is born to work, and when he retires he feels like he's finished" (Nuttman-Schwartz, 2004, p.232). This illustrates that a narrative approach can expose meanings that people attribute to occupational experiences, such as those associated with gender, which contributes a contextual understanding of the construction of identities during retirement. Howie et al. (2004) also took a narrative approach to their research with the aim of gaining insight into how a sense of self is associated with occupational engagement in later life. They found four major themes relevant to this: relational practices, changing self-awareness, enduring qualities, and reflective processes to the formation of a sense of self.

As noted, retirement can significantly impact upon older adults' identity, health and well-being, and, as such, has been argued to be the most important transition in later life (Wang et al., 2011). Retirement is therefore apt as a focal point from which to investigate older adults' identities, health and well-being as part of the broader, enduring question within gerontology: what does it mean to grow old? There is a need for research to consider personal circumstances in terms of past, present and anticipated future experiences situated in context, in order to investigate this in depth. Yet, gerontological studies seldom consider older adults' lived experiences of the retirement process in-depth, and the implications their experiences have for their identities, health, and well-being over time.

Indeed, Grenier (2012) has noted that models of retirement are currently based on generalised ideals and tend to neglect personal context and lived experiences. As such, life course models of retirement can create expectations that are over-simplified. When applied to the complexity of lived experience, these models can lead to retirement being a confusing, unsettling, and conflicting experience. Arguably, if these models incorporated the complexity of lived experience, expectations would become more relevant to everyday life. In order to inform life course models in such a way, it is necessary for research to examine how varied retirement transitions are experienced and situated in both social and personal contexts.

Theoretical developments have steered perceptions of retirement away from a time of disengagement and declining health and towards a time of activity, social participation and health. Whilst expectations of retirement are still related to the meta-narrative of decline, counter-narratives are challenging its dominance. This is associated with models of successful ageing and ageing well (see section 2.3), whereby the absence of disease and illness, maintaining physical and cognitive function to a high capacity and sustained engagement with life are deemed essential for health and well-being in later life. In addition, Quine et al. (2007) have argued that having a sense of *choice* is central to understanding how individuals form expectations and adjust to retirement, and advocate that a sense of choice can significantly contribute to enhanced health and well-being during the retirement process.

The retirement process has become laden with choice (Burr et al., 2002). In accordance with the various types of retirement that exist, there is no longer set definition of a 'normal' retirement, having previously been defined by the standardised retirement age, (axed in 2011, see Age UK, 2011, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011). Removing this chronological boundary implies the addition of a new sense of freedom associated with retirement. Despite this, the responsibility to decide whether to work or retire has never been placed more heavily on individual's shoulders. Retirement, then, is possibly more daunting than ever before, and has more opportunity to reduce an individual's sense of satisfaction and well-being. Bogan and Davies (2011) strongly advocate this viewpoint in their book entitled: '*Avoid Retirement and Stay Alive: Why You Should Never Retire, and how not to*'. Their view is relatively controversial, though, as others strive to advertise retirement as a refreshingly liberating time, wherein the burgeoning choice and opportunity are portrayed as positive for individual's experiences of later life (Van Solinge and Henkens, 2008, Wang et al., 2011, Van den Bogaard et al., 2011).

According to Moen (2011, p.18, emphasis in original) retired older adults that remain healthy and active have '*maximum autonomy* in structuring their days, their social networks and their identities'. Indeed, Schwartz (2008, p.3) stated that 'Choice is essential to autonomy, which is absolutely fundamental to well-being. Healthy people want and need to direct their own lives'. Too much choice, however, can create a paradox that can be detrimental for well-being.

Schwartz (2008) has argued that the material affluence of Western society creates an abundance of choice and a sense of freedom, which, in turn, increases the amount of responsibility placed upon individuals to make choices. The expectations that these individuals have, as a result of the choices they can make, also increases.

The recent dynamics of retirement have led to a greater sense of responsibility being placed on the individual in relation to choice regarding retirement decisions, such as when to retire, and what to do when retired. On the one hand, this choice can provide access to a more satisfying retirement experience, yet on the other hand, it can also create greater expectations. That is to say, the more an individual expects from their retirement, the less likely it is that these expectations will be met, and the less satisfied the individual will be -



what Schwartz (2008) referred to as an escalation of expectations. When interpreting why some individuals go back to work (where choice is more limited and expectations more refined) after being retired for a period of time, choice can play a significant role and, therefore, needs to be considered by research in this area.

A lack of focus can represent a lack of purpose. As such, the benefits of 'maximum autonomy' for well-being during retirement are questionable. Ranzijn et al.'s (2004) theory of 'bounded choices' illustrates how choice can be maximised, albeit within limits. The bounded choices theory depicts that there are a range of individual and societal constraints that limit individual choice in relation to lifestyle. Drawing upon this theory, Quine et al. (2007) found that societal constraints can elicit active responses from some individuals, and profoundly negatively responses from others (also see Burr et al., 2002). They concluded that whilst the role of choice is complex, enabling retirees to retain a sense of choice and control is salient for well-being during retirement transitions.

## **2.6 Summary and Research Questions**

Interacting with nature has the potential to benefit individuals in terms of advancing their sense of self, health, and well-being. The concepts of *health* and *well-being* can be defined in multiple ways. The environmental model has been considered valuable because it defines good health as the ability to adapt to various challenges encountered throughout the life course. When viewed from a eudaimonic angle, the concept of well-being is inclusive of this definition of health as a feature of well-being itself. As such, eudaimonic well-being can be used as an umbrella term that incorporates health. Physical activity as a feature of health, however, can be considered separately in its ability to benefit individuals physiologically. Places of nature have been found to encourage physical activity, which can act to counter sedentary lifestyles. Interacting with nature has also been suggested to relieve stress, as a component of poor physiological health.

What has been overlooked by research, to date, is what places of nature can mean to older people, and how this can impact upon their self-identity, physical activity, and well-being. This represents a burgeoning area of importance due to increasing longevity, and the dynamics of ageing well in relation to the resultant older working population. More specifically, both environmental gerontology and environmental psychology have seldom examined the concepts of embodiment and embedment in relation to experiences of nature, thus representing an opportunity for further, in-depth research (see Stevens, 2010). This is especially so in relation to longitudinal, in-depth studies from a life course perspective.

Transitions throughout the life course also represent a lacuna in research concerned with human interaction with nature. Amalgamating the subject areas of *older adults' experiences of nature with transitions* illuminates an apt focus for environmental health research: *experiences of retirement*. Both an increase in sedentary living and stress are associated with the late life transition of retirement. Yet, research has overlooked the potential role of nature during older adults' experiences of the retirement process.

There is, therefore, a need for research that is concerned with how older adults have experienced nature throughout their lives, how they experience the retirement transition as a process of change and continuity, and whether nature plays a role during this process in the context of past, present, and anticipated future experiences. Such research would provide opportunity for exploring older adults' interactions with nature, and the implications for self-identity, physical activity and well-being.

Against this backdrop, my research aimed to bring new insights to the field of environmental gerontology by examining *how* and *why* older adults interacted with places of nature, what implications this had for their experiences of retirement over time, and the potential relationships between nature, self-identities, levels of physical activity, and sense of well-being. Accordingly, the following research questions are central to and inform my research:

- 3) What role (if any) do interactions with nature play in older adults' experiences of the retirement process?
- 4) What can nature offer in aspirations to 'age well'?

The remainder of this thesis details how I undertook independent research to respond to these research questions, and how the findings of my research contribute to knowledge. In the next chapter, I outline the methods employed to respond to these research questions, and justify my decisions for employing such methods.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods**

The purpose of this chapter is to communicate *what* I did in order to respond to these research questions (the methods), and *why* I employed such methods of inquiry (the methodology). Pluralistic methods were employed in this project, the main research method being in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Selecting appropriate research methods depends upon two key elements:

- 1) The *research questions*, as the selected methods act as a structure to the response(s) made to these questions, and
- 2) The *epistemological and ontological assumptions of the researcher*, as these provide explanation for the researcher's beliefs regarding knowledge (epistemology) and reality (ontology), thus justifying what they deem to be the best way to respond to the research questions.

Having previously stated my research questions, I begin this chapter with a discussion of my epistemological and ontological assumptions, or my *positionality*, and follow this with a description of the methods I employed to generate and analyse data. I finish this chapter by proposing several criteria as tools with which to judge my research, and outline how I have represented the data in the chapters that follow.

#### **3.1 Positionality of the Researcher**

*'the construction of any work always bears the mark of  
the person who created it'*

(Riessman, 1993, p.v)

Positionality refers to where we place ourselves in relation to our subjective personal experiences within a socio-cultural context (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). From this position, an understanding is constructed of what is regarded as important/unimportant, relevant/irrelevant, and a sense-making process

which justifies actions is engaged with. Communicating my own positionality provides readers with knowledge of the reasons behind the various decisions I made throughout the research process, placing them in a more informed position from which to interpret my research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002).

In chapter 1, I included an autobiographically oriented narrative in order to communicate how my subjective personal experiences relate to my research. Here, I add to this by outlining my socio-cultural context. Together, the detail in chapter 1 and the detail in this section illustrate my positionality.

I self-identify as a white, British, 25 year old female who has lived in Cornwall, England from a young age. I situate myself within the heterosexist, patriarchal boundaries of what I consider typical of contemporary Western society. I was brought up by my parents who have both been extremely influential in guiding my positionality. I have watched them work hard to provide for my family, and as such, I consider paid employment to be a necessary and significant part of adult life. I have also seen my parents struggle with their health (and well-being), which has raised my awareness of these subjects and their importance, and has inspired me to learn about the various ways, and the ways in which health and well-being can be enhanced.

I have also learnt what can be deemed as important in life from my other relatives. I am the youngest of my siblings, and have little contact with relatives outside of my immediate family. The relations that I do speak to and visit, albeit not very often, are my grandparents. The people who are closest to me in terms of family, therefore, are all older than me. From them, I have learnt diverse lessons as to what is important throughout the life course. For example, one of my grandmas is deeply religious and has practiced a traditional form of Christianity from a young age. At times, I have interpreted her actioned beliefs as a form of symbolic violence, in that they have silenced me from being open about my sexuality and make me feel as if my 'body markings', such as tattoos and piercings, are something to be ashamed of. From what she tells me, she believes that people should live in order to please Jesus Christ, whereas my other grandma tells me that 'whatever makes me happy' is what matters and that I should 'follow my heart'. In light of their comments and lifestyles, for me, they illuminated the diversity of the ways in which people interpret their own situations, and others. This acted to reinforce my belief that heterogeneity

needs to be acknowledged and appreciated, as there is always more than one angle from which to understand any given situation.

From this, I have learnt to consider as many viewpoints as possible and make decisions based on all the information available. I recognise that my interpretations do not (and cannot) represent a singular and final truth, as they are based upon an understanding constructed by lived experiences unique to how I make sense of the world. As such, I believe that there is not *one truth* to be sought and proven, but rather, there are *personal truths* that exist for each individual. As a researcher, my beliefs complement what Richardson's (2000, p.934) notion of 'crystallisation', described below:

the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach... Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know

Within academia, a researcher's beliefs and the ways in which they make sense of the world is placed within an academic community framed by scholars with similar philosophical assumptions. These assumptions can be categorised by particular research *paradigms*.

### 3.1.1 Paradigms

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 107) described a paradigm as a 'set of basic beliefs...a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world", the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts'. Situating research within a paradigm involves the taking on of certain philosophical assumptions concerning questions of ontology and epistemology (Phoenix et al., 2013). Paradigms inform, but do not determine, how researchers go about their work (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). The assumptions associated with a particular paradigm act to justify the selection of the research methods and any other decisions made throughout the research process

(Sparkes, 1992, 2002). As such, 'questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.105).

There has been much debate surrounding the value of various paradigms and how they shape approaches to research (Sparkes, 1992; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Bryman, 2001). Table 4 (adapted from Clough and Nutbrown, 2002, p.16) provides a contrasting view of the two dominant research paradigms: *positivist* and *interpretivist*.

Table 4. Key Characteristics of Differing Paradigms

| <b>Positivist</b>  | <b>Interpretivist</b>  |
|--|--|
| Medium/large-scale research  | Small-scale research   |
| Objective  | Subjective   |
| Research conducted 'from the outside'  | Personal involvement of the researcher                                   |
| Generalising from the specific   | Interpreting the specific  |
| Assuming the taken-for-granted   | Investigating the taken-for-granted                                      |
| Macro-concepts: society, institutions, norms, positions, roles, expectations | Micro-concepts: individual perspective, constructed, negotiated meanings |
| Structuralists   | Symbolic interactionists   |
| Technical interest   | Practical interest   |

The purpose of the following section is to detail where I position myself with regards to paradigms and type of academic community.

### 3.1.2 Qualitative Research, Social Constructionism and the Interpretivist Paradigm

All research can be associated with two types of academic communities, referred to as *quantitative* and *qualitative* (mixed methods studies are associated with both). Whilst Sparkes and Smith (2014) have stated that there is 'no clear-cut and unanimously agreed definition' (p.6) of what either quantitative or qualitative research is, I recognise this research project as qualitative, in line with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005, p.3) description, as follows:

'Qualitative research...consists of a set of interpretive...practices that...turn the world into a series of representations, including...interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers...interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.'

Sparkes and Smith (2014, p.14) describe qualitative research as 'a form of social inquiry that focuses upon the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live'. As such, qualitative research is associated with a *relativist ontology* and the social construction of reality. Through a social constructionist lens, reality is not a product of an objective observation of the world we live in, but a continual development of knowledge constructed through inter- and intra-personal interactions (Manning, 1997). Burr (2003, p.2) stated that social constructionists 'insist that we take a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world'. The ways in which we understand reality and construct knowledge of the world, therefore, can be thought of as dynamic rather than static. In this sense, as Sparkes and Smith (2014) note, multiple realities can exist as mental constructions.

This is not to say that social constructionism completely ignores physicality or materiality, such as recognising the human body as a biological entity, however, which is a common criticism of this perspective. Commenting on Foucault's (1972) work on this subject, Mills (1997) proposed that material matter is not denied by social constructionism, but, crucially, our knowledge and



understanding of such matter can only be constructed by way of constructed knowledge and interpretation.

The interpretivist paradigm<sup>1</sup> incorporates the relativist ontology adopted by qualitative researchers as well as the epistemological characteristics of social constructionism. Interpretivists promote the viewpoint that knowledge of themselves as researchers is inseparable from their relationship to their research (Richardson, 1994; Etherington, 2004). This is in contrast to the positivist researcher who plays the role of 'disinterested scientist' (Sparkes and Smith, 2014, p.10), adhering to the notion that we can examine what is 'real' or 'true' from an objective, disassociated position. My position as a researcher is within the qualitative community, wherein I adhere to the philosophical assumptions of social constructionism through an interpretivist lens.

My methodology complements my conceptualisation of the main topics detailed in chapter 2, wherein I discussed the complex, multi-dimensional and constructed concepts of ageing and place, and how retirement, self-identity, health and well-being can be viewed as meaning-making processes that can change over time. The task of capturing how older adults understand these concepts needs to incorporate how these older adults understand themselves and the world within which they live in. One method of inquiry that is particularly well-suited to understanding identities, lived experiences, and how meaning is attributed to various matters throughout the life course, is that of *narrative inquiry*.

### **3.2 Narrative Inquiry**

Diversity is a common characteristic used to define narrative inquiry within the literature. Defining a subject by its diversity, however, risks leaving it undefinable, as Spector-Mersel (2010) has noted. Whilst the range of ways in which narrative inquiry can be interpreted is useful for its interdisciplinary application, it can still be discussed as a distinct paradigm relative to interpretive-qualitative inquiry into lived experience. As a paradigm, narrative

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<sup>1</sup> In essence, every paradigm is an interpretative framework. However, as Spector-Mersel (2010) reminds us, the term interpretive is commonly referred to in a non-positivist sense.

inquiry represents a way to make sense of the world and interpret lived experiences.

Sparkes and Smith (2014, see pp.46-47) listed seven core characteristics of narrative inquiry. The first of these seven core characteristics is: *meaning is basic to being human and being human entails actively construing meaning*. Accordingly, studies of human lived experiences will incorporate the construction of meaning. Secondly, *meaning is created through narrative and is a storied effort and achievement*. To understand meaning, then, stories and narratives need to be considered. Thirdly, *we are relational beings, and narratives and meanings are achieved within relationships*. Logically, then, the fourth characteristic is that *narratives are both personal and social*. In this sense, in order to appreciate lived experiences of others, psycho-social levels of inquiry need to be considered. The fifth characteristic states that *selves and identities are constituted through narratives, with people relationally doing and performing their storied selves and narrative identities*. The performance aspect of narrative identities illuminates that the body is a core aspect of identity, as well as the interactional nature of storytelling. Finally, the sixth and seventh characteristics are that *being human is to live in and through time, and narrative is a primary way of organising our experience of temporality, and that the body is a storyteller, and narratives are embodied*.

Viewing the world through a narrative lens means that experiences are understood by way of particular types of stories (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Understanding lived experiences from a narrative perspective involves the consideration of past, present, and anticipated future experiences, and the meanings attributed to these experiences. Because 'being human is to live in and through time' (Sparkes and Smith, 2014, p.47), studies of lived experience need a temporal focus. Narrative inquiry incorporates temporality, as stories generally have a beginning, middle and end, and tell of events that are connected through time (Eakin, 1999).

According to Morgan (2000), stories are 'created through linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a time period, and finding a way of explaining or making sense of them' (p.5). Furthermore, Sheridan and Chamberlain, (2011, p.315) have argued that 'we understand ourselves through

talk', which is one reason why the impulse to narrate is an integral part of human experience (Mishler, 1986; Frank, 2010). Telling our lived experiences through stories, then, can make us aware of why we act and think in the ways that we do, which can help us to make sense of our lives. In this way, storytelling is fundamental to human communication and understanding selves and others (Kenyon et al., 2001; Feldman et al., 2004).

As narratives represent *types* of stories, the stories individuals tell of their own experiences in order to make sense of their lives are *guided* by narratives. Frank (2000) clarified that 'people do not tell narratives, they tell stories; "let me tell you a narrative" sounds strange. The subtle semantics of narrative suggest a *structure underpinning the story*' (p.354, emphasis added). Narratives that guide stories can be thought of as plot-lines, a range of which exist, such as 'progressive, stable, regressive, heroic, tragic, sad, ironic and comic...restitution, quest, [and] chaos' (Smith and Sparkes, 2009a, p. 283).

Narrative inquiry has been discussed by Sparkes and Smith (2008) as two strands: narrative constructionism and narrative constructivism. The main difference between the two strands of inquiry is the focus upon either societal or individual levels. A constructionist's point of view primarily posits narrative as 'a form of social action' (Sparkes and Smith, 2008, p.299).

From a constructivist's point of view, however, the stories people tell are presented as an intrapersonal process. Riessman (1993, p.5) notes that a narrative constructivist angle 'gives prominence to human agency and imagination' and is therefore 'well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity'. Whilst the intrapersonal dimension is at the fore of constructivism, the socio-cultural and structural dimensions of stories are also acknowledged. Socio-cultural context, therefore, plays a crucial role in generating a credible interpretation of these experiences.

Indeed, McAdams (1995) argues that an individual's identity is reflected by the narratives they adhere to or resist in the construction of 'an inner story of the self that integrates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future to provide a life with unity, purpose, and meaning' (p. 365). In this way,

'the self *is* a story' (McLean and Pratt, 2006, p.715). Yet, the personal stories that individuals tell are not wholly individual because, as Smith and Sparkes' (2009) comments explain,

'No matter how personally authentic anyone wants to be or wants to allow others to be, and no matter how separate from others we feel we might be, we are always connected and exist in relation to other people' (p.4).

As such, personal stories are relevant to the socio-cultural context they are told in. More specifically, Somers (1994) presented three dimensions of narratives: *ontological*, *public*, and *meta*.

*Ontological* narratives refer to the types of stories that individuals use to define who they are, and, consequently, how to act, just as the term ontology refers to the nature of being and existence. In relation to health, stories framed by ontological narratives may focus upon moral commitments regarding medical treatment decisions, or the adherence to a particular diet. *Public* narratives are larger than ontological narratives, in that they are attached to cultural or institutional formations larger than the individual. For example, this may include stories that are informed by practices of self-care as guided by political decisions. The third dimension of *meta*-narratives is larger still. As exemplified by Somers, meta-narratives represent the socio-cultural context within which 'individual' stories are told, and are recognised as the 'epic dramas of our time: Capitalism vs. Communism, the Individual vs. Society, Barbarism/Nature vs. Civility' (p.619). *Meta*- is derived from the Greek prefix *μετά*- meaning beyond. As such, meta-narratives often operate 'beyond our awareness' (p.619). An example that is particularly relevant in Western society is the meta-narrative of ageing as decline.

The dominance of meta-narratives can lead to the formation of expectations regarding the life course. Over time, these expectations can become taken for granted assumptions as part of a process of *naturalisation*. According to Bourdieu (1998, p.168), we make assumptions based on the taken for granted because our minds are 'constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world'. In other words, we base our assumptions of what is natural upon our pre-reflexive, un-questioned experience of the world. How we come to understand the world,

however, depends upon our position in it; varied experiences and interpretations can be made of the same phenomena. As such, experiences of the world on a *micro* or individual level are not unified or constant, nor are they unified or constant on a *macro* or societal level (see Roberts, 2012). From a narrative perspective, therefore, understandings of selves and the world are multi-dimensional.

### **Why is a Narrative Paradigm specifically well suited to this Study?**

Whilst other theoretical perspectives exist, adopting a narrative perspective is particularly useful for studies of lived experiences over time. A body of research exists that supports the notion that narratives are central to how individuals make sense of their lives and are crucial for understanding lived experience (see Polkinghorne, 1991; Sandelowski, 1991; Kenyon et al., 2001; Riessman, 2002; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006; Frank, 2010; Phoenix et al., 2010).

Narrative inquiry, therefore, provides a base from which to explore the various ways in which stories function in individual lives, which can act to illuminate identity development over time in context, thus giving way to an in-depth study of lived experiences (Kenyon et al., 2001).

Narrative inquiry can usefully contribute to literature concerned with health and well-being, which often overlooks depth, as noted by Angner (2010, p.362):

existing literature fails to capture the degree of diversity, and disagreement, among proponents of subjective measures. The result is a false impression of homogeneity and an obstacle to fruitful communication and cooperation within and across disciplinary boundaries.

Furthermore, studies of subjective well-being tend to adopt a narrow, scale-based approach that utilised 'self-reports' (enabling participants of research to individually select their own answers to survey questions regarding how they think and feel about their lives). The responses that participants can choose from, however, are pre-determined. A report by the Office of National Statistics (2015) illustrated that studies of subjective well-being have utilised numerical scales to measure individual components of well-being. For example,

individuals had been asked to rate their life satisfaction, how worthwhile their life was, their happiness, and their anxiety on a scale of 0 -10, with 0 representing 'not at all' and 10 representing 'completely'. Although this method is useful for operationalising at policy level, they do not provide insight into the full complexity of well-being, as this method acts to quantify and objectify individuals' subjective thoughts and feelings (thus demonstrating a somewhat contradictory methodology). In addition, as noted by Schwarz (1999), the meanings attached to the terms in question are ambiguous, that is, the meaning of term 'happy', for example, can vary considerably amongst individuals (see Raibley, 2012). Arguably, then, quantifying the results of such survey data to make cross-comparisons, and applying generalisations to wider populations is presumptuous. This observation is crucial when considering how to best utilise research methods for studies of well-being, and illuminates the need for qualitative methodology appreciative of diversity and subjectivity.

Frank's (2006) work illustrates how narrative inquiry is useful for health studies. His notion of health consciousness allows for the subjectivities of health to be considered because it is driven by a narrative perspective, whereby health is a fluid process of living with certain stories.

Having an awareness of narratives enables a more informed understanding of the meanings that individuals attach to health, and the implications this can have for their lives. Indeed, an individual's health consciousness is shaped by the health stories they 'take on board', and which are left to 'float by' in the river of 'not-for-me' (Frank, 2006, p.424). Stories are taken on board because of the feelings brought to attention by these stories and the evaluations they offer. For this reason, health stories *perform* in different ways for different people (Frank, 2010).

The performance of health stories is a bi-directional embodied act (Frank, 1995; Phoenix, Smith and Sparkes, 2007) whereby narratives are taken on board or inscribed onto the body, and bodies unfold or tell these stories in practice and performance. In this sense, bodies 'may do what a story has shown them how to do and given them cause to do' (Smith and Sparkes, 2009, p. 6). This is akin to Frank's (2006) viewpoint:

'bodily awareness is constantly being reshaped by health as ideals and evaluations, sometimes a promise and sometimes a fear. What I notice about my body, what I attend to or disregard, how I act on what I notice, what I worry about and what I take satisfaction in – all these are being informed by the flow of stories that affect my embodied sense of health' (p.422).

Remembering the body is useful within health research as it necessitates the subjectivity of health. As noted by Pope and Mays (1995), qualitative research methods are well suited in this respect, and are essential to health research. As a distinct paradigm relative to interpretive-qualitative inquiry into lived experience, narrative inquiry allows for a multi-dimensional and *in-depth* analysis of the subjectivities of health and well-being, according to those whose experiences are being examined.

This approach to research is well-suited to this study in particular as the research questions are concerned with lived experiences, identity, health, and well-being over time, inclusive of the life course transition of retirement as a process of continuity and change. As such, a key aspect of my research is the notion of 'ageing well'. As such, a sub-field of narrative inquiry that is particularly relevant to my research is the field of *narrative gerontology*.

### **3.2.1 Narrative Gerontology**

Narrative gerontology can be defined as the 'study of the stories of aging as told by those who experience life and growing older' (Kenyon et al., 2001, p.vii).

Kenyon et al. state that there are five assumptions that underpin narrative gerontology, as follows:

- 1) Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of being human
- 2) Lives as stories are made up of both facticity (objective events) and possibility, and are therefore open to change
- 3) The meaning and nature of time are connected to our lives as stories
- 4) Lives seen as stories incorporate four dimensions: structural, sociocultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal
- 5) We are fundamentally interpersonal beings, and as such, our individual story is created within a social context

These assumptions relate to my research questions as they sought to examine the process of retirement in relation to *intrapersonal* processes (identity, well-being) whilst recognising the dynamic *structural* interplay of *socio-cultural* narratives (such as the concepts of health consciousness and ageing well). *Time* featured centrally in relation to the life course and retirement as a process of continuity and change, all of which are negotiated by *facticity* and *possibility*.

Moments of change in later life initiated by periods of transition, such as retirement (Thompson et al., 2011) can involve a process of *re-storying* (see Kenyon and Randall, 1997). In order to re-story our lives, Kenyon et al. (2011) propose that the current stories being lived need to be exposed through telling, positing the self as a constructed, reflexive project (Giddens, 1991).

Recognising what stories we live by can illuminate the significance of meta-narratives in individuals' lives and how they are intertwined with personal narratives. Appreciating how narratives function in our lives, therefore, originates from the communication of lived experiences.

Experiences of retirement transitions can be accompanied by a loss of autonomy. This can be because a change in circumstances can implicate choice in terms of having access to the narratives that once guided personal stories. According to Kenyon and Randall (1997) and Kenyon et al. (2011), in order for a new story to be lived, previous stories need to be articulated over time so they can be 'seen' and changed, or replaced. In a narrative sense, then, incorporation of new selves during the retirement process is possible if there has been opportunity for stories that were once lived to be told or made visible. By narrating the retirement process over time, therefore, it is possible to see the stories being lived by, which can act to illuminate possibilities and new meanings, and can ultimately change stories, and lives.

Without acknowledging personal stories, the possibility of capturing the nuances that might hold significance as to what represents sources of meaning in individuals' lives is limited. Against the theoretical backdrop of narrative gerontology, driven by the principles of the interpretivist-qualitative paradigm, I designed my research in such a way that allowed me to access older adults' stories of retirement and experiences of identity, health and well-being throughout the life course, and the sources of meaning in their lives relevant to



this. The following sections outline my research design in terms of the methods I employed in order to generate data regarding my research questions.

### 3.3 Research Design

My guiding research questions were concerned with the process of retirement, which occurs over time. Accordingly, it was beneficial, and necessary, to apply a longitudinal design to this study. Research designs can be considered as longitudinal if data is collected on at least two separate occasions (Matthews and Ross, 2010). My longitudinal design involved gathering information from individuals at three points in time throughout their experience of the retirement process, over a total time-span of 2 years due to the temporal boundaries of this programme of study.

The three successive stages were necessary to allow for the development of participants' narratives to be documented longitudinally. This is important because, as Mischler (1999) explained:

'We continually re-story our pasts, shifting the relative significance of different events for whom we have become, discovering connections we had previously been unaware of, repositioning ourselves and others in our networks of relationships' (p.5)

Longitudinal methods provide a way of documenting how individuals encounter and respond to new circumstances. The salience of events which appear to be biographically significant can be re-visited over time, with latter accounts revealing how meaning is re-constructed in new contexts (Kehily and Thomson 2011). The longitudinal design, therefore, allowed for developments over time in respect of participants experiences as well as my understanding of the data. In effect, I was able to compile participant-specific themes following the first stage, which could then be revisited in the later stages for further elaboration, thus generating richer data. This was considered a small-scale longitudinal study, in comparison to studies that generate data over longer periods of time, known as large scale studies (for an example, see the Health and Retirement

Study [accessed online: <http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu/index.php>]).

Furthermore, the length of intervals between interviews was considered in relation to the amount of data that was deemed manageable in terms of collection, transcription and analysis.

More specifically, I planned to generate data with participants who were approaching retirement in consideration of van Genneep's (1960 [1909]) model that incorporated three phases of transition (separation, transition/liminality, and incorporation). Stage one data took place before participants had retired. Stage two took place a short period (approximately six months) after participants had retired in order to capture pre- to post-transitional developments. Stage three took place after the longest period of time possible following stage two, depending upon personal circumstances and availability.

On a practical level, longitudinal research can be challenging. For example, when participation in research projects is voluntary, as it was in this project, participants do not have to commit for the entirety and are free to withdraw their participation at any time. Attempting to gather data from voluntary participants over a prolonged period of time is therefore associated with the risk of participants 'dropping out'. Other situations that can result in a loss of participation include the death of participants, a change in personal circumstances such as moving to a different location, or if they simply can no longer be contacted. Undertaking a longitudinal research project, therefore, requires the researcher to uphold excellent organisational and communication skills in order to maintain contact with participants and hold their interest in the project over long periods of time. Participants were selected and recruited by way of particular sampling techniques, following ethical approval of the study.

### **3.3.1 Ethical Considerations**

Prior to the recruitment of participants, this project was reviewed and approved by the ethical committee of the College of Life and Health Sciences, University of Exeter, and the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry (see appendix 2). In line with the ethical approval that this study received, all of the people

who indicated that they wanted to take part in this research were sent an information sheet and a consent form (see appendix 3). Potential participants were required to read the information sheet and sign the consent form to register their understanding and willingness to participate.

Throughout the entire research process, participants were aware that an audio recorder was used to record and store digital versions of all interviews. The purpose of this was to allow me to transcribe the interviews verbatim, thus producing transcripts that I could further analyse (for details on analysis, see section 3.5). I verbally reminded participants that any information they shared with me was confidential. To maintain this confidentiality, interview content was modified during transcription (for example, using pseudonyms for names of people and places where necessary). All information and material gathered during the research process was stored securely, as detailed on the information sheets. Access to this information and material was restricted to myself and my primary supervisor. See section 3.6 for further ethical considerations.

### **3.3.2 Sampling Techniques**

Sampling techniques were useful to draw upon when decisions were made regarding which individuals would be most suitable for this project, in relation to the stories they might tell. The sampling techniques relevant to this research project are displayed in table 5.

Table 5. Sampling Techniques

| <b>Sampling Technique</b> | <b>General Purpose within Research<sup>2</sup></b>   | <b>Purpose to my Research</b>  |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Purposeful</b>         | To select participants that will provide as much information as possible, relevant to the purpose of the inquiry | Provides in-depth information  |
| <b>Criterion</b>          | To identify participants that have particular attributes relevant to the purpose of the inquiry                  | Ensures the in-depth information will relate to subjects of interest                             |
| <b>Snowball</b>           | To access potential participants via the direction of others   | Increases the likelihood of finding participants   |
| <b>Convenience</b>        | Often due to limited resources, the selection of participants relates to ease of access                          | Makes the sampling and selection process realistic and achievable                                |
| <b>Opportunistic</b>      | A flexible approach used to meld the selection of participants around the context as it unfolds                  | Allows for the implementation of creative and critical thinking as part of an inductive approach |

According to Sparkes and Smith (2014, p.70, emphasis in original), 'sampling in qualitative research is best described as *purposive* or *purposeful* in which an attempt is made to gain as much knowledge as possible about...the person'. Purposeful sampling involves the selection of people 'from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term of *purposeful* sampling' (Patton, 2002, p.230, emphasis in original). Under the rubric of purposeful sampling, a number of subtypes exist (see Patton, 2002). The subtype relevant to my research is *criterion* sampling, which involved the generation of a set of criteria that would deem participants as suitable for inclusion.

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<sup>2</sup> (see Patton, 2002; Sparkes and Smith, 2014)

Having specified inclusion criteria helps to identify and select potential participants. Alongside availability and accessibility, my inclusion criteria centred on three main topics of interest, as follows:

1. Retirement

Individuals who were approaching retirement were selected due to the interest in stories about the retirement process. As retirement is a process over time, it followed suit to interview these participants using a longitudinal design. In doing so, these people could be involved in the project throughout their retirement process, across three prospective contact points. I approximated six month intervals, as this represented a short enough period of time to document pre- to post-transitional changes, whilst also fitting within the temporal restrictions associated with this research project.

2. Engagement with Places of Nature

To examine older adults' interactions with places of over the life course and during the retirement process, it was favourable to select individuals that met criteria 1 and engaged with places of nature.

3. Physical Activity

Physical activity was deemed an important inclusion criterion as it is considered to be a significant aspect of health.

I used my inclusion criterion to construct a short survey (see appendix 4). The purpose of this survey was to identify potential participants. Prior to distributing the survey, I contacted the Human Resources departments of schools, large organisations companies and corporations such as banks, local councils and factories. I provided them with my contact details, a brief description of my research project, and requested permission to send them a number of surveys, either electronically or by post, given their preference. Those that agreed were then asked to pass on the surveys to their members of staff. At times, I was contacted with names and e-mail addresses of potential participants. Some potential participants contacted me directly by e-mail or telephone. In these instances, I replied with a brief reiteration of the purpose of

my research, and attached a survey to e-mails, or posted a survey if contact was made by telephone.

In addition to the survey, I also created a research poster with the purpose of generating interest and attracting potential participants (see appendix 5). Alongside the surveys, the poster was sent to the organisations that I had contacted. I requested for the poster to be displayed around the respective place of work in communal areas such as staff rooms. I also used the poster to generate interest in places other than the organisations I had made contact with. As this study took place in Cornwall, England, I took copies of the poster to the city of Truro and several towns around the county. Upon gaining verbal consent from the relevant authority figure, I displayed the poster in various public places such as post offices, leisure centres, libraries and veterinary surgeries. This was a form of *convenience* sampling, whereby selection is based upon ease of access under the given conditions (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Both the survey and the poster were utilised to maximize response rates, as the more responses received increased the likelihood that inclusion criteria would be met.

Responses to the survey raised some interesting issues. Given the emergent nature of qualitative research, such changes are possible and are even expected to occur throughout such research projects (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The relevance of this flexibility became apparent when I reflected upon correspondence via e-mails that I received from individuals regarding the content of my survey. Included overleaf is a diary extract in which I documented part of an e-mail received from a potential participant, and my reaction to this e-mail (figure 2).

Journal notes

I am getting a few responses to my survey that I didn't quite expect. I received one today that read:

'Hi Joanna,

Your email and your survey seem to be at odds. The email talks about 'engaging with the natural environment' and the survey talks about 'planned and repetitive bodily movement'. The latter sounds like an outdoor gym and is not my bag at all. However, I retired at the end of 2004. Since then, I have spent six years doing voluntary work...It's not planned and repetitive bodily movement but it is engaging with the natural environment.'

This e-mail makes me reflect upon what I meant by 'engaging with the natural environment'. It's made me realise that I'm primarily thinking about it in a physically active way and I am consequently limiting my understanding of it. I've said all along that I want to incorporate the diversity of lived experience, and here I am creating boundaries. Luckily this person has pointed this out to me...if I focused too much on levels of physical activity, my research might have neglected the other ways in which people engage with the natural environment during retirement. This could have led me to think that the natural environment did not play a significant role in their lives, but this would have been wrong. I just need to look at it from more angles.

Also, this guy retired six years ago but he seems keen to take part in my research. Perhaps I could learn something from him that the other participants can't provide - a long-term perspective of the retirement process in hindsight...

Figure 2: Diary Extract in Response to a Participant's E-mail

Upon reflection, I decided that it was beneficial to amend my selection criteria in two ways. Firstly, I discarded physical activity as a set inclusion criterion. This was because I recognised that interaction with places of nature did not necessarily need to include physical activities. Practically, this meant that I took a more inclusive approach to survey responses, and did not dismiss potential participants based upon their participation in physical activity. By taking ‘advantage of unforeseen opportunities’ as they arose, I adopted a flexible approach and melded the selection of participants around the context as it unfolded, which represents a form of *opportunistic* sampling (Patton, 2002, p.81).

The second way in which I amended my selection criteria was by including older adults who *did not* intend to retire, that is, *older workers*. I decided that valuable data could be gained from older workers because the burgeoning older population are likely to be a working population, as Collins (2003) has noted: ‘the growth in the number of older workers may lead to changes in age norms...the concept of retirement will be in transition, as rising life expectancies will place life roles into a new context’ (pp.155-156). The emergent nature of my research allowed me to refine the types of participants selected, rather than be restricted to a rigid procedure (see Henninck et al., 2010). Figure 3 illustrates my refined outlook of participants at stage one of the data collection, displayed along a working-retired continuum (figure 4 represents participants at stage two and stage three).

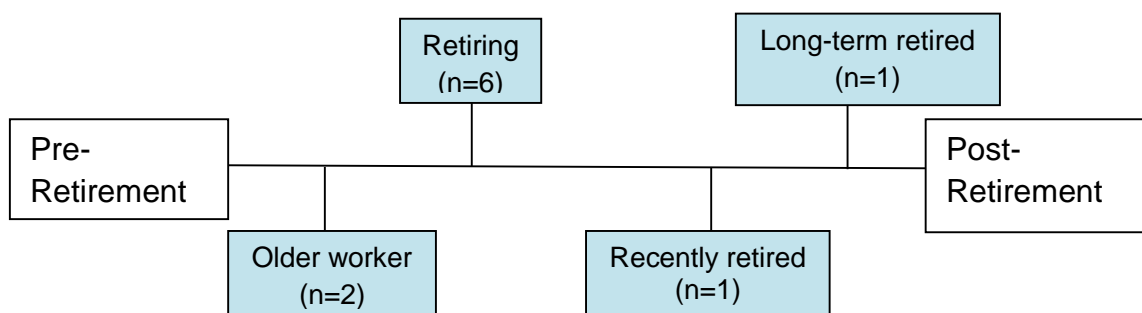


Figure 3. Participants at Stage One



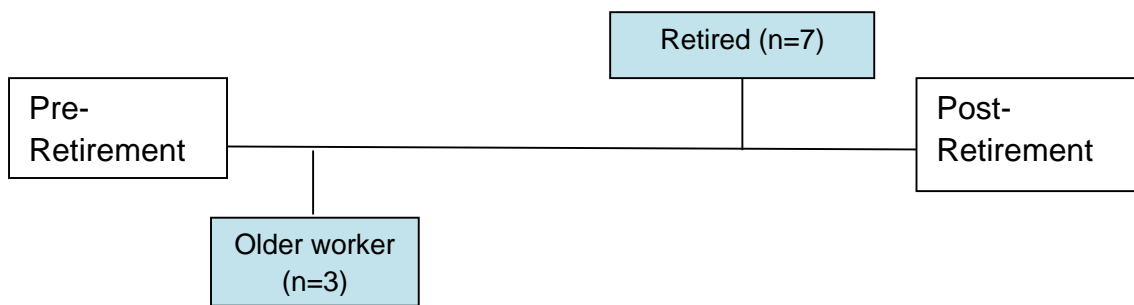


Figure 4: Participants at Stage Two and Three

This situation exemplifies reflexivity as it illustrates how my ideas emerged during this stage of the research process and how I reflexively developed my research. This further supports the view that research is not a seamless, neat and linear process, as I advocated in chapter 1 (also see Boden et al., 2005). Srivastava and Hopwood (2009, p.77) remind us that ideas ‘do not emerge on their own. They are driven by what the inquirer wants to know and how the inquirer interprets...according to subscribed theoretical frameworks, subjective perspectives’ and ‘ontological and epistemological positions’. In this sense, my inductive, iterative approach not only encouraged but also enabled me to incorporate creative and critical thinking into my research.

### Participants

Whilst this is not agreed by all (see Mason, 2010), there is a general consensus that a relatively low number of participants are necessary for studies that seek to construct in-depth information, due to the potential amount of data produced by each participant. Indeed, collecting narrative material over time generates a vast amount of data (Lieblich et al., 1998). According to Morse (1994), at least six participants are required in order to construct in-depth research material. A total of ten people were recruited as participants in this study (see table 6).

Table 6: Participants

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Sex</b> | <b>Most Recent Employment Status</b> | <b>Transition to Retirement Status Experienced?</b> |
|------------------|------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Peter            | M          | Adult Educator                       | No  |
| Denzel           | M          | Farmer                               | No  |
| Mark             | M          | Gym Instructor                       | No  |
| Rosie            | F          | Primary School Teacher               | Yes   |
| Ellie            | F          | Carer                                | Yes   |
| Cathy            | F          | Hairdresser                          | Yes   |
| Tanya            | F          | Secondary School Teacher             | Yes   |
| Barry            | M          | Medical Doctor                       | Yes   |
| Daniel           | M          | Psychotherapist                      | Yes   |
| Tom              | M          | Physicist                            | Yes   |

The following section provides a summary of the research methods I employed to collect data from these participants.

### **3.4 Qualitative Methods**

Furman (2007, p.2) noted that individual lives in context, 'and the meanings we ascribe to them, are complex and varied. They are not easily studied through research methods that seek clear and tidy reductionistic categories'. Qualitative methods do not seek to do so, and as such, they are well suited to research within an interpretive paradigm that seeks to develop a greater understanding (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Matthews and Ross, 2010; Sparkes and Smith, 2014).

An array of qualitative research methods exist due to there being 'no single, accepted way of doing qualitative research' (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p.1). Whilst these methods can vary considerably, a commonality amongst all qualitative methods is that they are concerned with the meanings that people attribute to phenomena within society (Bryman, 1988). There are two broad

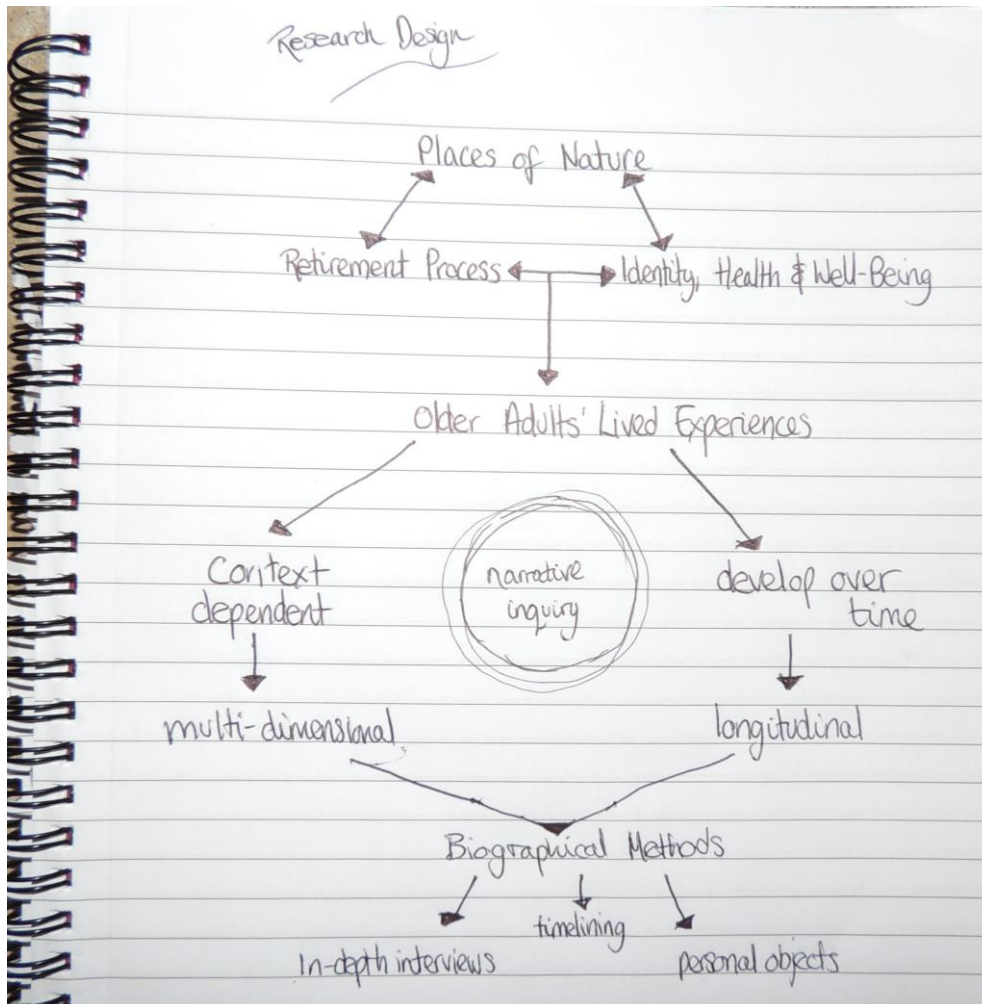
groups that qualitative methods can belong to: those that focus upon collecting naturally occurring data, such as participant observation and the analysis of documents, and those that focus upon generated data, such as in-depth interviews and biographical methods (Ritchie, 2003). Methods that generate data are well suited to my research design because 'generated data give insight into people's own perspectives on and interpretation of their beliefs and behaviours – and, most crucially, an understanding of the meaning that they attach to them' (Ritchie, 2003, p.36).

### **Pluralistic Qualitative Methods**

*Pluralistic* qualitative methods were employed in this research. That is to say, this research employed more than one qualitative research method. Sheridan and Chamberlain (2011, p.317) advocate the use of pluralistic methods when exploring topics in depth in order to enhance research in various ways. For example, Chamberlain et al. (2011) argue that taking a pluralistic approach can benefit the researcher as it forces critical reflection and constant questioning of both methods and methodology. Utilising pluralistic methods can also generate a rich depth of data, thus providing further insight into the complexities of the research questions under examination (Darbyshire et al., 2005).

Importantly, Chamberlain et al. (2011,) note that any methods employed in a study, regardless of the amount, 'need to be innovatively taken up in the service of the research, and not used uncritically or without reflexive consideration' (p.164; also see Travers, 2009). Using pluralistic methods encouraged me, as a researcher, to confront the epistemological underpinnings of each method and to relay this information to readers of my work (see sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.4.3). I developed a graphical representation within my research journal to illustrate how the key features of my research aim and questions relate to the research methods I employed (see figure 5), which are discussed in the following sections.

Figure 5: Journal Extract illustrating Relations between the Research Aim, Questions and Methods



A particular benefit of employing pluralistic methods within this study was that they provided participants with alternative ways to communicate their experiences. This use of pluralistic methods adheres to the interpretive paradigm in that it does not favour one way of knowing – and communicating – over another. This, in turn, can encourage multiple interpretations of data, leading to varied discussions and deeper explanations (Chamberlain et al., 2011). Specifically, this study utilised pluralistic biographical methods, namely, *in-depth interviews*, *timelining*,

and *biographical objects*, discussed in section 3.4.1., 3.4.2 and 3.4.3, respectively.

### 3.4.1 Biographical Interviews

According to Kvale (1996), an interview is a 'construction site of knowledge' (p.2) where conversed opinions can be shaped as lived experiences. That is to say, sharing information about experiences can communicate how others understand themselves and the world, but this information is always perceived and interpreted based upon the listener's own understandings (Gergen and Gergen, 2010). As such, interviews can be thought of as a bi-directional relationship between the researcher and the researched, whereby the interview is more than just a 'research tool based on questions and answers', rather, it is a 'social occasion that creates a particular version of social reality' (Marvasti, 2004, p.31). Indeed, Kvale (2008) describes interviews as an *active* process of meaning making, involving both the researcher and the researched. As such, I was aware that my own experiences impacted upon how I made sense of the experiences shared by participants' during interviews (Gergen and Gergen, 2010).

The process of active interviewing necessitates active listening skills. For example, it was valuable to have what Patton (2002) referred to as a *patient curiosity* and allow for moments of silence. This required having an enquiring mind and, at the same time, recognising that silence could act as a probe or a response in itself. Taking note of particular responses, both verbal and embodied, attributed to the shape of subsequent questions. Attentive behaviour can help to develop rapport with participants as the questions become more individualised. This is beneficial for the generation of rich data as a greater sense of rapport can encourage participants to share a greater depth of information (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

Biographical interviews represent the type of interview employed in this study. The two main categories of qualitative interview are known as *life story* and *life history*. Both can elicit narratives concerning the various stages of an

individual's life, and whilst the two are often used interchangeably, there is a difference between them with regards to emphasis and scope (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). *Life story* interviews, according to Atkinson (1998) generate 'information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life' (p.3) to achieve both breadth and depth of information. *Life history* interviews are typically used to examine how a person's life story is interrelated to social and political context, with a particular focus on change during the life course (Sparkes and Smith, 2014).

My research questions were concerned with how older adults' experienced a particular time of change in their lives, in relation to their past experiences, albeit within a given context (their interaction with nature). As such, life story interviews were relevant to an extent (temporally), and life history interviews were also suitable given their focus on context and change (with a personal, rather than socio-cultural shift). The type of interview employed in this study, therefore, transcended the life story/history boundary, and cannot be defined as one or the other. What can be said is that the participants' biography was the focus of the interviews, within the given research context and structure.

Qualitative interviews generally follow either a structured, unstructured and semi-structured shape (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In this research project, interviews were semi-structured to enable the exploration of relevant topics under study, namely, interactions with nature, retirement, identity, health, and well-being.

Unlike the semi-structured interview, a structured interview has a prescriptive form and adheres strictly to pre-determined questions and topics. The unstructured interview differs as it is autonomous in that it is directed by participants' talk rather than any pre-determined questions. Semi-structured interviews follow a pre-determined yet flexible structure of questions. The flexibility allows talk to be directed by participants and their stories to be heard as they want to tell them. In addition, the researcher can re-shape the pre-determined questions during the interview according to the participants' talk (see Fontana and Frey, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Marvasti, 2004). Sheridan and Chamberlain (2011) note that semi-structured interviews are well suited to

narrative research, as the semi-structure provides a particularly 'good way to draw out participants' stories, their understanding of reality, and their place in that reality' (p.315) in relation to specific topics.

Prior to performing the interviews, I constructed an *interview guide*, that is, a set of pre-determined questions designed to *guide* the interviews and ensure that the topics of interest would be included throughout (Sparkes and Smith, 2014; see appendix 6). According to Kvale (2008), either *content mapping* or *content mining* questions are used in this respect. The purpose of content mapping questions is to identify areas that are relevant, whilst the purpose of content mining questions is to explore the relevant areas in more detail. The content mapping questions that I used were 'open-ended' (in that welcomed an array of responses), as opposed to 'closed' questions (those that require a limited response, such as 'yes' or 'no'). Using open-ended questions complements inductive research that aims to develop understanding, as they enable researchers to actively encourage participants to talk about subjects without pre-disposing their responses, thus avoiding leading questions (questions that are shaped to evoke a particular response, see Britten, 2006). The content mining questions were *probing* questions, such as exploratory probes (to elicit more depth), explanatory probes (to elicit further reason), and clarificatory probes (to elicit a clearer response) (see Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Marvasti, 2004; Kvale, 2008). Probing questions were particularly useful in enabling participants to talk openly as opposed to stating short, simple answers (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

A different interview schedule was allocated to older workers, recently retired and long-term retired participants, as they had either not experienced the pre- to post- retirement process, or were in the latter stages of this process. As such, my focus was to document developments in their lives on as longitudinal a time scale as possible. Details regarding specific intervals between interviews, and number of interview transcript pages (typed, single spaced) with all ten participants is provided in appendix 7.

Sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 describe how the methods of *timelining* and *biographical objects* were utilised as part of the biographical interviews.

### 3.4.2 Timelining

Following the first stage of interviews, I became aware that it was somewhat difficult to encourage participants to talk about how they related their experience of retirement, their well-being, and their interactions with nature over time without asking leading questions. I noted this in my research journal, displayed in figure 6 below:

Journal notes 23/06/11

I decided to follow my interview guide more in that interview, in terms of the order of the topics. I had avoided this before as I didn't want to limit or control what participants spoke about and in what order. By doing this, for some participants, the result was a long, in-depth interview steered by them, with the guide merely serving as a reference point for me to see if topics had been covered. For others, however, the conversation didn't flow so freely on their part, which prompted me to ask more questions and provide some structure. The result was a choppy, fragmented interview and the pressure to find the next relevant question in times of silence...listening skills were sacrificed and specific answer-related questions were often missed.

So, I decided that a different approach might be more beneficial, one that amalgamated the topics of interest yet kept the participants in the driving seat...

Figure 6: Journal Extract - Reflections on Methods

This prompted me to revisit literature that discussed innovative research methods, and in doing so, I became inspired by Sheridan et al.'s (2011) concept of timelining.

Sheridan et al. (2011) describe timelining as a process of graphic elicitation. During this participant-led process, past, present and anticipated future experiences are plotted over time, leading to an illustration that can be discussed and reflected upon within an interview. Creating a timeline during an interview is useful as it can enhance participants' memory of a sequence of events, and allow them to more easily articulate experience in relation to time. Positioning time as a central feature can enhance reflexivity and encourage in-



depth, rich descriptions of change and continuity. By encouraging participants to talk about the past in relation to the present and the anticipated future, timelining can situate experience within a wider context.

As a method of inquiry, timelining suited the longitudinal aspect of my research design. Timelining was also of beneficial use to me as I wanted to specifically adopt a participant-driven method that would encourage the discussion of various topics in relation to each other<sup>3</sup>. In light of this, I developed Sheridan et al.'s (2011) method to suit my research aim and questions. Specifically, I utilised timelining to document experiences relevant to interactions with nature, health, and well-being during the retirement process over time.

Participants had previously been made aware of the timelining task by letter (see appendix 8). Timelining was not used with participants who had not yet experienced retirement (the older workers), and not all participants completed timelines. Table 7 provides information as to which participants took part and which did not, and the reasons for this.

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<sup>3</sup> Timelining acted as an alternative way to document experiential accounts of the retirement process over time. As the older workers had not yet experienced retirement, timelining was not used with these participants.

Table 7: Participation in Timelining Task

| Pseudonym | Timelines Completed? | Reason   |
|-----------|----------------------|--|
| Peter     | Yes                  | Peter was given the choice to complete timelines despite being an older worker. This was because he was recruited as someone who was planning to retire. |
| Denzel    | No                   | As the focus of the timelines was on the retirement process, older workers were not asked to participate.  |
| Mark      | No                   | As the focus of the timelines was on the retirement process, older workers were not asked to participate.  |
| Rosie     | Yes                  | Voluntary participation.   |
| Ellie     | No                   | Ellie was given the choice to complete timelines, but chose not to.  |
| Cathy     | No                   | Cathy was given the choice to complete timelines, but chose not to.  |
| Tanya     | Yes                  | Voluntary participation.   |
| Barry     | Yes                  | Voluntary participation.   |
| Daniel    | Yes                  | Voluntary participation.   |
| Tom       | Yes                  | Voluntary participation.   |

To date, no set procedure exists in relation to how to do timelining. Three general phases, however, have been put forward by Sheridan et al. (2011) as guidelines: 1) *Documentation and Record: Drawing the Lines*, 2) *Extension and Distraction: Beyond the Lines*, and 3) *Reflection and Insight: Between the Lines*. I applied and developed these three phases to suit my own research, as follows:

The first phase of timelining, *Documentation and Record: Drawing the Lines*, involved plotting and drawing the timelines. This phase took place at the beginning of the interview in order to initiate interview talk. To support

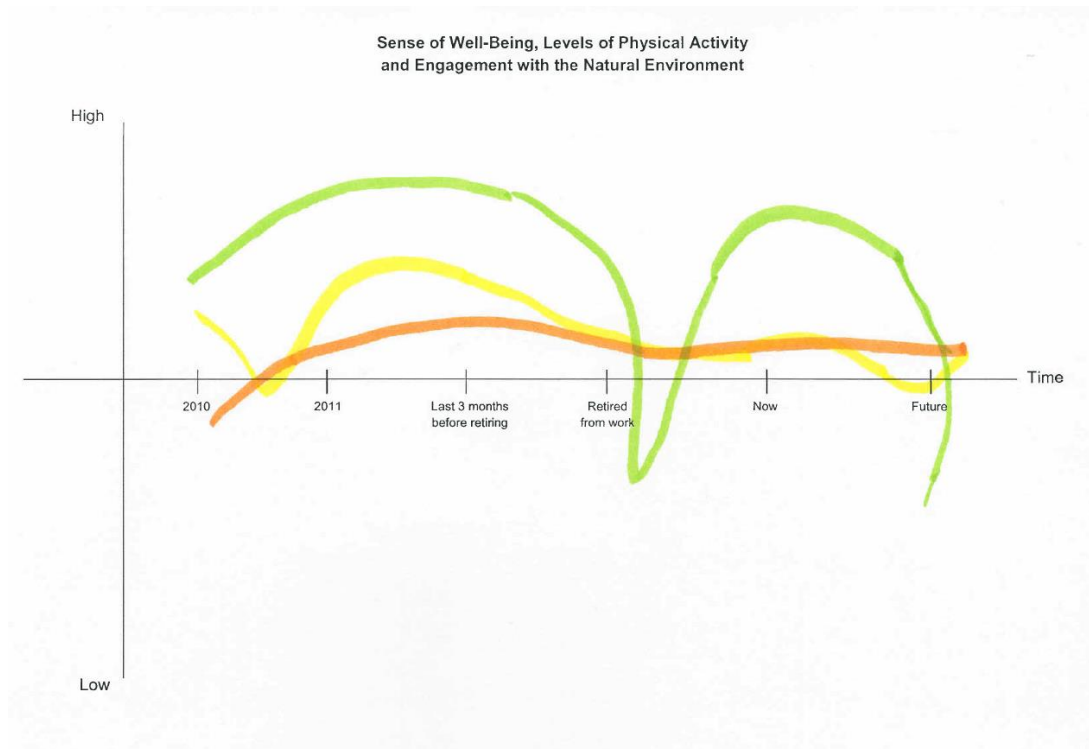
participants with this phase, I provided each of them with three timeline templates, all of which were set in a particular context relative to my research. Specifically, the vertical axis on each template represented either *sense of well-being*, *levels of physical activity*, or *engagement with the natural environment* on a *low to high* scale. The horizontal axis on each timeline template represented *time*, from past to present.

During the interview, I verbally reiterated a brief description of the task, and asked participants to plot points on each template as they saw fit. I actively encouraged participants to describe what they were plotting and why. Some participants did this of their own accord and did not need my input, whereas others were less confident. In these situations, I emphasised voluntary participation whilst encouraging them by reiterating that the timelines were individual participant-driven creations - there was no right or wrong way to draw them. Some participants drew a data point on the timeline and subsequently sought my reassurance. In these situations, both myself and the participants became engaged with the research in an embodied, reflexive way, and it became apparent that this method was kinaesthetic as well as visual (Chamberlain et al., 2011).

When participants had finished plotting points, they were asked to 'join the dots' to form a (time)line. The resulting timeline was then discussed according to each individual situation, which initiated the second phase of timelining, *Extension and Distraction: Beyond the Lines*. This process was repeated until all three timelines were drawn. Within this phase, objective, one-dimensional, static timelines became *narrative tools*. By talking about, with, and beyond the timelines, previous experiences were elaborated on, given context and, at times, re-storied. Participants were able to focus on or detract from specific sections of the timeline throughout their interview, making it a personal construction, and allowing them to tell their story in a way that they could make sense of. Consequently, as well as acting as a visual aide-mémoire, timelining acted to elicit richer narratives which implies that that this method increased participants' levels of confidence and relaxation.

In order to apply the method of timelining to my research project in the most beneficial way, I added another episode of *Documentation and Record: Drawing the Lines*, prior to the third phase of timelining. I copied each of the three

previously drawn timelines onto a blank timeline template and amalgamating all three timelines onto one document (see figure 7).



Key:

|             |                                     |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Green Line  | Sense of Well-Being                 |
| Yellow Line | Level of Physical Activity          |
| Orange Line | Engagement with Natural Environment |

Figure 7. Example of the Amalgamation of Timelines onto one Document

The three-in-one document encouraged participants to notice and talk about relationships between their interactions with nature, health, well-being and retirement without my direction. As such, timelines became objects for discussion in their own right. This was beneficial as it encouraged nuanced discussions, for example, participants noted the shape of their timelines, which raised their awareness of *how* they were storying their experiences.

Reflecting upon the timelines incorporated the third and final phase of timelining: *Reflection and Insight: Between the Lines*. This phase was initially practiced in stage two and re-introduced in stage three interviews. This technique attributed to my effort to maintain participants' interest in the project over time.

The process of timelining was very much an individual process, whereby participants had control of the way the timelines were constructed. In this way, timelining shifted the power dynamics between researcher and participant, which has been known to enhance the overall experience of being a participant of research (Sheridan et al., 2011).

### **3.4.3 Biographical Objects**

The third method I used to generate data involved *biographical objects* (items that are personally meaningful to an individual, such as photographs). Biographical objects were used to generate data as part of the interview process. As Sheridan and Chamberlain (2011, p.317) note, biographical objects act to engage participants' interest in the research, 'deepen researcher insight and interpretation', and 'also function to develop and extend narratives' by providing an extra access point.

Prior to stage two of the data collection, a letter (see appendix 8) was sent to each participant requesting that they bring an item to the second interview which was meaningful to them in relation to their experience of retirement, their interactions with nature, and/or their health and well-being.

Not all participants responded to this voluntary task. Four participants brought biographical objects to their second interviews, including visual objects (personal photographs, paintings, a letter, and a photocopy of a set of keys) and the non-visual object of self-written poetry.

When accompanied by talk, visual methods such as photographs and paintings can be useful in helping to construct a shared understanding of

meaning. This is in contrast to using visual materials alone, which can provide misleading information as the meanings of visual data are subjective and depend on who is looking (Pink, 2007). The inclusion of biographical objects, when represented as visual objects, provided further insight into topics of interest by allowing participants to 'show' rather than just 'tell' about their lived experiences (Phoenix, 2010).

Similarly, poetry, when presented as a non-visual biographical object, can also show and tell about lived experience. A unique aspect of poetry is that it can communicate experience on a complex, emotional level, as explained by Furman (2007, p.2):

'Poetry is not based upon linear cause and effect logic; a poem does not need to "make sense". In this manner, the poem may be a particularly valuable means of exploring emotions...Through the use of metaphor, the poem allows for interplay between the external and internal worlds of the person that are often complex, contradictory... Further, through the device of imagery, a poem can convey the essence of an emotion by evoking images which often transcend the schism between the experience of an emotion and its expression in language.'

Other authors, such as Richardson (1993) and Chan (2003), have illustrated how autobiographical poetry can be a useful method of presenting research material in emotive ways. As transitions often involve emotional challenges, poetry is an especially useful tool for communicating how people experience transitions (Hedges, 2005). Yet, poetry does more than just convey thoughts or feelings. The use of poetry as narrative material has the potential to elicit a powerful empathic reaction in its reader and create resonance, therefore enhancing the quality of research (see Tracy, 2010, also see section 3.6).

As with the timelining method, biographical objects positions participants as central to the research process. Participants chose their own biographical objects which provided them with choice regarding both *how* to talk about the object and *what* to say. The object that elicited narrative talk rather than my questioning. Incorporating biographical objects, therefore, acknowledged participants' creativity and intellect in the communication of their lived experiences.

The use of pluralistic methods illuminated how individuals tell stories in different ways, and that there is not a 'one method fits all' rule. Utilising pluralistic methods increased the likelihood that a suitable method would be available to each participant.

Following data collection, I was left with various material that documented participants' experiences over time. It was necessary to employ methods of analysis that acknowledged continuities and changes over time, enabled various types of data to be analysed, and appreciated the context the data was situated in. As explained in the following section, *narrative analysis* was suitable in this respect.

### **3.5 Narrative Analysis**

Narrative analysis is 'an umbrella term for a family of methods that make sense of, interpret, and represent data that is storied in form' (Sparkes and Smith, 2014, p. 130-131). Indeed, multiple types of analysis exist in order to appreciate the complexity of narrative material (Sparkes, 2005; Phoenix, Smith and Sparkes, 2010). Within an interpretive paradigm, a commonality of all narrative analyses is the focus on whole stories, rather than separated, fragmented data. This holistic approach allows the rich detail of narrated lived experience to be conserved, and appreciates the context surrounding such accounts. As such, it is particularly useful to apply narrative analysis to longitudinal sets of semi-structured, biographical interview data, such as those collected in this study.

This study utilised two types of narrative analysis: *holistic content* and *holistic form*. Drawing upon definitions by Lieblich et al. (1998) and Riessman (2008), table 8 outlines what is meant by each of these terms.

Table 8: Types of Narrative Analysis

| Type of Narrative Analysis | Focus   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Holistic                   | Researcher focused upon interview transcripts in their entirety and in context.   |
| Content                    | Stories analysed with respect to <i>what</i> the story is about. Researcher focused upon patterns regarding what is said, and also imprints made by what is left un-said.   |
| Form                       | Stories analysed with respect to <i>how</i> they are told. This is inclusive of the language used by the storyteller, emphasis of particular features, and how the story is structured by socio-cultural narrative templates. |

Sparkes (2005) advocates that narrative researchers should, wherever possible, analyse both the content and form of narrative data because, as Lieblich et al. (1998) note, ‘formal aspects of structure, as much as content, express the identity, perceptions and values of the storyteller’ (p.88). As content and form do not exist separately, attempts to analyse both can lead to an effort to separate the two, which can create an ‘inescapable analytic tension’ (Sparkes, 2005, p.207). Gubrium and Holstein (1998) proposed that *analytic bracketing* can ease this tension, whereby researchers move back and forth between analyses.

Whilst analytic pluralism can present a challenging and time consuming process, the benefits include an increase in analytic rigour, which can be valuable in revealing unanticipated subtleties regarding the topics under study. It was necessary to employ analytic pluralism in this study; the holistic content analysis enabled me to analyse the content of participants’ stories in order to examine the role of nature during the retirement process (in response to research question 1), whilst the holistic form analysis was necessary in order to examine the extent to which personal stories were shaped by meta-narratives of ageing (in response to research question 2).



Guided by information provided by Lieblich et al. (1998), Riessman (2008) and Sparkes and Smith (2014), the following sections provide further detail regarding how I performed a holistic content and holistic form analysis, respectively.

### 3.5.1 Holistic Content Analysis

Step 1: Getting to know what the stories are about

I began the holistic content analysis by thoroughly reading and re-reading the interview transcripts in their entirety, in order to get to know the stories being told by the participants. I constructed a flow chart in order to maintain focus at this stage (see figure 8).

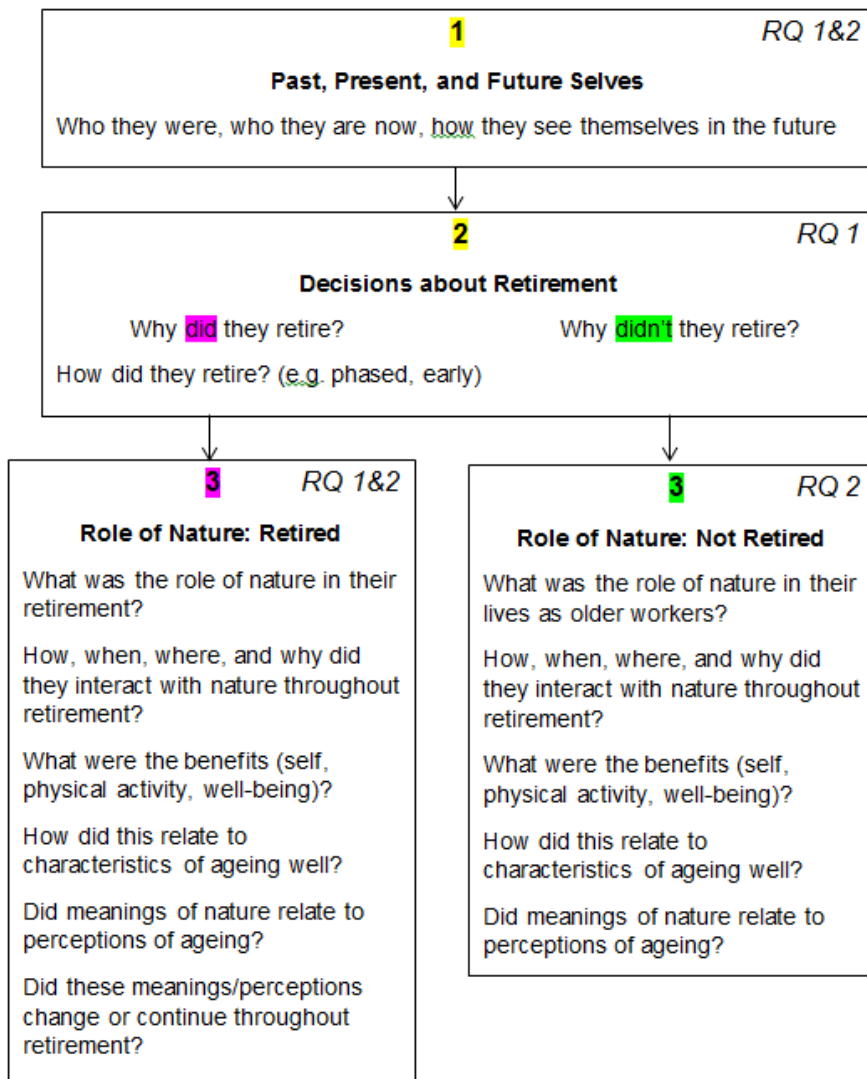


Figure 8: Flow Chart to Aid Content Analysis

### Step 2: Noting Initial Impressions

When I felt that I had a good grasp of what participants had spoken about during interviews, I noted re-occurring phrases within transcripts, and made descriptive comments about the data including any contradictions, unfinished descriptions, and unusual features. This materialised as approximately 3 sides of notes on A4 sized paper for each participant (30 pages in total).

### Step 3: Deciding on Themes

I re-visited my initial impressions to identify patterns, topics or themes that were dominant and relevant to my research questions (that is, participants' perceptions of self, health, and well-being during retirement, and their interactions with nature). Dominant themes were noted, and were compared with those of other participants. Final themes were amalgamated where possible, and decided upon as the most meaningful.

### Step 4: Discussing Themes with Others

Valuable insight, by way of alternative explanations and interpretations, can be gained by discussing themes with others. I followed Marshall and Rossman's (2006) recommendation to discuss findings with 'critical friends', such as academic supervisors and colleagues.

### Step 5: Writing Up

Having considered the themes in depth, I wrote a report of how the themes related or contrasted previous literature, and how this made an addition to knowledge relevant to environmental gerontology (see chapter 6 for this report). This marked the final step of this process.

### 3.5.2 Holistic Form Analysis

#### Step 1: Getting to know the types of stories

The first step of the holistic form analysis involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to become immersed in the data, paying particular attention to the sequence of the stories being told, inclusive of narrative disruptions or turning points (see McLean and Pratt, 2006).

Examining the storylines adopted by each participant raised questions such as: What point is the storyteller trying to get across, and why? What explanations do participants give for how they make sense of their past, present and (anticipated) future experiences? Does the narrative ascend towards the present or descend from the past? Such questions were useful regarding the examination of participants' sense of self.

#### Step 2: Identify the dynamics of the plot

When the structure, coherence and direction of the narrative was established, it was translated to a graphical representation where possible. When labelled, these graphs represented the type of story being told. Examples include stability narratives represented by a horizontal line (see figure 9), progressive narratives represented by a line of ascent (see figure 10), and regressive narratives represented by a line of descent (see figure 11). It is relevant to note that, as Sparkes (2005) stated, no actual storytelling conforms exclusively to any narrative type. Rather, any or all of the types can be told, alternatively and repeatedly throughout the narration. As such, graphical representations of narratives were useful for presenting a large amount of narrative data in a clear way, however they were not relied upon in isolation as interpretation of the data.

#### Step 3: Writing up

When the aforementioned steps had been performed for all participants, comparisons and contrasts were noted and written up in relation to the findings of previous literature (see chapter 5), which marks the final step of this process.

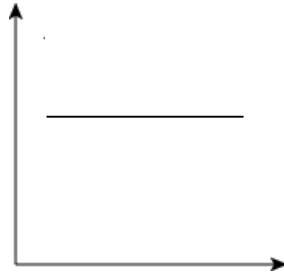


Figure 9: Stability Narrative

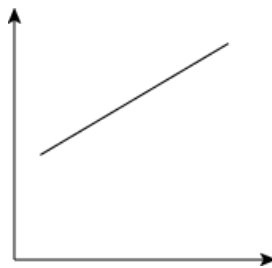


Figure 10: Progressive Narrative

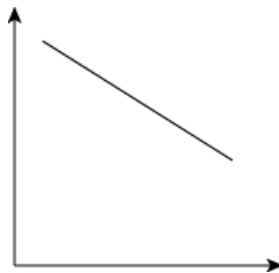


Figure 11: Regressive Narrative

### 3.6 Judgement Criteria

Judging a research project regarding how valuable and worthwhile it is depends upon the criteria by which it is judged. Whilst some authors, such as Tracy (2010), advocate an internationally recognised criteria for qualitative research, others including Lieblich et al. (1998) argue that the very nature of qualitative research asserts that it can be judged in diverse ways; having set criteria for evaluation is consequently contradictory. Indeed, an underlying assumption of the narrative inquiry this research is situated in is that ‘there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text’ (Lieblich, 1998, p.2). Furthermore, there is not one correct way to tell about experience, as Riessman’s (1993) comments illustrate: ‘telling about complex and troubling events *should vary* because the past is a selective reconstruction’ (p.64, emphasis in original). This argument advocates flexibility, diversity and consideration in the judgement of qualitative research. It does not, however, eliminate the need to assess qualitative research against *any* criteria (Sparkes, 2002).

When establishing appropriate judgement criteria, it is essential to consider the epistemological assumptions that underpin the research that is being judged (Tracy, 2010). For example, applying traditional, positivist criteria such as generalisability, objectivity, and reliability to this research project would be illegitimate, as this project is based upon interpretivist assumptions. It is necessary, therefore, to utilise alternative judgement criteria.

Historically, trustworthiness has been promoted as a notion by which any kind of qualitative study can be judged (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness as a concept can be categorised by way of four key criteria, all of which can be directly compared or *paralleled* to positivist criteria, as follows:

1. *Credibility*: the parallel understanding of internal validity.  
Characteristics of credibility include consistency and reproducibility.
2. *Transferability*: the parallel understanding of external validity.  
The interpretivist qualitative researcher cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry, that is, how close it is to ‘the truth’. They can,

however, provide the thick description necessary to enable findings to be related or transferred to other contexts or settings.

3. *Dependability*: the parallel understanding of reliability.

To ensure dependability, researchers can provide an audit trail that details descriptions of the path of research and decision making processes, making the decision-making trail of the researcher visible and available for public judgement (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

4. *Confirmability*: the parallel understanding of objectivity.

Confirmability is concerned with assuring that research material, interpretations and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in the contexts and participants, and that the results of the inquiry are not the outcome of the biases and subjectivity of researchers.

Trustworthiness criteria should be utilised 'when they advantage the research, researched, and production of the account' (Cho and Trent, 2006, p.333). Yet, meeting these criteria in order to achieve trustworthiness is not necessarily a straight forward process. As such, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) perspective has been criticised for being based on fixed and pre-determined rules rooted in positivism, making it epistemologically and ontologically contradictory (see Sparkes, 2001). Particular aspects of critique include the topic of bias in qualitative research, which 'remains unresolved' (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 698). The use of member checking as a method of verification is also problematic as it assumes that participants are the possessors of 'the truth'. However, in qualitative research, research findings represent a 'multivoicedness', whereby 'meaning resides neither in the speaker nor the receiver, but is created through the interaction between the two' (Furman, 2007, p.2, cf. Bakhtin, 1982). Research findings cannot, therefore, be verified by either the researcher or those who participated in the research. Rather, informed interpretations can be offered by way of a process of transparency. In this respect, Seale (1999, p.468) has noted that 'trustworthiness is always negotiable and open-ended, not being a matter of final proof whereby readers are compelled to accept an account'.

Accordingly, an alternative set of criteria to trustworthiness has been presented by Tracy (2010), who advocates that 'criteria, quite simply, are useful'

(p.838) and should be utilised where possible. She provided a set of eight criteria by which to judge qualitative research, outlined below. I deem these eight criteria to be relevant to my research and its epistemological underpinnings, and as such, I propose that these eight criteria are taken into account when judging the quality of my research.

1. *Worthy Topic*

The topics being researched are judged in relation to how relevant and timely they are in the context of the research field, thus determining how worthy they are of study. Within this research project, the topics being researched were older adults' interactions with nature, health and well-being, and retirement.

2. *Rich Rigor*

The research is judged based upon how appropriate the theoretical frameworks are, how material was collected, and how much time was spent collecting data.

3. *Sincerity*

To ensure sincerity, judgements are made as to the extent to which the researcher illustrates self-reflexivity, where 'the goal is to provide a research "trail" of gradually altering methodologies and reshaping analysis' (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 696). Being genuine about research decisions is valuable as it attributes to the credibility and persuasiveness of the research (Riessman, 1993, Clough and Nutbrown, 2002).

4. *Credibility*

Credibility of qualitative research findings can be judged in relation to how detailed the data is, and how detailed the interpretations of this data are.

5. *Resonance*

The research can be judged in relation to how affective it is. For example, affective research will move the reader in some way, perhaps on an emotional level.

6. *Significant contribution*

Research can be judged as to how much it can make a contribution to theoretical and practical knowledge.

7. *Ethical*

The penultimate judgement criteria relates to the assessment of ethical procedures put in place by the researcher. This involved the maintenance of professional boundaries throughout the research process by way of keeping an audit trail and reflecting on the ethical consequences of my decisions.

8. *Meaningful coherence*

The final judgement criterion is concerned with how much the research achieves what it set out to. This relies upon how well the methods suited the research aim and questions, the use of relevant literature, and how well the research findings respond to the research questions.

### **3.7 Representation**

In the following chapters, I have represented my research findings in the form of *cases*, *modified realist tales*, *confessional tales*, and *poetic representations*. In chapter four, I chose to represent each participant as a case in their own right in order to provide a rich description of each individual situation. As an approach to research, case study provides in-depth information about specific topics in context (see Stake, 1995; Simons, 2009)

Modified realist tales acknowledge the author's voice, as well as the participants, in contrast to realist tales which are absent of the author's voice and written with Third Person Pronouns. Representing findings by way of modified realist tales enables participants' experiences to be told in their own words, as well as in the researchers' words of interpretation. As a method rooted in interpretivist epistemology, modified realist tales incorporate subjectivity and do not aim to communicate the researchers' interpretations as a final truth.



*Confessional tales* are presented as moments of reflexivity, illustrated by journal extracts or reflective writing that tells of the researcher's personal experiences. Complementary to the judgment criteria of *sincerity* (see section 3.6), reflective writing can provide further insight into the decisions and interpretations made throughout the thesis. By enhancing the sincerity of the research, confessional tales can potentially enhance the quality of the research report.

*Poetic representations* were also used as a third method of data representation. Poetic representations are designed to stimulate and encourage multiple interpretations and invite the audience to construct understandings of the data in a way that is meaningful to them, and perhaps resonant with their own lives. As such, they are a worthy component of the analytical repertoire in qualitative research (Sparkes et al., 2003). Within this study, poetic representation involved selecting relevant text from interview transcripts and using this selected data to construct a poem. When attempting to capture the nuances of lived experience, the simplicity and power of poetry can often move the audience emotively, thus engaging them with the data on a level that modified realist tales and confessional tales may not reach (Poindexter, 2002). The following three chapters present findings from this study.

## **Chapter Four: An Introduction to each Participant**

This chapter provides an introduction to each participant and their experiences of health, well-being, and interaction with nature over time. For the seven participants who planned to retire during this study, this chapter provides an analysis of their self-drawn timelines, which often captured the inter-related nature of participants' sense of well-being, levels of physical activity and engagement with nature. As such, this chapter uniquely discusses the shape of retirement stories from the angle of both researcher *and* participant, with a focus on similarities and differences between participants. The content of this chapter provides a contextual foundation for the findings presented in chapter 5 (holistic form analysis) and chapter 6 (holistic content analysis).

### **4.1 Peter's Story**

Peter identified as a white British male in his mid-sixties. He grew up near London and was an only child until his sister was born when he was 14. He described his upbringing in relation to his mother's cautious and resistant approach to new experiences. When asked to tell me a bit about himself, he commented on his education, noting that he enjoyed school but he was '*never very academic*'. During his adult life he had had several jobs, got married in his early twenties and had two children. When he experienced bankruptcy in his late forties, however, the relatively stable story of Peter's life changed to a more chaotic story. Bankruptcy had a great impact on Peter's well-being, as he described his need for alcohol in order to sleep and that he 'lost 5 months' of his life during this time. In order to move on from this state, with the support of his wife he learnt that he could not live in regret, and instead needed to focus on the future and the opportunities it may hold.

With a new outlook on life, Peter attended university and graduated at age 50. He described his graduation as a 'turning point' in his life. This point acted to contrast his reserved upbringing and former 'non-academic' self.

Following this, he became employed by his local college as an adult educator. 14 years later, Peter contemplated retirement and volunteered to participate in this study.

As such, I was surprised when Peter told me he had decided *not* to retire during our stage 2 interview. His decision to keep working involved the financial security his job provided, yet financial worries were not emphasised throughout his story. What was illuminated, however, was how his job provided him with new social experiences and enabled him to help others to try new things, both of which complemented his opportunistic sense of self. He was worried that retirement would cost him these interactions, which it had done for his wife who was already retired.

Interaction with others was important to Peter, such as going for walks in the natural environment with his wife and talking to new people that he met along the way. Unusually, he also spent some of his spare time taking on a caring role in order to look after his wife's parents. He believed that if he did retire, any extra spare time would be consumed by this caring role which he said would drive him 'crackers'.

Peter felt most content when his life incorporated variety and, from this, opportunity. This was relative to his perceptions of ageing well as he explained by drawing upon the story of the 'oldest man in the world' who lived to 114 because he always tried something new.

One way in which Peter sought new experiences for himself was by interacting with places of nature, such as coastal and woodland areas. He believed these areas in particular provided scenery that was '*never the same*', as there were always subtle differences to be found. Peter found the variety inherent in places of nature to be interesting, relaxing, and, consequently, stress relieving. He was also more physically active when he interacted with nature, although he generally thought of physical activity as a by-product. Peter's interaction with nature over time, as well as his levels of physical activity and perceived well-being, are displayed in his self-drawn timelines below (figure 12).

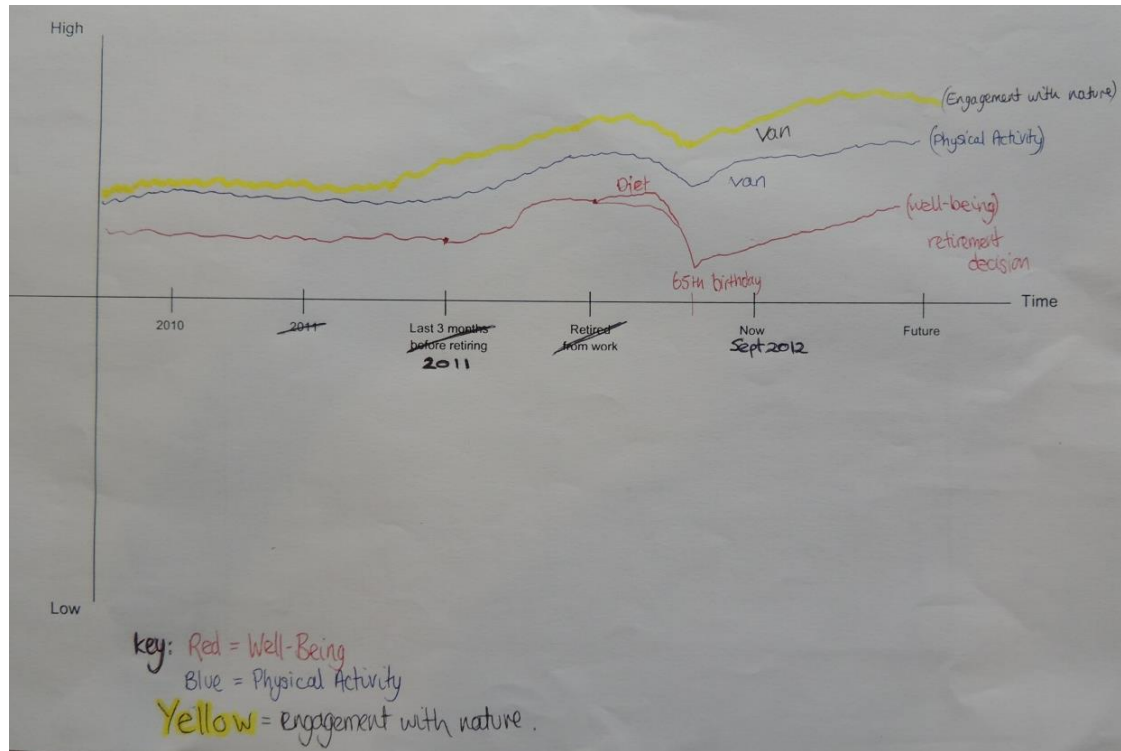


Figure 12: Peter's Timelines

## 4.2 Denzel's Story

Denzel identified as a white Cornish male in his mid-seventies. He had no intentions of retiring and planned to keep working for as long as he could. He told a story of productivity and opportunity.

His life was spent living and working in the same area of Cornwall. In addition to his thick Cornish accent, his Cornish identity was evidenced by his sense of community, such as his familiarity with Cornish places and people. He had a job as a farmer, which he began when he left school at age 10. One reason why he enjoyed work on the farm was because it enabled him to help others, particularly the owner of the farm who suffered from a chronic disease.

Similar to Peter, Denzel had experienced significant moments in his life that had motivated him to be productive and active. He told moving stories of how siblings and friends had died unexpectedly, which motivated him to make the most of his life and his health. As a 75 year old man, Denzel attributed his good health partly to luck, and partly to being regularly active in the natural environment and 'fresh air'.

Working and being in nature on a daily basis contributed significantly to Denzel's sense of well-being. He described farming as an active, busy job that is full of variety and never boring. After work, rather than stay indoors with his wife and watch television in the evening, he preferred to keep his 'mind occupied' and go outside to plant and tend to vegetables.

Akin to Peter's need for new experiences, a sense of variety was key to Denzel's perception of ageing well. He believed that it was better to work in later life than retire, as retirement was when 'you pack up all of a sudden' and 'lose interest in everything'. He believed that boredom was such a powerful force that it could result in a heart attack, should he let it set in. A tragic story of his friend - a fellow farmer who committed suicide shortly after retiring - acted to convince him of this.

### **4.3 Mark's Story**

Mark identified as a white British male in his mid-seventies, who had no children of his own and lived with his wife in Cornwall. He did not want to retire primarily for financial reasons, however his story also told of a need to be active and provide opportunities for others to succeed – both of which were encapsulated in his work as a gym instructor.

Mark grew up in a rural area, which provided him with regular access to places of nature. As a child, he would often walk six or seven miles with his friends into the hills nearby and make up games to play. He enjoyed being in nature because 'you learnt things without knowing you were learning them'. His father was 'always working' and didn't have a lot of time to dedicate to Mark, so he had to 'just get out and do things' to find his own way of learning. As an adult, Mark described himself as a 'self-made man' who had a strong work ethic and resilient attitude.

His self-guided career varied throughout his life; he worked in the RAF, as a teacher, a driving instructor, coaching athletics at an international level, and, most recently, as a gym instructor. He believed that success and satisfaction in life were gained by pushing limits and not allowing himself to be

'beaten'. This description matched his perception of ageing well, which is one reason why he continued to work, rather than quit and retire.

As a gym instructor, Mark valued the camaraderie that accompanied his interactions with people both young and old, whilst helping them to achieve personal goals, which resonates with Peter's story. Echoing both Peter and Denzel, Mark valued the variety that his work provided, and described it as 'never repetitious'.

Similar to Denzel, Mark also found that places of nature alleviated boredom. He felt a 'natural desire' to be active when there was sunlight and fresh air. Being in nature made him feel young, which he believed to help his physical ability. As an ex-athlete turned recreational runner, Mark often spent time running in natural environments, especially those that represented a challenge. Mountains were his favourite type of natural environment, as the challenge of climbing a mountain complemented his perseverant and resilient attitude. This attitude, however, proved detrimental to his physical health in later life.

During our second interview, Mark told a story that began two years prior, when he was out running. Rather than enjoying the run, he noticed that his body didn't feel as good as usual. In keeping with his resilience narrative, he pushed himself to carry on running. Over time, however, each run left his body feeling worse. A full eighteen months later, Mark went to his doctor to enquire about the problem. He was diagnosed with stage 4 bowel cancer.

For Mark, cancer was 'a bend in the road'. To compensate, he reduced his working hours to part-time. After some initial treatment, he felt well enough to write and perform his own rehabilitation programme, including press-ups, sit-ups, walks and jogs. He maintained that he would live to 114 years. Until then, he aspired to write three books, 'get back into painting', and, due to perceived physical incompetence, change from coaching athletics to being an official.

#### 4.4 Rosie's Story

Rosie identified as white British female in her early sixties. She lived with her husband in Northern England and had two children.

Having always lived in close proximity to rural environments, places of nature were a 'very major part' of Rosie's life. Her early years were spent in Scotland, which she described as 'fairly idyllic'. When she was six years old, however, her father took up a job in Kenya and their family moved out there to live. Unlike any of the other participants, Rosie spent eight years of her childhood living in a place of wild nature. The treetops were her playground, she went barefoot 'everywhere', exploring the vast environment with a sense of adventure and freedom.

Whilst she was out climbing trees, her older brother was sent to a local school where he had a miserable time. After a few years of trying different schools, her parents agreed that Kenya was not a suitable place for Rosie and her brother to be educated. The decision was made to send them back to the UK to attend boarding school, whilst her parents stayed in Kenya to work. In contrast to when she lived in Scotland, Rosie described this time of her life as 'very, very traumatic' and vowed to never put her own children through a similar experience. Indeed, throughout the interviews it became increasingly apparent that Rosie valued having close relationships with her children and their families.

Her work as a primary school teacher incorporated her love of nature, as she purposefully chose to teach in a small, rural school where she felt she could be herself. Whilst she enjoyed her work, at age 60 she felt the time was right to retire.

Retirement, for Rosie, was a time to spend doing things she enjoyed, such as spending time with family and being in nature, especially wild nature. Retirement also brought a sense of urgency and a fear of 'missing out', particularly in relation to physical activities.

During her retirement, Rosie was active in places of nature, sometimes alone, sometimes with her husband. She strongly related her sense of well-being to activities such as camping, walking, canoeing, swimming, and gardening. For her, embodying the environment by becoming immersed in it

was what made a beneficial difference to her state of mind, and represented the main purpose for her interaction with nature. Rosie's interaction with nature over time, as well as her levels of physical activity and perceived well-being, are displayed in her self-drawn timelines below (figure 13).

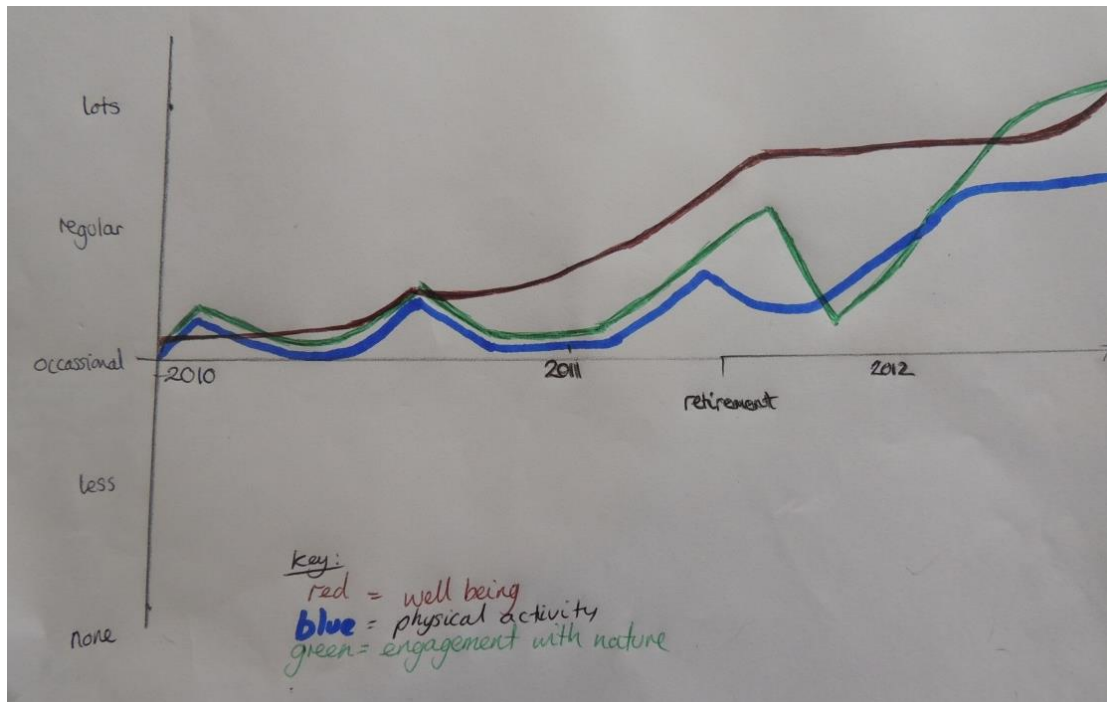


Figure 13: Rosie's Timelines

#### 4.5 Ellie's story

Ellie was the only non-British participant in this study, identifying as a white, Portuguese female in her late fifties. She was married, had three children, and two grandchildren.

The first thing I noticed about Ellie was her very caring and welcoming character. I had originally arranged to interview her husband, but on the day of the interview, when I arrived at their home, he had forgotten about our arrangement and was too busy to take part that day. Ellie invited me in nonetheless, and offered me tea and cake which I politely accepted. As we



started to chat, she mentioned that she had planned to retire at the same time as her husband so that they could spend their retired time together. Upon my request, she agreed to take part in this study.

Her caring character was evident in her day to day life. This was influenced by her father, who she described as 'the richest person in the town', not in terms of gold and silver, but because he helped anyone in need and was respected by everyone that knew him. From childhood, Ellie learnt to value relationships with people more than her financial status or material possessions.

This was reinforced by the traumatic separation from her mother that she experienced when she was two years old. She claims to know nothing about her mother, not even what she looked like as her face had been cut out of all of the family photos. Similar to Rosie, Ellie felt hurt due to being separated from a parent and valued close relationships with her own children. When she tragically lost one of her own children to cancer, she felt 'cheated out of life' accompanied by a strong sense of anger towards her mother. This did not dampen her caring attitude in her adult life, though.

In her working life, she took on caring job roles and worked as a cleaner and as a carer for elderly people. At home she cared for her brother who had very poor eyesight, as well as mental health problems. She went so far as to move to a house more suited to her brother's needs so that he could live with her permanently.

Retirement represented both a restriction to and an opportunity for interacting with others. Before retiring, Ellie had lived in London and occasionally holidayed in a house she owned in Cornwall, near to where her daughter and grandchildren lived. Upon retiring, she decided to move to Cornwall permanently and be closer to the grandchildren. She also enjoyed the community feel of being in Cornwall, where strangers smiled at you and took the time to have a chat whilst out in town. Being away from London, however, meant that she would not see her son as often. It also made her feel that she was leaving her daughter behind, as their house in London was close to the graveyard in which she was buried. As a compromise, her husband bought a campervan which they intended to use to travel to London in.

Ellie became a participant based upon the reason that she was approaching retirement. Nature did not feature heavily in Ellie's story, yet she did mention that she enjoyed watching her grandchildren play outside. She also disliked blue environments due to a childhood experience that left her with a fear of water.

#### **4.6 Cathy's story**

Cathy identified as a white Cornish woman in her late fifties and had retired from being a hairdresser two weeks before she was interviewed for this study.

Her Cornish life began in a small town by the sea where people knew their neighbours and looked out for each other. The sense of belonging that accompanied the local-level community was a defining feature of Cathy's altruistic character. Over time, with the development of the tourist industry, she watched the town she grew up in change. The houses that were once home to people she knew became empty shells during the winter, and holiday homes during the summer. Her sense of belonging became lost, filling her with sadness.

She managed to re-create a sense of community by establishing her own hairdressing business, which incorporated a wide client base. Similar to Ellie, her working life was dedicated time to cater for other people's needs. Her well-being largely depended upon her ability to help and care for others.

Cathy felt pressured to stop working due to her poor physical health and her perceptions of ageing. She was aware, however, that retirement would act as a detachment from her social networks and altruistic routine. A year after retiring, she missed her job, felt regret, and suffered a lack of purpose. Her story contrasted markedly with the other participants in this study. As such, by using direct quotes from her interview transcripts, I have endeavoured to illustrate her story by way of poetic representation, as below.

-----

*Cathy's Retirement*

busy

house to sell

upheaval

we've been upside down for a year.

a bit stressful

I miss my job very much

- stressful sometimes, but it was more like a club than a hairdressing salon

I do miss it, I miss it quite a bit

You get to an age and that's it. If you don't snuff it you got to retire!

I could feel my health suffering.

It was like a puzzle coming together that I thought, this is it

It was stressful.

In some respects I regret it,

people that I'd seen for 27 years I don't see now.

I don't regret stopping because of my health.

Because of my age as well

Diabetes, legs, blood pressure

- so I take a tablet for that.

I do miss it...It's that purpose.

There's a gap from retirement, that 10 years, to get involved.

I'm in two choirs, so I do that,

walk the dog,

swimming class for the over sixties.

I use my computer quite a bit,

I'd like to find out more things,

keeps your mind active.

I don't think my brain has really switched off yet.

But my brain will catch up at one point and remind me that I'm retired.

I miss the independence

I do miss it more than I thought.

Same old thing - you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.

It feels like part of your life is over

Three quarters of my life is gone - if not more!

Life has moved an awful lot faster.

Where is my twenties? Where is my thirties? Where is my forties?! Where's my fifties?!

Gone! How much longer have I got? Five or ten years, might not be here.

Retirement.

Stealer of time.

This is what we've worked all our life for, so that we can take that easy step.

- but you can step too easy.

Wasted the morning...well that's what I've worked for!

Entitled to waste the morning!

But now, every morning's the same.

Totally different feeling.

I wouldn't say retirement is enjoyable.

It's just, easier, a little bit.

Slower pace.

But if you don't want to be that sort of slow...

My purpose for getting up in the morning has gone.

I like being needed.

I feel so helpless.

It's my burden...you can't save them all.

My husband helps me, he's fantastic really.

It's important to talk.

We all need to talk and have someone maybe listen to us.

To be able to cope with each day

Retirement has to be worked at.

-----

Altruism was not the sole contributor to Cathy's sense of well-being - nature also played an important role. Specifically, living features of nature - particularly animals - reminded her that the Earth is in a continuous process of moving, growing, and developing. She believed that people are part of a continuous natural process which will continue when she is no longer here. In this way, places of nature contributed to a sense of belonging. They illuminated the continuity of life, rather than a fear of dying, which helped her to appreciate her later life.

#### 4.7 Tanya's Story

Tanya identified as a white British female in her late fifties. She had a daughter from a previous marriage but had been divorced and lived by herself for over 15 years at the time of this study.

Growing up on the coast of Cornwall, Tanya described her childhood as 'privileged'. The sea shore was her 'playground', which initiated her 'endless fascination' with nature. She studied zoology at university and went on to teach biology at a private school, whilst being actively involved with the local wildlife trust on a voluntary basis.

Work commitments and voluntary activities consumed Tanya's energy. She was resentful towards her job as it left her with no time that she could dedicate to enjoyable activities, such as exercise classes, walking along coastal paths, and visiting her daughter and granddaughter. As such, she planned to spend her time on these activities in retirement.

The most enjoyable feature of her work seemed to be the opportunity for intellectual conversation. This enjoyment was over-shadowed by poor management, however, which left her feeling stressed and undervalued. She noticed that other colleagues were in similar states, some of whom had been 'seriously ill' due to stress at work.

To avoid being in that situation herself, Tanya felt the need to take early retirement. Similar to Rosie and Cathy, Tanya was aware of 'becoming old' and wanted to maximise her time in retirement whilst she was still able to do so. Shortly after retiring, Tanya re-claimed her identity by changing her married name to her maiden name. She planned 'things to get up for', which involved quilting with friends and swimming. Retirement enabled her the time to complete courses related to her intellectual interests, such as marine conservation and environmental awareness. This intellectual stimulation gave her a sense of purpose in retirement.

Apart from the swimming, she had not been able to be as physically active as she had wanted due to a prolonged episode of flu and having 'sore

knees'. Physical activity did, however, feature as a by-product of her interactions with places of nature, such as gardening - which had become a pleasure rather than a chore - and allotment work, which she also found to be calming, satisfying, and aesthetically pleasing. Tanya's physical activity over time, as well as her interaction with nature and perceived well-being, are displayed in her self-drawn timelines below (figure 14).

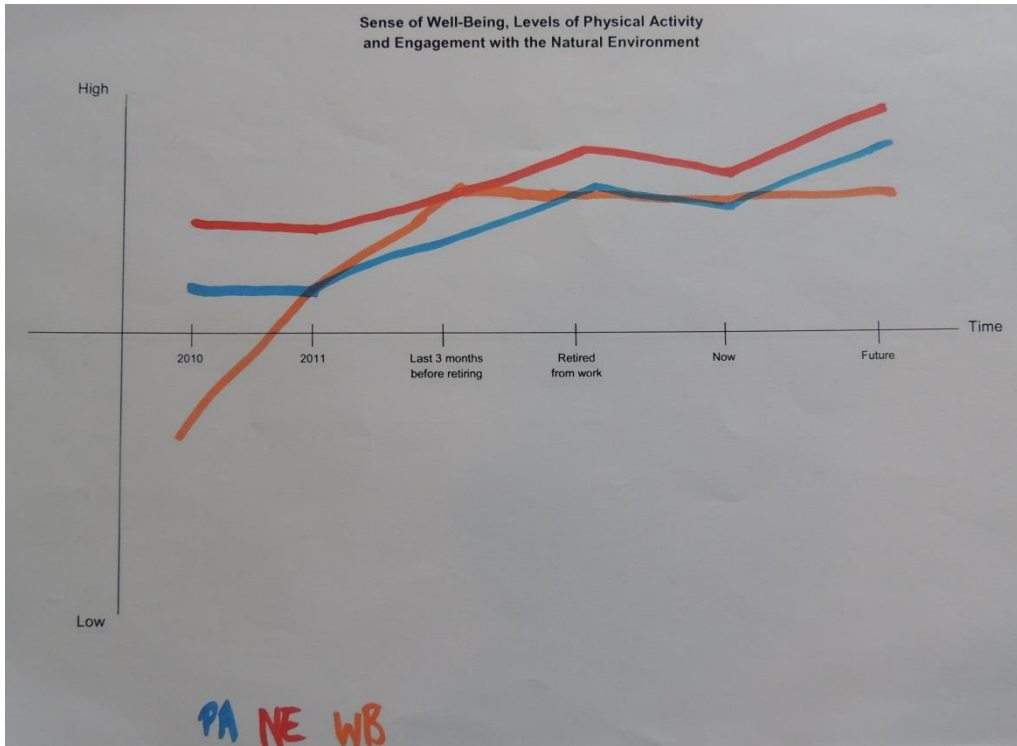


Figure 14: Tanya's Timelines

#### 4.8 Barry's Story

Barry was a white, British male in his mid-sixties who primarily identified as a doctor. He grew up in the countryside and considered himself to be a 'country boy'. Being a doctor was a (male) tradition in Barry's family. His father advised him against doctoring based on personal experience, and the argument that it would take over his life. Despite this, Barry became a doctor in his mid-twenties.

Forty years later, on reflection, he admitted that his father was right. He found that being a doctor was extremely consuming. Physical activity was irregular during Barry's working life. Akin to Tanya, work was his priority in terms of energy expenditure. Furthermore, he described himself as 'very much about the process of doctoring as a way of embodying that identity'. Retirement did not just represent a detachment from work; it was also a detachment from his sense of self. He decided that retirement needed to be a 'complete cut from work'. Whilst this felt 'very, very scary', it was necessary in order for him to be able to re-discover aspects of his identity that he had neglected over his working years.

Barry re-claimed his creative self in retirement. He wrote poetry and practiced music. He became more physically active by walking the Cornish coastal paths, but he did not do so in order to enhance his health and fitness. They were by-products. The purpose of the coast path walks was conceptual, as he believed that being physically active in places of nature allowed him to access and explore his thoughts.

This practice had proved useful during his working life. When he had time, he would go to places with panoramic views where he could walk for long periods of time. Here, he would feel able to process issues associated with work, such as the death of his patients. Nature seemed to play a therapeutic role in Barry's life, which he used to process the transition to retirement, and the changes that came with it.

Over time, Barry became more focused upon creating a contrast to his previous lifestyle. His garden exemplified this, as it held symbolic significance for him. Whilst working, he had allowed his garden to be wild. Now he had retired, he had tamed his garden, reflecting the greater sense of agency that he felt. Similar to Tanya, the exercise that accompanied gardening was a welcomed by-product.

Barry experienced a 'brutal separation' from a very fulfilling, satisfying working life, yet he was enjoying his exploration of other opportunities and activities as he adjusted to his life as 'a doctor-being, not a doctor-doing'. His perception of his well-being over time, as well

as his interaction with nature and physical activity, are displayed in figure 15, below.

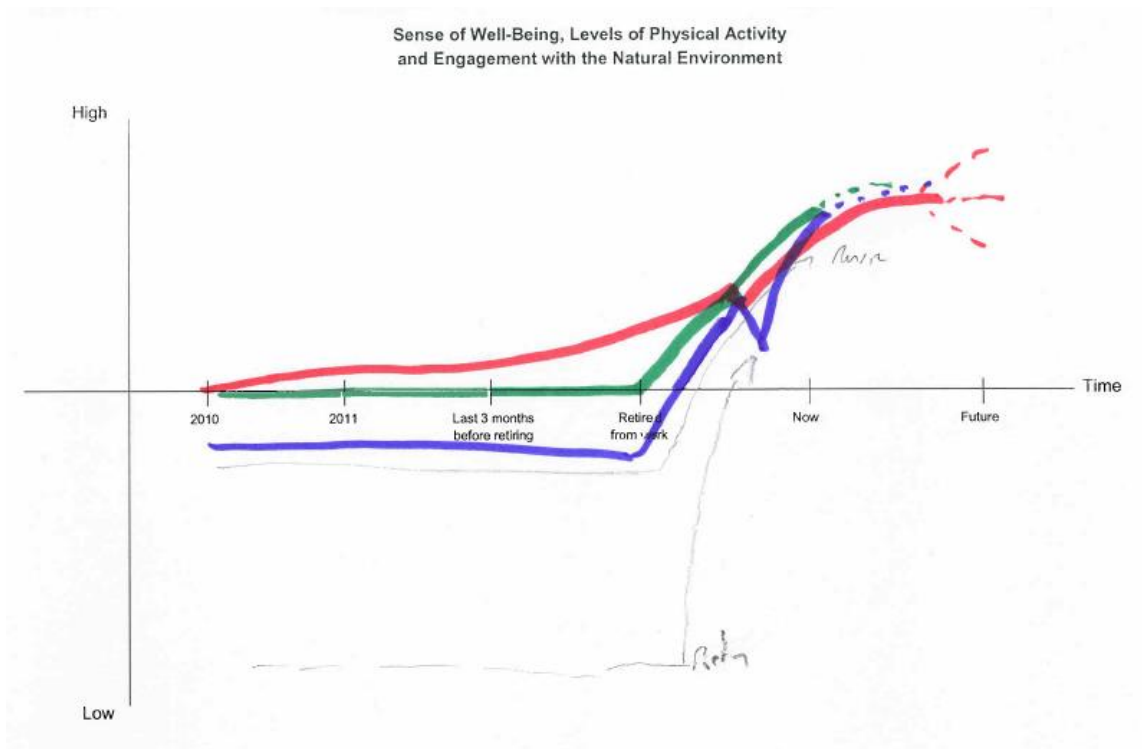


Figure 15: Barry's Timelines

#### 4.9 Daniel's story

Daniel identified as a white British male in his mid-sixties. He lived with his partner in Devon. As a child, Daniel was brought up in a house next to a river. His childhood was spent in places where water was always present; summer holidays were spent in Cornwall in a family owned hotel near the sea. Being near water gave him a sense of comfort and familiarity, which he continued to feel throughout his life.

He described the sea as a curious place 'which is different from your normal conscious reality...so much going on under the surface'. His interest in exploring areas beyond 'normal conscious reality' was reflected in his career as a psychotherapist.



At age 65, Daniel felt ready to retire from his career and welcomed retirement as a new beginning that would give him 'more time to play'. Having retired from a job based in an educational institution, at the time of the summer holidays, it took him several months to feel a sense of separation from work. Similar to Barry, he planned to re-claim parts of himself that he had neglected during his working life, such as being a writer. The majority of the time he spent writing was focused upon the past. Eight months after retiring, however, Daniel's viewpoint shifted.

The third and final interview with Daniel was opened with an illness story about a heart attack. Shortly after our second interview, Daniel had experienced pain in his chest whilst meditating, and was rushed to hospital. Later, he was diagnosed with heart disease. Whilst amplifying his fear of dying, his experience encouraged him to let go of the past, and focus on the present in order to get the most enjoyment from the rest of his retired life.

His perceived well-being, interaction with nature, and physical activity levels are displayed in his self-drawn timelines below (figure 16).

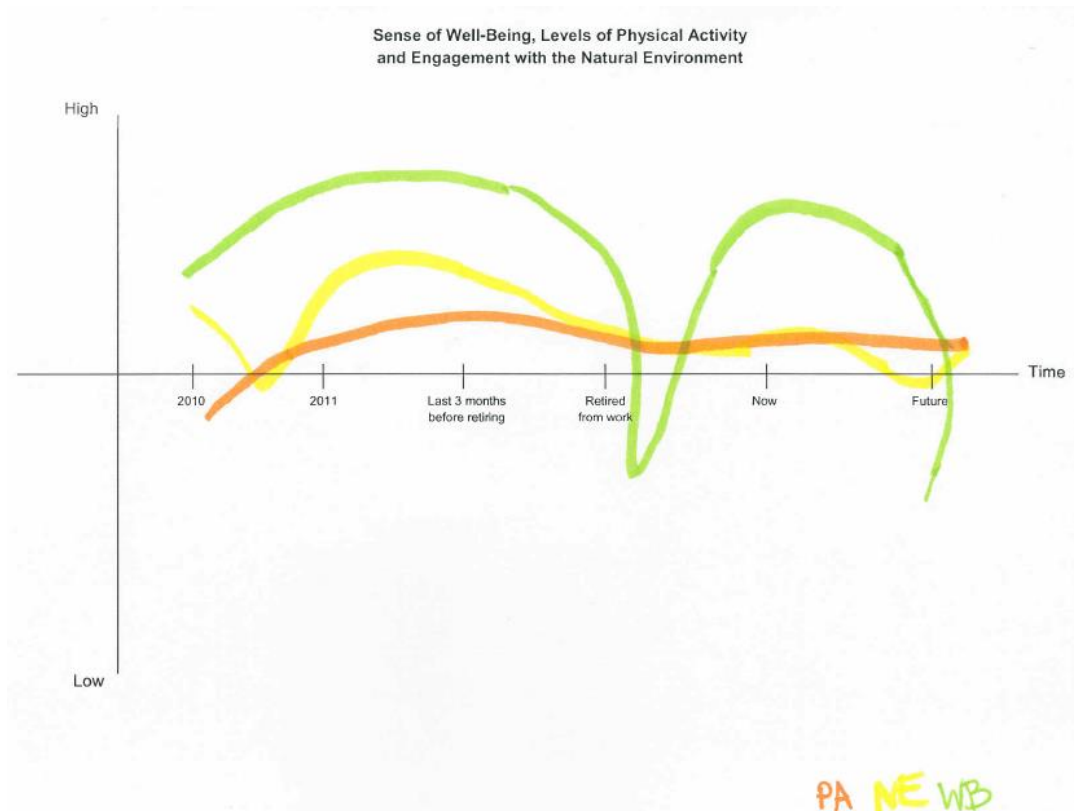


Figure 16: Daniel's Timelines

#### 4.10 Tom's story

Tom was a white British male in his late sixties. He was the only participant who had been retired long-term at the time of this study, having retired six years prior to interview.

As a child, Tom lived in the countryside. He often played out in the fields with his friends and helped out on the local farms, which he described as 'tremendous fun'. His interaction with nature was restricted when he was 11 years old, however, as he started his attendance at grammar school.

As an adult, Tom worked as a physicist. Throughout his working life he had little contact with nature, of which he had some regret. Indeed, he considered his 100 mile commute to and from work as 'the best piece of the day' because he got to see the countryside through his car window.

Boredom and a lack of purpose were Tom's reasons for retiring. He retired early, aged 60. He would rather spend his years getting 'fresh air, freedom, and exercise', than being at a workplace that had little purpose for him. Similar to Peter, trying new activities attributed to his sense of well-being. He purposefully completed courses that involved being outdoors, such as 'tractor driving, quad bikes, chainsaws, animal first aid, pest control' and others. He also took part in numerous voluntary projects and helped charities. He regarded this to be a worthwhile way to spend his retired time, which reflected the altruistic character of his mother the way and his respective upbringing. His sense of well-being over time, as well as his interactions with nature and levels of physical activity, are displayed in his self-drawn timelines below (figure 17).

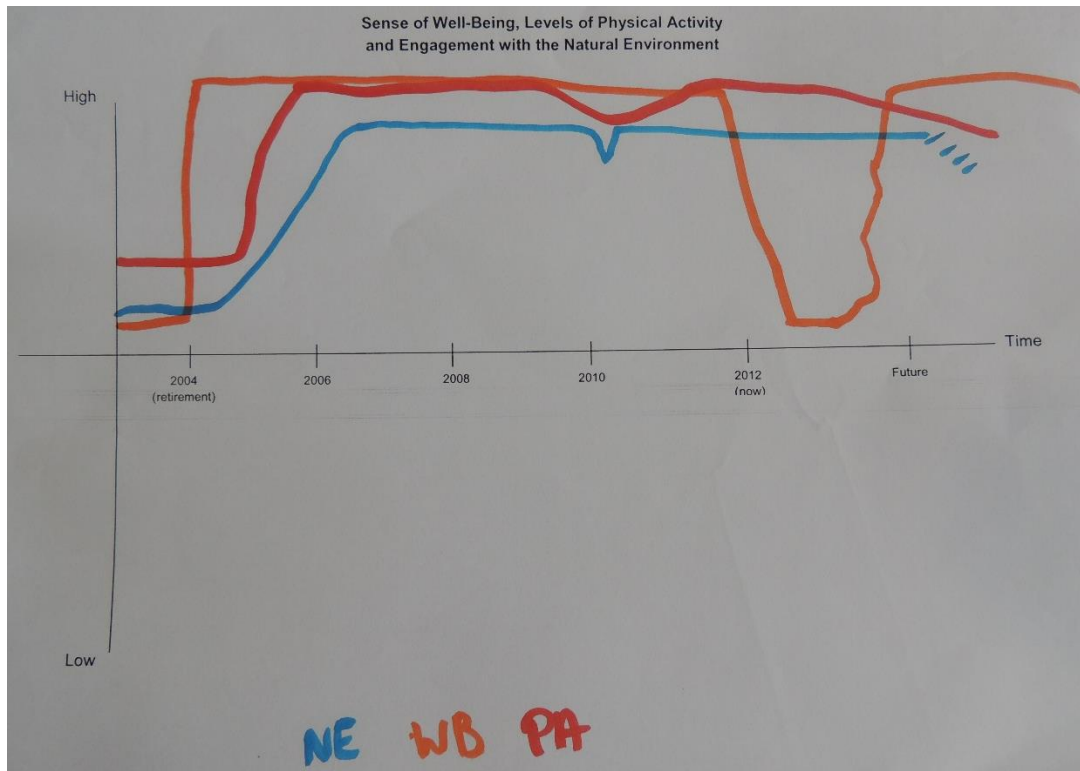


Figure 17: Tom's Timelines

#### 4.11 Similarities and Differences

For Peter, Rosie, and Barry, health, well-being and interactions with nature in pre-retirement were storied along a stable narrative. This was followed by an

overall progressive change in direction post-retirement, marking retirement as an opportunity to enhance health, well-being and interactions with nature.

Tanya and Tom’s timelines, however, began with a progressive narrative which plateaued and stabilised post-retirement. Both of these participants were unhappy at work, and both took early retirement. Tanya told a story of resilience when describing her working life, a life which was ‘stressful’ and pressured. For her, retirement was an escape from burnout. Tom told a story of stagnation when describing his work, where nothing progressed, leaving him with a lack of purpose and feelings of boredom. For both Tanya and Tom, retirement represented an opportunity to change their stories and reinvigorate their interests.

In contrast, Daniel’s well-being notably declined upon retirement, followed by an increase, and then a projected decline in the future (see figure 18). The sharp decline coincides with his heart attack, which left him ‘fearful of physical deterioration and ill-health’. Coupled with the influence of the narrative of ageing as decline, this fear is illustrated by the second decline on his timeline. In addition, the annotations on his timeline describe the lowest points of his retirement process as due to ‘lack of purpose, feeling I’m not contributing’.

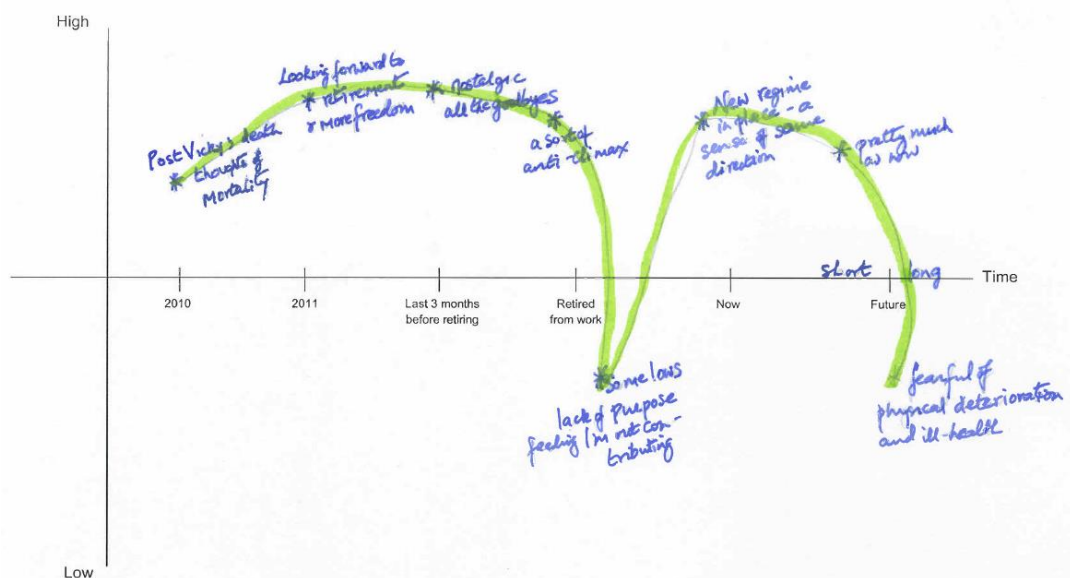


Figure 18: Daniel's Well-Being Timeline

Barry, Tom, and Peter's well-being timelines also included sharp decreases in well-being. Barry marked the lowest point as 'bug', referring to a bout of physical illness. Similarly, Tom attributed the decrease in well-being to poor physical health following a recent car crash<sup>4</sup>. The dip on Peter's well-being timeline also related to poor physical health as he was diagnosed with arthritis. As such, physical health was an important feature of how stories of well-being were told. Interestingly, Peter did not mark his dip by way of any physical problem, such as 'arthritis'. Instead, he labelled it as '65<sup>th</sup> birthday'. As with Daniel, it became evident that meanings of ageing were structuring his retirement story.

Peter questioned meanings of ageing, but did not clarify them. This was exemplified by the way he discussed the biographical object that he brought to interview:

'on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, well just the day before my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, someone told me I'd got arthritis in the knee...So I've been to see a specialist and the letter from the specialist to the doctor, um, I kind-of got quite agitated about...it says 'Background: This very pleasant 65-year-old gentleman'. As if I'd been written into Jeremy Fisher somewhere along the line, you know?! And I thought, I really took exception to that! That one phrase, I thought - what, he thinks I'm old!...Combination of arthritis and being a 65-year-old 'gentleman' who's 'pleasant', you think, I thought it was terrifically condescending!...It was just, I think it was the words '65-year-old gentleman', probably to see it written down. There was, I can't tell you why it agitated me. I have no idea, but it did'

(Peter, stage two interview)

Clearly, Peter was not comfortable with the language used to describe him at age 65. His specific recollection of the day he received this letter, in addition to his choice to bring it to interview as a biographical object, reflected its significance to him. This indicates that the dip in his well-being storyline was labelled as '65<sup>th</sup> birthday' because its significance was held by meanings of ageing rather than physical ailments.

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<sup>4</sup> The 'now' label is slightly inaccurate on Tom's timeline, and should be in line with the lowest point of the orange line.

According to Somers (1994), meta-narratives, such as the narrative of decline, often operate 'beyond our awareness' (p.619). A lack of awareness can be sustained by acceptance, by way of the process of naturalisation (cf. Bourdieu, 1998; chapter 3.2). Peter thought that the specialist who wrote the letter was 'actually being polite', thus illustrating the association of this language with being age 65 as acceptable. He was not entirely accepting of this, however, as exemplified in his comments below:

'it did make me think about age and what people saw about it, what they thought...which is when I discovered how I thought about myself. And you'll see on there that the well-being, it took a dip on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, but it recovered. I got over it.'

(Peter, stage two interview)

The reference to being 65 held particular significance when taken in the context of Peter's retirement situation, that is, he had planned to retire at 65, and then changed his mind. When he allowed his story to be guided by the narrative of decline, it became one of agitation and lack of autonomy, which he described as follows:

'it sounds like I'm in a Beatrix Potter story here, 65-year-old gentleman with whiskers or something, who is following Jemima Puddleduck around'

(Peter, stage two interview)

To counter this, he storied his self as resilient. Whilst enhancing his sense of well-being by way of his attitude to life, this had particular implications for his body and his participation in physical activities:

'you don't really want to think about your age. Perhaps you feel alright – got a bit of a sore knee – well, life goes on. I did a 10 kilometre walk for Marie Curie at Plymouth with it. Okay, it was a bit painful but it didn't stop me doing it. I go out walking all the time, it doesn't stop me doing anything...I get on with it. I don't go around sitting around, putting my foot up and saying oh, can't got to work because my knee aches, can't get up the stairs or something. I make an effort to not let it affect me'

(Peter, stage two interview)

#### 4.12 Summary

In pre-retirement interviews, Daniel, Barry, Ellie, and Rosie told stories of (other people's) retirement, and used these stories in various ways to inform their own, and realise their possibilities. In contrast, Denzel - one of the older workers in this study – seemed to view retirement in one way, and one way only (as a time of stagnation, boredom, and a fatal risk to health). As such, Denzel was locked in a 'facticity jail' (Kenyon et al., 2011) because he could not see any other possibilities in relation to retirement. In Cornwall, it is traditional for farmers to work into later life. His avoidance of retirement, in this sense, could be seen as an adherence to narrative foreclosure (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011), supporting Westerhof et al.'s (2010) view that the identity development of older adults and their openness to change is useful to study in relation to their life stories.

Participants' stories varied regarding how they experienced the retirement process. Peter, Rosie and Barry's stories reflected similarities in narrative direction, whereas Tanya, Tom, and Daniel presented an exception to this. The summarised stories of each participant in this chapter provide background details relevant to the interpretation of the findings presented in chapters 5 and 6.

The following two chapters focus upon how types of stories impacted upon retirement transitions, the key features of these stories and the role played by interactions with nature within them, in terms of form (chapter 5) and in terms of content (chapter 6).





## **Chapter Five: Holistic Form Analysis of Retirement Narratives**

By performing a holistic form analysis of participants' stories, I found that retirement did not represent the happy-ever-after narrative of a fairytale. Rather, I defined three narrative types of retirement stories: *contemporality*, *individualistic*, and *relational*. The narrative of decline was also present within all of the participants' stories. In what follows, I discuss each narrative type in relation to how participants experienced retirement, and highlight the role of nature where relevant.

### **5.1 Contemporality Narrative**

*'Life is poorer when you press ahead.*

*Not paying heed to where you are instead'*

(Daniel, stage three interview)

Temporality was central to how participants' perceptions of time shaped their experiences. For one participant in particular - Daniel - a particular type of temporality shaped his story of retirement. Specifically, this involved what I have termed a *contemporality* narrative, where the focus was on *living in the present* (see Roberts, 1999). Those who tell this narrative could be described as immediate selves living in a linear 'flow of nows' (see Brockmeier, 2000, p.62). As such, the contemporality narrative reflects a linear story of life as exclusive of 'gaps, intersections, overlaps and anachronies like flashbacks and flash-forwards' (Brockmeier, 2000, p.63). The contemporality narrative became apparent within Daniel's retirement story around 18 months after he had retired.

Having storied his working life as full of 'doing', Daniel expected there to be nothing left to do in retirement, thus initiating a shift from 'doing' to 'being'. Primarily, his retirement involved leisure activities, when leisure activities are defined as:

'activities that are not work oriented or that do not involve life maintenance tasks such as housecleaning or sleeping. Leisure as activity encompasses the activities that we engage in for reasons as varied as relaxation, competition, or growth'.

(Hurd and Anderson, 2010, p.9)

He took part in meditation, yoga, and writing every day. Whilst meditation and yoga are related to states of 'being', his writing reflected an attempt to maintain 'doing'.

Specifically, Daniel wrote about parts of his past that he felt needed attention, such as memories that he had previously avoided. At times, when his writing was not going so well, he described a decreased sense of well-being wherein his problems became amplified, and being 'at the end of things rather than at the beginning of things'. He was living *the past as in the present* (Roberts, 1999). Eight months into retirement, however, his narrative orientation changed.

During our stage three interview, Daniel told me that he had recently experienced a heart attack. Following the attack, whilst lying in hospital, his sense of mortality was amplified. When he began to write again, he found that his sense of *temporality* had changed; rather than living the past in the present, he was living the present in the present and past in the past. This is illustrated in his comments below:

'I would find if I was writing...I'd be going back to that same stuff again. And I was kind of sick of it, actually. And what I've found is, that it's kind of lost it's, whatever power it had, it doesn't seem to be there anymore, in the same way. And I feel much more in the present now, than I had done before. And, I guess, I don't know, whether it's just something about the experience, that just at some deep level made me, just shifted something like, you know. That is in the past, that is gone, there's nothing you can do about it. For God's sake let it go... and be present, in the present. And, and that's not, as I said, that's not like me deciding it, that that should be so, it is what's just happened of itself, you know. And, and now I'm trying to understand it, or make sense of it. But that, but that's where I am, and I think I am much more in the present, than I was before.'

(Daniel, stage three interview)

Within eight months of retiring, then, Daniel had become more focused on the present, reflecting a contemporality narrative. From here on, his leisure

activities in retirement were more akin to those defined by Phoenix and Sparkes' (2009), as follows:

'being leisurely involves having the time to take one's time, and accordingly feel as though one could live in and enjoy the present rather than race towards a future or dwell extensively on the past' (p.230)

Within this, Daniel's *interaction with nature* seemed to facilitate a focus on 'being'. As illustrated by his comments below, one reason he was able to achieve this focus was by having adequate financial resources:

'It's like being fully alive and aware in the present...And, and living that, living at the present moment. And in a sense, there's nothing, there isn't anything to do. I guess that's it. It's like for me now, there isn't anything to do. I just need to be. I'm in that fortunate position where, you know, I've got enough to, to live on.... And those were those moments of, kind of, oneness with nature. So, when you actually lose your sense of self almost, and just merge with the, the universe, as it were. And, so that can happen, it very often is provoked by nature, by being out somewhere lovely, on a lovely day. But it can come at other times, in other ways and just, it's just the kind of feeling of peaceful companion with the moment'

(Daniel, stage three interview)

As such, whilst interactions with nature can represent a low-cost tool for enhancing health and well-being (see Maller et al., 2006; Wheeler et al., 2015), the potential to enhance an individual's well-being may depend upon their personal circumstances. Indeed, during retirement, financial security enabled participants to focus on the present whilst interacting with nature, in contrast to financial worries causing decreased well-being in retirement (see Knoll, 2011; Chiesl, 2014). This was also apparent for Barry, who, similar to Daniel, storied his interactions with nature during retirement as a time to focus on being (for example, considering his stance on spirituality). Significantly, his story was absent of any financial talk, apart from two instances where he mentioned that he had sponsored a local musical event, thus highlighting his lack of concern regarding finances.

Nature afforded apt conditions to focus on being present, therefore facilitating mindfulness. Engaging with nature, then, has the potential to enhance health and well-being in similar ways to that of mindfulness (such as decreased stress, increased resilience, increased self-awareness, and

enhanced emotional states, see Brown and Ryan, 2003; Senders et al., 2014). This is particularly relevant to the late life transitional process of retirement, given the likelihood that retirement will incorporate stress, unexpected circumstances, deflated emotional states, and necessitate an enhanced sense of self-awareness due to the loss of identity associated with work. Enhanced self-awareness in particular can enable a sense of autonomy during retirement. For Mark, Peter, Tanya, and Barry, autonomy was key to their well-being during retirement, framed by an individualistic narrative.

## 5.2 Individualistic Narrative

An *individualistic* narrative is common within Western society, and featured strongly in stories of retirement that were autonomous and self-driven. In this sense the individualistic narrative has masculine connotations and is commonly told by males who adhere to typically masculine identity (Eakin, 1999). It presents half of a gendered binary of narrated identity (the other being a more indecisive, relational narrative, see section 5.3). One female participant (Tanya) in this study, however, told her retirement story in an individualistic way, thus blurring this boundary.

Stories guided by the individualistic narrative featured resilience as key to ageing well. This was exemplified by Mark, who identified himself as a 'self-made man' who pushed his limits and did not allow himself to be 'beaten'. He storied retirement as an inability to work and as a symbolic acceptance of the narrative of decline. As such, his resilient self encouraged him to continue working in later life. In addition, being decisive and autonomous was central to the stories guided by the individualistic narrative. Tom's story, for example, illuminated 'being directive' as the most defining aspect of his identity. His story of childhood represented a stable narrative direction where he was directed by others. During adolescence, he started to learn how to be directive in response to an experience at school that limited his ability to reach his potential. Here, his narrative shifted from stable to regressive. As an adult, he had learnt to not do exactly as he was told but instead he took control of the direction of his life, reflected by a progressive story. This was evident in his interviews; he

requested to read the interview guide prior to beginning each interview and took opportunities to ask me questions throughout. Both interviews were over 4 hours long.

His directive self was also related to the activities he enjoyed during retirement and his interaction with nature. He particularly liked taking his boat out in 'the open countryside and the open sea shore'. The sense of space gained from open environments allowed him to feel like he could make his own decisions when in those environments.

Barry also told stories of being decisive. He described himself as an argumentative, self-driven person who questioned authority. He had a self-regulatory focus, whereby he decided upon his own goals and motivated himself to achieve those goals (see Feldman and Beehr, 2011). For him, the individualistic narrative was beneficial for retirement, as it encouraged him to focus on what he wanted to achieve, and to make decisions as to what he would dedicate his time to when it was no longer consumed by work.

For Peter, an individualistic narrative was strengthened by particular turning points. As Adler and McAdams (2007) noted, turning points depict moments deemed important by the narrator. Peter's turning points were going bankrupt, which preceded a stressful and chaotic period of change with no set direction, followed by graduating from university. These events had a progressive impact upon the direction of his story, illustrated by the graphical representation that I drew in my research journal whilst analysing his transcripts (see figure 19).

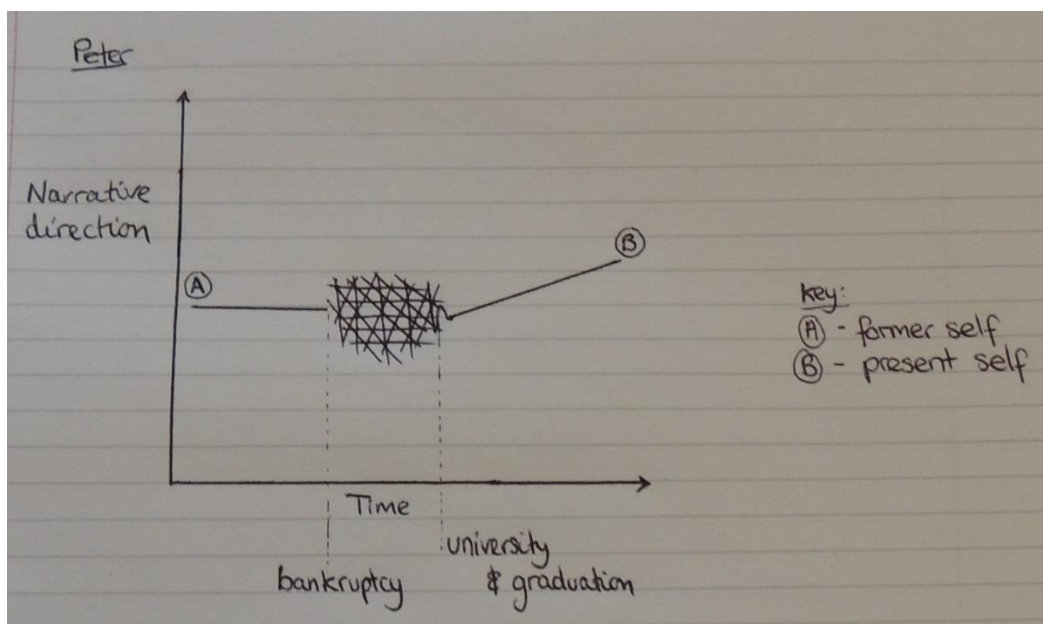


Figure 19: Holistic Form Analysis of Peter's Interview Data

Peter's decisiveness was necessary in order to create a coherent narrative through a period of transition. During this time, he purposefully interacted with nature, which he related to various aspects of well-being, as illustrated in the following comments:

'just to get outdoors is relaxing. When I was very stressed when we were going through bankruptcy, I used to walk quite a bit through woodland, I used to find that quite relaxing. Takes your mind off it as there's so much to see...I used to spend quite a bit of time outdoors. It's just sort of a relaxing environment. I find that far better for you to do that than drive off somewhere or go somewhere indoors. Go out into the woods, there's always something new, or on the beach...it's just so variable. I think it's because, if you can go on the same walk, you can walk across a beach and it's never the same... There's always something different there's always things to see...It's just the variation I think, not that constant. Whereas...if you go for a walk in London, well once you've done it, if you went back the next day, apart from a couple of trees that won't have changed very much it's nothing. Same buildings. I find that not rewarding whereas a walk on the same beach hundreds of times - it's always different'

(Peter, stage one interview)

Interestingly, when experiencing changes in his own life (during transitions), Peter sought out places of nature that were always changing. This provided him with a sense of relaxation, perhaps acting as a reminder that change can

be interesting and fulfilling. As such, places of nature played a part in the process of re-storying his life.

For Peter, a satisfactory life, and ageing well, must include variation and change. He perceived retirement to represent a time where life ‘straightens out’ – something he did not find attractive. This translated to a narrative of stable shape (see figure 20). When compared to the progressive shape of his self-drawn well-being timeline (in chapter 4, section 4.1) these graphs clearly show the difference of narrative direction, which is supportive of his decision not to retire. If he did retire, perhaps the regular interaction with places of change, such as natural environments, could help to give shape to his predicted straightened out life.

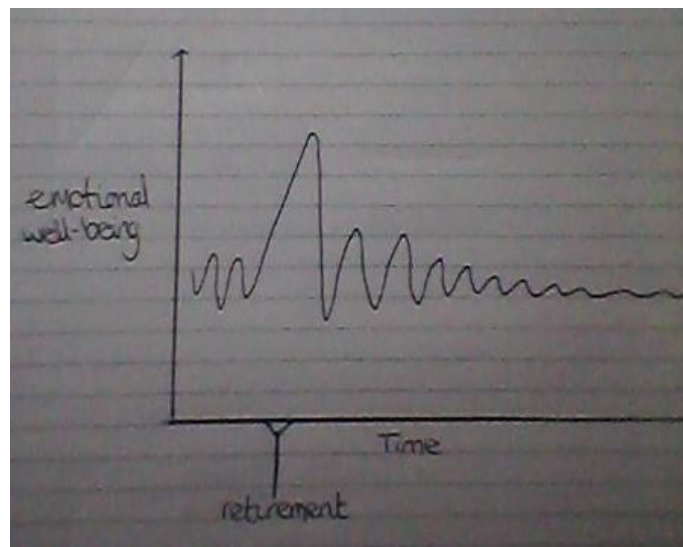


Figure 20: Journal Extract: Graphical Representation of Retirement for Peter

Creating coherence was also important for Barry’s decisive self-driven story, guided by the individualistic narrative. His interactions with nature afforded him the space to create coherence during times of change. As such, interacting with nature was also important for Barry when he experienced challenges in his life, as illustrated in the following comments:

“there’s obviously some kind of connection there...the environment is just allowing thoughts to emerge...one of the poems I’ve written, talked about how when walking on mountains I found that usually coming off the back of the mountain, I would find that I would – because this was when I was looking after a lot of AIDS patients, who tended to die – while I was walking off the back of the mountain...I would always be metaphorically burying my patient, the patients that had died under my care. And it was a sort of way of processing, it was really interesting and, you know, it was very surprising. I didn’t seek to do it; I just found that was what was happening in my head...I think sometimes we need different spaces to think differently...you go to a different place because it helps you to think differently and I think sometimes we use the environment to do that...that sense of a wider perspective and the seascape is always changing and you can see so much further... the physical sense of perspective gives you a sense of metaphorical perspective. And I’ve found that when dealing with bigger issues that happen. Being in that sort of place, I feel I can get perspective on things that have been bothering me or things that I haven’t processed. So I think that sense of space is very important’

(Barry, stage two interview)

Tanya appreciated space in a slightly different way. Away from the social attention of her working life, retirement provided Tanya with the space to tell a more individualistic story and gain more control over her life. Indeed, once retired, Tanya considered that feeling a sense of control over her retirement transition and dedicating time to herself was beneficial for her well-being, as exemplified by her comments below:

“I think when I decided to be positive about leaving I felt better because I was taking control. And then it’s been pretty good I would say. I’m quite a reserved person, I wouldn’t like to say everything’s ecstatic, you know...I suppose it’s having had quite a tempestuous marriage, I would rather function on an even keel emotionally rather than have all these ups and downs, so I’ve kind of aimed for being calm and being in control I suppose.”

(Tanya, stage two interview)

Having divorced her then-husband over 15 years prior to retirement and being a single woman from then on, Tanya already lived an individualistic life to an extent. In retirement, having changed her married name back to her previous name, the individualistic narrative strengthened:



'I've been continuing my involvement with the wildlife trust and other things that I do so, I'm pretty busy. In fact, I'm just amazed really at how much every day there are things to be done. I've not been at a loose end at all. But I think I was careful before I left, to make sure I had got plenty going on in my life, especially being single. And you know I've changed my name. It was my married name and I'd been divorced for 17 years, but I just didn't want to go through the public thing at school...it just seemed the right time to do that, you know. Get my own identity back really, be somebody different again.'

(Tanya, stage two interview)

Tanya's comments also indicate how relationships can impact upon an individual's sense of self and the expectations that they form regarding transitions, thus highlighting the importance of situating experience in context (see Grenier, 2012). The notion that identity is constructed through the relation to the chosen other is typically feminine and, in this sense, contrasts the individualistic narrative. Benjamin (1988) has argued that, as autonomy is dependent on recognition of independence from the other, all forms of identity are relational, and neither autonomous nor relational lives are better or worse than the other.

### **5.3 Relational Narrative**

As Eakin (1999) has made clear, identities are always formed in relation to the other. A relational narrative, then, is an inevitable framework for any story of identity. It is useful, however, to distinguish a relational narrative when key others have 'decisive impact' upon the author. In this study, the key others that had impact within participants' stories were parents, friends, and partners. The identity and life story of a parent is often key to how their child identifies themselves. For example, Steedman (1986) made the case that her mother's personality and lifestyle shaped her own. In this study, for Rosie and Barry, fathers played a supportive role in their stories of self. Ellie, who never knew what her mother looked like, drew upon her father's story when commenting on aspects of herself that she valued. Daniel, however, learnt valuable lessons of self by avoiding his father's lifestyle. In Tom and Peter's stories, the characteristics of their mothers were related to their own sense of self.

For Rosie and Ellie, the relational narrative was particularly dominant, evidenced by their use of the plural personal pronoun *we*, rather than the singular *I*, even when questioned specifically about themselves. Unusual stories about their family relationships in childhood played a key role in how they approached retirement. Both of these participants placed particular value upon close relationships to family in relation to ageing well and having satisfactory retirements. In childhood, they both experienced a traumatic separation from parents, albeit under different circumstances (see Rosie's Story, and Ellie's Story, chapter 4). The hurt they felt translated into a caring attitude in later life, representing what Linley and Joseph (2004) refer to as adversarial growth.

Joseph and Butler (2010) refer to Nietzsche's dictum '*what doesn't kill me makes me stronger*' when explaining positive reactions to adversity, highlighting a progressive narrative. For Rosie and Ellie, adverse events encouraged altruistic attitudes. As such, helping others, caring for family members, and being in a close, caring, personal relationship were salient characteristics of well-being during retirement, guided by a relational narrative.

Denzel's story also featured a positive reaction to adversity, carried a feminine tone, and was guided by a relational narrative. Like Tanya, his story acted to blur the gendered binary of typical ways to story identity. In his stage two interview, Denzel told me a story about his friend – another Cornish farmer - who had recently been given up work due to poor health. The implications of this were tragic, and acted to reinforce the relational narrative guiding Denzel's story, as well as his decision to continue to work in later life.

'When he had the big tractor accident on the A30 he had arthritis, rheumatism set in and he just couldn't go on no longer. No. He had a lovely wife, Sarah, she come home from work, seen his car outside up there. She went in and there he was floating round in the water, in the pool...There's a great big pool over up there, pool of water. Helluva size. He jumped in there and committed suicide, 'cause he couldn't do nothin'. Poor old buggar couldn't do none...Helluva shock for poor old maid really, yeah. But, wasn't a small pool, was helluva pool...When all we boys, when we was single, 'bout 16 and 17, we used to go up there swimmin', you know. Wrap an old car tube round your waist so you wouldn't sink (laughs). Many a time we thought, if we didn't do that, one of us could be drowned. T'int like a little pool so deep as a door like, hell no, 'bout 30 foot of water. But

poor old John went in there and ended it all in there. 'Cause he got to the end, he couldn't do no more. No. He was so devoted to the farm he was buried on the farm. 'Cause the bungalow was 'ere, and his graves up there over the wall up there. That was his last wish. Yeah. But people do do it, dunnem. They get so depressed and that, that's one thing with goin' on workin'. You got somethin' that keeps your mind up all the time! If you weren't workin' you'd think well, you know, t'int no good goin' on like this, might as well end it.'

(Denzel, stage two interview)

Being and remaining active were crucial for Denzel's sense of well-being, as well as being socially active by helping others. In this way, Havighurst's (1961) activity theory of ageing was supported by Denzel's story and the relational narrative that framed it.

The relational aspects of Cathy's story were structured around the needs of others. She referred to retirement as a positive time where she could be 'free' and relaxed, a time she looked forward to. The hairdressing job she retired from involved helping others, however, and her relational narrative revealed that she defined herself by her ability to do so. For example, when reflecting on her job, she emphasised altruism:

'I'm not a 'me person'...my main aim was to look at their hairstyles and say, yeah, I'm pleased with that...I would give my time, and effort really, to try to help people. And if I can't help them, then I...feel I've failed them, you know?...I'm more content when somebody needs me, when I'm needed...it's my nature to help anybody'

(Cathy, stage one interview)

Retirement, therefore, represented a conflict with her sense of self, and the altruistic characteristics that she described as being the most important feature of her well-being. This contradiction suggests that her description of retirement as 'free' reflected more of her culture than her genuine self, which is more apparent in the structure of her stories. As such, her data illustrated that analysis of form can be more revealing of an individual's identity in comparison to analysis of content.

Over a year after retiring, Cathy's story had not changed much, and a relational narrative remained. Despite this, Cathy's focus had shifted slightly from the other to the self since retiring, which enabled her to

dedicate more time to improving her physical health. Overall, however, this had an adverse effect on her well-being, made clear by her powerful statement:

'My purpose for getting up in the morning has gone.'

(Cathy, stage two interview)

This was because purpose, for Cathy, meant achieving by way of helping others. This was crucial for her sense of well-being. As such, all of her life – until retirement - had been guided by a relational narrative. The lack of achievement she felt in retirement meant that the importance of her life began to fade. The bright light shone by the cultural ideal of having a laid back and relaxed retirement can leave a loss of urgency, achievement and purpose in the shadows.

Indeed, not being needed by others and not having to structure her time around them, Cathy believed that her days went faster in retirement. Having the space to make her own decisions about when to do day to day tasks created a lack of urgency. She described retirement as a 'stealer of time'. This had implications for her ageing self, as it acted to amplify the narrative of ageing as decline, thus highlighting her own mortality.

The majority of Cathy's retirement story was pessimistic in tone, regressive in shape, and as a researcher I found it difficult to hear. She spoke of retirement as something she was pressured into doing due to her age and health, yet it certainly didn't translate into a life she wanted to live. Re-reading the transcripts, I longingly searched for something that brought a sense of purpose to her life. I found it when reading about her leisure activities (described as 'luxury time' spent interacting with other people), and when she spoke about nature, both of which brought a relational narrative back into focus.

Interacting with nature, for Cathy, was about being reminded of living things. The role of nature within her story supports the biophilia hypothesis, which states that human beings have an affinity with all that is living. Cathy fantasised about how the relational features of nature, in particular green space, could bring purpose to her retired life:

'I have a sort of fantasy thought I suppose really, of looking out on a farm, looking out and seeing the cows down there and whatever else is over there then I've got my bit here which is like a little duck pond. And two or three chickens. Little house on the prairie! (laughs)...I like the green myself...I like animals. I like new life. I mean, I like (..) caring...I think to see your cattle having their calves and things like that, baby chickens, lambs. I think ooh, new life...I like being surrounded by live things more than dead buildings. I like live things. If I had my way I'd have half a dozen dogs and three thousand cats..the need in my life, the purpose in my life, is to sort out your need...I like being needed.'

(Cathy, stage two interview)

Having grown up near the sea, blue space also had relevance for her relational self in that it fostered a sense of belonging. As a consequence, interacting with blue space enhanced her sense of well-being. To illustrate this, I have (re)presented her interview data in poetic form below:

The sea is a thing that no-one can take away, no-one can build on it.  
It's part of my inheritance  
The sea is there for everybody  
It's a life-giver  
just look at the sea and the sea is never still. There's so much life  
It makes me feel that things are going to be on-going when I'm gone  
And I get this sudden sense of belonging  
I'm not afraid of dying

I think nature would give you pleasure, if you let it.  
Depends where your environment is and what you want it to do for you  
If you embrace it, you can always get something from nature.

You need to be around life to feel alive.  
You hear the birds singing, your mood is lifted.  
Looking at my window, I can see life.  
Seeing life helps keep you alive.  
We've got such a fear of a dying and disease that that can dominate your mind  
Don't waste your life.  
Embrace every day.

(Cathy, post-retirement interviews)

The impact of interacting with green and blue space were particularly salient during Cathy's retirement because they acted to replenish aspects of her relational self that she had previously maintained by working. Perhaps those

whose stories are dominated by a relational narrative would benefit in retirement by giving to nature, such as volunteering on a farm with animals, as this could potentially feed their need to care for the other, whilst also providing other benefits such as relaxation from aesthetically interesting environments, and a feeling of serenity from places of nature that are absent of people and people-related stress triggers, such as noise (see Kaplan, 1995).

In addition to reasons related to the biophilia hypothesis, nature has the potential to benefit individuals who are reminded of their own mortality, as well as individuals experiencing a transition that emerges from loss (such as those who are retired), because *nature itself tells a story of transition and continuity that can create a sense of belonging and sustain relational selves*.

This notion emerged from Barry's retirement story. Almost two years after retiring, as part of a sense making process, Barry related the seasonal transitions inherent in nature to lived transitions, specifically those inherent in retirement, and the final transition: from life to death. Barry regarded the seasons as a performance of transitions; an ever changing environment that reflected the cycle of life. He related Autumn and Winter to the process of death, which he regarded as necessary to allow for new life to aspire in the form of Spring and Summer. He communicated this with a poem he presented as a biographical object within his stage two interview:

#### Seasons

The procession of our seasons carries us forward afresh,  
And transfigures the dark and the brief.

The unfurling leaves of our spring  
Encode our own sure transience in the cycle of creation.

The confidence of summer's growth allows a myth of permanence,  
Fuelling the cycles of our love.

Burnished, we prepare to transmute this – our flourishing,  
To free us for the cycle of earth's renewing.

For the seeming-deaths in winter  
Are truly the transfigured lives...  
Resilient, transcendent, and ineffable.

(Barry, stage two interview)

In the context of retirement, getting older, and perhaps the nature of his medical career as a doctor, the idea of death was brought to the fore. Barry's conceptualisation of the seasons highlighted death as a necessary part of life; death does not necessarily equate with cessation. Whilst the seasonal transitions of nature incorporated loss, it was never without growth and new beginnings. By relating the inevitable transitions of the seasons to life course transitions, Barry recognised that transitions are an integral part of existence and conceived of death as something not to be feared, but rather to be lived with.

In this sense, associating nature with ageing can challenge the narrative of decline. Rather than fight the ageing process in an effort to avoid decline, decline can instead be re-interpreted as part of life that is necessary, that loss is a part of life's journey, and that beauty can be found in that.

#### **5.4 Summary**

Performing a holistic form analysis was useful as it illuminated defining features of participants' self-identities as well as their culture. Similar to Jonsson et al.'s (2000) finding, this study found that while narratives play a role in shaping the direction of individual lives, they also interweave with and change directions as a result of ongoing life events and experiences.

Three narrative types were prominent: contemporality, individualistic, and relational. Stories guided by the contemporality narrative focused on living in the present, which had beneficial implications for facing physical challenges, perceptions of ageing, and a sense of well-being. The individualistic narrative was present in stories told by male participants, with Tanya's story being the only exception. Here, a focus on autonomy, decisiveness, and control were distinctive features of self and impacted upon how retirement was experienced. In contrast, the relational narrative was a dominant feature of the stories told by the female participants in this study, as well the male participants, albeit in less obvious ways (however, Denzel was an exception to this). Retirement worked well with the relational narrative if relationships with significant others were accessible. For one participant in particular, retirement meant that access to

others was severely limited in comparison to her working life. This presented a struggle and loss of purpose. Significantly, nature provided some relief from this. Indeed, places of nature played a role in stories that countered the meta-narrative of decline, thus helping people to re-write the later chapters of their life stories in progressive directions.

The following chapter focuses the content of retirement stories in relation to participants sense of self, as well as their physical activity, health and well-being.



## **Chapter Six: Holistic Content Analysis of Retirement Stories**

Retirement transitions can disrupt a sense of continuity and the flow of time. At such junctures, as illuminated by Bochner (1997), coherence becomes a human need that involves the re-telling and re-storying of how life was, and how life is. This re-structuring is a process achieved over time.

Participants' stories of this process highlighted the importance of *doing* and *being* for health and well-being during retirement and in later life. More specifically, a sense of productivity by way of physical activities, volunteering, and a sense of variety were central in terms of *doing* retirement. *Being* in retirement related to participants' need to recover genuine aspects of the self, such as other-relatedness, creativity, and spirituality. Indeed, a sense of self (being) that was congruent with actions (doing) attributed to greater coherence in retirement. This was particularly significant for participants who no longer actively identified with careers that they once found consuming.

Interactions with nature acted as a platform that supported *doing* and *being* during retirement in various ways, depending on individual circumstances. Within key themes that emerged from participants' stories, this chapter discusses the ways in which experiences of retirement related to interactions with nature, and the implications this had for health and well-being over time.

### **6.1 Dedicating Time**

Participants expected their perception of time to change when they retired. Shipp and Fried (2014) note that perceptions of time are contextually bound, in that they are informed by clock time as well as socio-cultural time-related norms, whilst also being a personal process whereby an individual has choice in how they perceive time. Pre-retirement (working) lives consisted of repetitive, cyclical, and predictable routines, wherein time was perceived as fast-paced and devoted to others. This echoed Brockmeier's (2000) notion of *cyclical* and *pressured* time, whereby individuals' lives revolve around patterns and repetitive routines and time is dedicated to others. In contrast, time was

expected to 'slow down' in retirement. For some, this acted to create a space which could be filled with activities that satisfied the self. For Cathy, however, a slower pace was not desirable:

'everything with hairdressing is that you watch the clock. If you've got a 9 o'clock appointment, 9 o'clock you've got to be there...you're constantly... everything's by the clock. You start by the clock, you work by the clock right through the day...Retirement, it's a much more slower pace, a much more relaxed pace, a much more do what you want when you want to do it pace. And if you like that, that's great! But if you don't want to be that sort of slow, you know, you can lose your purpose. You've got to have a purpose for, well I don't know about each day but you've got to have a purpose for each week. In that, let's do so-and-so, we ought to get that this week, or whatever the case may be. But um...I don't feel I've got a purpose. I (...) I don't feel that I've got a purpose. Whereas I did have. And I think that's got to have been one of the major factors, my purpose has gone. My purpose for getting up in the morning has gone.'

(Cathy, stage two interview)

Similar to Jonsson et al.'s (1997) findings, perceptions of time throughout the retirement process were related to how each individual associated meanings of their past with the anticipated trajectory of their future.

Living in cyclical time can be beneficial in providing a sense of purpose, yet it can also inhibit a sense of agency and consequently cause distress (Marchand et al., 2005). This was exemplified by the following excerpt from Barry's story:

'I was ridiculously busy, working. I had to sort of protect my leisure time otherwise it was going a bit pear shaped. Um, but it was all about being a doctor...all of this was ridiculously busy, ridiculously long hours and I just did it. I was clinically busy, I was academically busy...the nature of my job has been such that, um, I haven't had the time or the choices to be able to put in work-life balance...I've a wife and four children, they're now grown up...So, um, and they're all very intense and, you know, I've tried to be there as much as I can when circumstances have allowed. We spend time on holidays and we have protected time at weekends...I'm very conscious that the bit that's not work is small, I protect it and it's precious.'

(Barry, stage one interview)

After retiring, Barry found that his perception of time had changed, as well as how he felt in himself, which was beneficial for his well-being:

'it's very different. It feels much more open-ended, there seems much more of it, which is an obvious thing to say. (...) It's the sense of not being on sort of tram lines, with everything determined – you've got to do this, you've got to do that, or you've got to get through this by the end of the day or, yeah...A sense of, well I can prioritise things and I can decide what to do. I'm trying to get into some routines...I needed to have some sort of pattern of how I'd use my time...the great thing is the flexibility and it's so relaxing! If I don't feel like something today, then I'll just do it tomorrow. That's part of that sort of freedom that's seems to relax you...And you know, if there was a crisis...I can drop things...that gives me a sense that it's not all free-floating and unstructured, which I don't think I would cope very well with...quite often, if I need to pick up something from the shops, I will walk to the local town which is about 10 minutes away, whereas previously I would have taken a car. Quite ridiculous that I did that, but it's an indication of the mindset I got into, time pressure at the end...everything has a rough location, but it's wonderfully flexible. And I think that's my perception of how time has changed, so it is still structured but it's loose. It's very much at my behest but it's not lacking in structure. That feels very good.'

(Barry, stage two interview)

Barry's comments illustrate that changes in perception of time can affect an individual's sense of control, the structure of their everyday life, and the amount of relaxation they feel.

Tanya's pre-retirement story followed a similar tone to Barry's when she described her working routine:

'I get into work about half 7 in the morning and I don't get home 'til, sometimes if it's parents evening it could be, 8, 9 at night...there's just no time or energy left to go out and do things outside yourself, except weekends...I used to go to exercise classes regularly, but now I really don't feel like I have the energy when I come in and, there's housework and gardening to face as well...if I went, I just wouldn't be able to function the next day, I'd be too tired. So I do feel a bit resentful sometimes that my job always seems to intrude on things I'd like to do... But my mother, for the last 15 years you know until she died, I've been visiting her at weekends and, I think as a daughter more is expected of you than perhaps a son, you know, so I've not really been able to indulge much, you know I've stopped doing, leading wildlife walks and that kind of thing for the Trust, you know, or doing much of that myself because I just haven't

got the time. So uh, and I've got a granddaughter now, and obviously I want to spend time with her so, yeah, cuts into the time...I hope to sort of make use of free time to do it....I hope to be flexible enough to sort of think oh well it's a nice day I'll go and walk this stretch of the coast path, if I feel like it. Um, I want to do more in my own house and garden and a big quilting project in mind, and I'm going on a bread making course"

(Tanya, stage one interview)

As with Barry's situation, Tanya felt that any time for herself was restricted to non-working (weekend) time where she could 'indulge' in activities that she enjoyed. A potential implication of experiencing pressured time, therefore, is that it can result in self-neglect, whereby time dedicated to the self becomes rare. In contrast to Barry, however, pressured time was carried over to Tanya's weekends when she spent them caring for her mother and granddaughter. The performance of a feminine gender role attributed to this, as Tanya believed that a care-giving behaviour was expected of her as a woman (see Finch and Groves 1983).

Having lived a life that was intertwined with environmental activities, it was interesting to hear Tanya regard gardening as something 'to face', and then contradict this by hoping to do more gardening in retirement. This change in tone illuminates how pressured time can restrict access to enjoyable activities.

As a self-employed hairdresser, Cathy's job involved regular interaction with clients. She found pressured time to be rewarding because it satisfied her sense of self:

'my priority in life is to be a good person. To be a good person. To be a good wife, be a good homemaker, be a good sister, be a good adult so that I can give, you know. My priority is to make people happy. To do what I can to make their life happier, you know? My priority, for *me* - haven't got one. It's all for everybody else...I don't think that I'll ever become first. But I'm hoping that I will come in a close second! (laughs) You know? But I don't think I'll ever be first. But having more time in the day [in retirement] would give me time to sort-of perhaps do what I want to do to me as well. But yeah. I'd like to be in there somewhere, but I certainly won't, I'm not a first-person. I won't be all "me, me, I want this"...The last fortnight was sad really... they'd be coming in with cards and little presents and, you know,

it was sad. I found it difficult to accept...I found it very difficult to accept.'

(Cathy, stage one interview)

Whereas Barry and Tanya's perception of time associated with work led to distress, supporting Marchand et al.'s (2005) findings, Cathy's story challenged this notion. She was content with the pressured time that accompanied work and found it difficult to accept the disconnection with others that occurred with retirement. Indeed, the detachment from caring roles following the transition to retirement was significant for both Cathy and Barry. A poem written by Barry and presented as a biographical object in his stage two interview exemplifies this:

*Letting Go*

Continuity – the physician's link  
To the person, to story, to meaning.  
A companion and guide on their journey  
Across the mountain ranges of illness.

Gathering the next, I was wiser from the last,  
But my pack grew heavier with each spirit.  
So it wasn't my back, my heart, my mind...  
More an accumulation in my soul.

I'm afraid that I'm going to retire soon.  
Neck broken, no longer roped to this guide.  
They must retell – regain trust and meaning.  
She, unprepared, was direct:  
"You bastard!"

(Barry, stage two interview)

These findings provide information regarding how *altruistic* working lifestyles relate to how individuals may experience retirement. Chou (1998, p. 195) defines altruism as 'voluntary, intentional behavior that benefits another and that is not motivated by the expectation of external rewards or avoidance of externally produced punishments'. Deriving satisfaction from helping can enhance and maintain a sense of well-being (Post, 2005). Retirement can provide opportunities to practice altruistic activities and can, therefore, 'serve as a kind of rejuvenating cure' when it comes to a reduced sense of well-being (Tornstam, 2011, p.166). However, having a sense of agency is posited by

Third Age theories as the most important aspect of a satisfactory retirement and later life (see Carr and Komp, 2011). Scholars such as Helgeson (1994) have argued that both are essential for optimal well-being, and that detrimental effects occur when one exists in the absence of the other.

Barry's role as a medical doctor meant that he spent his working life caring for others. He welcomed retirement as he wanted to dedicate more time to himself and his family. Cathy, however, did not want to change the way she dedicated her time as she felt that it was part of her identity to help others and not herself. This gave her a sense of purpose which is a crucial aspect of well-being.

Five other participants in this study – Tom, Ellie, Peter, Mark and Denzel – also described dedicating time to others as a key aspect of their self-identity and as salient for their well-being. In retirement, Tom and Ellie's altruistic tendencies were practiced through voluntary work, social activities, and spending time with others such as family members. These activities were salient in order to maintain a continuity of self.

The majority of participants looked forward to having time that they could dedicate to themselves in retirement. Time dedicated to the self represented an opportunity to *do* more activities that contributed to a sense of purpose, which is crucial for well-being. Tanya, Daniel, and Peter's stories highlighted the importance of creating to a new, semi-structured lifestyle in retirement in order to maintain a sense of well-being:

'I think I'm going to have to have a structure, because otherwise I'm going to possibly feel quite depressed, you know, that I wake up and there's nothing to get dressed for, you know, um 'cause I live on my own as well. Um, so I sort of think I'll give myself a bit of a summer holiday, and then I will have a routine and go to, I hope to go to an exercise class or two. Um, maybe go swimming once a week or something like that you know have some sort of structure.'

(Tanya, stage one interview)

“that's what I plan to do when I retire is like, have a proper working week where I'm writing, and do it like a nine to five... I'd really like to write a novel because I, when I was young, I tried, I started three or four and never finished them... I'll at least do a minimum of three full

days writing a week. So then I have a new purpose, I have a new sense of self. I'm a writer. That's fine. That's what I'm doing, that's what I do. And uh, yes that's my next incarnation."

(Daniel, stage one interview)

"when you come to retirement, you have to have a plan and I'm not the best of planners but you got to say to yourself you've got to *do*, you can't just sit down and do nothing. You've got to have a plan about what you're going to do, how you're going to cope with this time...you've got to make sure that you've structured, you've got some sort of plan that you've got to, sort of, not get into 'I'm not doing anything' routine because it's absolutely fatal."

(Peter, stage one interview)

Participants who expected to have more control and choice in retirement regarding how they spent their time, in that retirement would allow them to dedicate more time to themselves, planned to take part in specific activities. Associating enhanced autonomy with retirement accompanied a desire to maximise time in retirement and 'get the most out of life'. Maximising time 'involves making the most of the here and now' (Phoenix et al., 2007). For participants in this study, 'the most' was gained from productive and meaningful activities, which were identified when a genuine sense of self was recognised.

## 6.2 Recognising Genuine Selves

Being in paid employment is often highly valued in terms of self-worth and plays a central role in identity formation (Barnes and Parry, 2003). Retirement, therefore, can be accompanied by a change in self-identity (see Jonsson et al., 2001; Kim and Moen, 2001; Nuttman-Schwarz, 2004). When retirement represents time dedicated to the self, self-awareness is salient if individuals are to make the most of that time. This is particularly so for individuals whose sense of self was applied to their work. For these individuals, not having a job to identify with prompted a re-cognition of self. This involved continuity and re-claiming past selves, as well as change and discovering new ways of being. Knowing the genuine self is not a given, and requires reflexivity and a

willingness to recognise past experiences and how they have shaped the sense of present self, and how this attributes to anticipated future selves (Rogers et al., 1990). For those whose time had become so consumed by work and others that they had neglected parts of themselves, retirement can be a time of extensive identity work (Schau et al., 2009).

On a certain level, this resonates with Athens' (1995) theory of dramatic self-change. According to Athens, the introspection involved when individuals are faced with a situation that initiates a change in self-identity forces them to 'become divided against themselves' (Athens, 1995, p.574). As such, former selves become splintered in the process of dramatic self-change. This splintering can be painful, and is often difficult, as the negotiations involved in this process are likely to be emotionally challenging. This was evident from Barry's story:

"[retirement] was, a sort of, a bit of a, a brutal separation from things that I'd done and loved for ages, and felt very fulfilled by, I thought it was the only way of making a clean break...that loss of role, or roles, or activities, then became a set of issues around loss of identity, cause you, you know, you lose, you, you no longer do things. And if people define you by what you do, and you no longer do it, who are you, sort of thing? And whether that's other people observing or you think it about yourself. So, I think, in so far as we define ourselves by what we do, and we depend upon the doing things for the articulation of who we are, but also the process of expressing that inner being, that doing it can become a, a dependency, if you like. And then when it's taken away, the real questions about your identity as a being, because if you're no longer doing, well who are you? So, I think, a lot of people, whether it was a role at work or their roles, a particular figure in the family, or whatever it was, have felt very undermined by that. And it used to come up in different ways in conversations, in, in clinic. And, and I just found myself saying, you know, you do, you need to remember we're human beings, not human doings"

(Barry, stage three interview)

For Barry, a key part of incorporation was existentiality in terms of 'being' and 'doing'. Cathy's story of retirement also reflected a splintering of self in the an ontological context. It is not uncommon to conceive retirement as something of an existential crisis (see Malette and Oliver, 2006). Indeed, dramatic self-change can be ignited when individuals are faced with situations that



necessitate the assembly of 'new unified selves', placing said individuals in an 'existentially precarious' situation' (Athens, 1995, p.576).

Turner (1969) considered that former, present and future selves are negotiated as part of a self-developmental process during transitions, when individuals experience a state of *liminality* - a space of ambiguity or disorientation with potential for reinvention (Grenier, 2012). This notion was evident when Daniel reflected on his retirement during his stage two interview:

"I think it's been changeable...Actually it was hard, there was a lot of phases...So, it wasn't really 'til kind of January that, and not going into work, that there was a sense of something different...I'd given retirement thought, so I had kind of prepared for the idea that I might feel a loss of purpose, a loss of status, you know, these things that can affect you. Um, and initially it was ok, and I deliberately put in a kind of structure to my day that I was going to have. Which was, I'd still get up at a reasonable time like 8 'o clock...half an hours meditation, half an hours yoga, then get dressed and have breakfast and then go and write until lunchtime. So that was going to be the structure and I've stuck to that pretty well. And then you have the weekends free of that structure. So in a way it still feels like a working week. Nevertheless, there have been times when the writing has felt sludgy and like it wasn't going anywhere. And then I felt, kind of a bit low, and that's to do with the kind of sense of purposelessness, of being at the end of things rather than at the beginning of things. Tending to look back rather than look forwards."

(Daniel, stage two interview)

A state of liminality represents an unsettled time. Daniel's planned nine-to-five writing routine could be interpreted as an attempt to become settled and fill the potential lacuna of retirement by creating purpose and maintaining a sense of continuity. He further communicated his experience of liminality by way of a poem he wrote specifically for the purpose of this research project, presented at his stage two interview:

'...retired men in caps, full of empty purpose.'

Peter Temple

there is no purpose now, except to be:  
nothing to prove, nowhere to go,  
nor more striving to impress or improve;  
just sitting here at a wooden garden table,  
noticing the fly walking the terrace hand-rail,  
looking out over the bay to St Helen's in Tasmania,  
sand banks revealed by the falling tide,  
now occupied by pelicans in ostrich feathers  
and strap-on beaks.

I thought of you, what I would tell you  
about the first months of retirement,  
of freedom from alarm clocks and the 'park and ride';  
and what I feel is the stasis of a rubber duck  
caught in a tree root by the side of a stream.  
I think of writing and it can feel like empty purpose –  
this piece of stream is as rich as any other,  
and the cap simply shades my eyes from the sun.

(Daniel, stage two interview)

Whilst in a liminal state, a sense of purpose - and a consequent satisfaction with life - can be a complex, dynamic and diverse experience. Participants negotiated this state by reflecting upon what they had genuinely valued throughout their lives. For Daniel, and others, this involved interactions with nature.

Generally, participants reminisced about activities that provided them with enjoyment and satisfaction before work pressured their time. Such activities surfaced as performing music, writing poetry, physical activities, and spending time with significant others. According to Ricon et al., (2013, p.179) ‘the maintenance of familiar leisure activities into retirement...is a major characteristic of the post-retirement period in order to preserve and maintain existing individual and social identities’. For the purpose of this research, I have focused upon the instances where participants valued nature to the extent that they self-identified with it and considered interactions with nature to be meaningful during their retirement process and later lives.

### **6.3 Recognising Selves through Nature**

The participants that took part in this study were chosen for the particular reason that they already interacted with nature in some way. All participants had contact with places of nature as children, which led some to feel that nature was part of their genuine selves. Tang et al. (2014) noted that if people have a personal connection with nature, they are more likely to have enhanced experiences of nature. Their study utilised cause-and-effect techniques to establish relationships between experience and nature. Simply put, their methods involved showing pictures of natural landscapes to people, and recording their reaction to these pictures in a laboratory setting. In contrast, the methods I employed in this study allowed for ‘thick descriptions’ to be told as to why people engaged with nature. In this way, my findings do more than just support Tang et al.’s (2014) assertion, but, importantly, they add depth to the statement by way of further explanation, and, consequently, greater understanding.

In retirement, participants found that interacting with nature encompassed enjoyable activities that enhanced their sense of well-being, and, often as a by-product, increased their level of physical activity. One participant, Ellie, was not physically active in her interaction with nature. She told a relational narrative that emphasised the significance of others for her own well-being and as such, found satisfaction from watching her grandchildren enjoy nature.

Spending time in places of nature had an impact on participants' sense of well-being during the retirement process. Significantly, the type of natural environment that participants interacted with made a difference to how they felt. Crucially, for Barry, places of nature that resonated with his experiences of nature as a child were the most important, as he explained:

'what for me is important in the natural environment has undoubtedly had something to do with my childhood, growing up in the country. My schools were in the country and we tended to do a lot on the outside and it was appreciated at the time, but that was where I was. So it's part of my sort-of hard-wired vocabulary of where I am or where I feel comfortable. So when we moved to London and we looked at various sort-of concrete places within South London that we could afford, I just suddenly went, I can't live here because there aren't any leaves anywhere! So we found somewhere that was near-enough some sort of proper leaves.'

(Barry, stage two interview)

Daniel also related his preference of nature to his childhood experiences:

'I like getting somewhere nice and just sitting and reading or watching the world go by, particularly if it's got a sea view and see the boats and stuff...I suppose again this comes back to having had this from birth, yearly contact, with Cornwall, overlooking the beach...just cross the road and walk down the steps and you're on the beach. And, so I think it must inevitably have started there really, because it was a nice safe beach, did a lot of swimming there...also water in general, because the house where I grew up was on the river, so wherever I lived there was water.'

(Daniel, stage one interview)

For Daniel, blue space was particularly important. Places near water had more impact on his sense of well-being in comparison to places that did not include water. Such 'healthy blue spaces' are defined by Foley and Kistemann (2015, p. 2) as 'health-enabling places and spaces, where water is at the centre of a range of environments with identifiable potential for the promotion of human wellbeing'.

Further to this, an absence of others and, consequently, a lack of intrusion, were important for Daniel, Peter, Rosie, and Barry:

'the natural environment will be very important [during retirement] because I'll be able to get out to the sea again, and more open

countryside and beaches...It's much more peaceful...it's much more about space ...open air...walking in empty spaces”

(Daniel, stage one interview)

“to me the natural environment is somewhere where you can be relaxed without too many people there... Somewhere where you are away from noise. Somewhere where you can walk quietly and just be yourself I suppose, just relax. Anywhere where you can relax. And I think for me I find both coastal and woodland and rivers, I find them very relaxing environments, they are very natural.”

(Peter, stage one interview)

“it's not about where I am, it's more stimulated by that setting, and that physicality and not being bothered by stuff or things to do. You have a certain freedom in your head that there isn't a lot of other stuff to be bothering you...I think something about being in the environment is about an absence of intrusion as well as the presence of a setting which feels very comfortable.”

(Barry, stage two interview)

Barry's comments illustrate that his interaction with nature enabled him to explore a new sense of purpose and discover new ways of being. Rosie told a similar story. She described being in nature on a spiritual level, noting that '*it creates, it generates - re-generates - re-invigorates*'. As such, she storied interacting with nature as beneficial for her physical health as well as her mental health, the latter of which she considered to be most important, as illustrated in her comments below:

“[nature] improves my mood, it's sort of as important as food, you know, it's just important, very important for a wholesome healthy life, for me. Healthy in mind and in body. Definitely healthy in mind, definitely healthy in body because you're being physical you're outside and it's, you know that's just improving you physically but it also does the same in a very similar way to your mind. It's um, clearing your mind of any sort of rubbish that you might have attached or whatever problems, little problems that there are. Just to sort of put things into perspective, it improves your feeling of being well.”

(Rosie, stage one interview)

This example illustrates that places of nature were useful for participants who wanted to attain clarity of thought. More specifically, for Rosie and Barry, nature provided a platform for physical activity which acted as a catalyst for

contemplation and reflexivity during the retirement process. In turn, places of nature were useful during retirement by facilitating desired states of being in a time of uncertainty.

Absence within places of nature were useful in recognising selves as they presented a setting within which participants, such as Rosie and Daniel, could re-connect with their body, thoughts, and overall sense of (well-)being. This was rooted in the senses:

“it is quite personal...communing with nature (laughs) awful lot of clichés coming out, but you know, the reason for going say, on the water in your canoe or on a walk up the mountain, is to be immersed in, probably my reasons for not wanting to swim in a swimming pool say it all. You’re there to be immersed in that environment and the chatter and sociability of going in a group, although that’s perfectly fine, I’m not being critical of that at all, isn’t what I do it for. So I think probably if you just think about what swimming in a swimming pool means compared to swimming in that lake for example in the Alps, you couldn’t have two more different experiences. And it’s the solitary, well...I wouldn’t want to join a club in order to go cycling in a group or walking up a mountain in a group or canoeing in a group it would just be such a different experience. So it’s the need to be immersed in the environment, that’s the point and that’s what’s beneficial about it.”

(Rosie, stage one interview)

For Rosie, being *immersed* in nature was the most significant part of her interaction with regards to enhancing well-being. Specifically, Rosie enjoyed interacting with places of wild nature, which she described as places which were absent of others, and as such, reflected a kind of purity:

“we do like quiet and remoteness and not to always have... neither of us are city folk and I’m definitely not a city person... I don’t much like swimming pools though I love swimming in the sea, lakes, rivers so um, it’s something to do with the proximity of too many other people (laughs)...That is a pure experience. It’s a good experience. And it contributes to you... it’s part of your makeup.’

(Rosie, stage two interview)

This contrasts Koole and Van den Berg’s (2004) view that individuals are most comfortable when their environment is controlled, managed, and secure – the opposite of wild nature. Being immersed in nature in such a way that the

individual feels connected to nature is relevant to the theory of embedment, exemplified by Daniel's comments:

"The senses, the feel of the fresh air, both on your skin and in your lungs, and the feel of the sun on you. And the scents. And the sounds, you become alive in your senses. I think quite often you can get caught up in thoughts. So I think it's relaxing into being. You're alive, a part of being, not locked up in your own thoughts or problems or pains. It's almost like you are everything around you...that sense of a circle of energy between the sun, and me, and the beach, and the sea and the sun again. It's a kind of connectedness."

(Daniel, stage two interview)

Within these environments, immersion was often related to being completely surrounded by water. Indeed, water featured as a significant feature of natural environments in Daniel's story:

'I would much rather be by the sea than inland... I like getting somewhere nice and just sitting and reading or watching the world go by, particularly if it's got a sea view and see the boats and stuff...I suppose again this comes back to having had this from birth, yearly contact with...the beach. And, so I think it must inevitably have started there really, because it was a nice safe beach, did a lot of swimming there...and of course, also water in general because the house where I grew up was on the river, so wherever I lived there was water...it always felt a bit unusual to be somewhere where there wasn't water. And I think as I got older, I think the sea had a double edged thing you know, it's a bit like the unconscious. There's something that takes you into a place which is different from your normal conscious reality as it were, and uh, so much going on under the surface of the sea, but, and what's really curious, I think part of that is having a father who never spent any time engaging with me in doing things...nobody ever showed me, when I was young, how to use the water'

(Daniel, stage one interview)

A shallow explanation of why this is might be to say that Daniel preferred water or 'blue spaces' because he wanted to repeat the enjoyable experiences of childhood. On a deeper level, however, Daniel implied that the sea represented an unexplored, curious territory, which drew him in with fascination – an aspect of nature that Kaplan (1995) argues to be part of the attention restoration theory.

Ellie's story contrasted this. For her, being immersed in wild water, such as lakes (or any water in which she felt a lack of control) was detrimental to her state of mind and sense of well-being. Her love of water was instead practiced in swimming pools, and places where her feet could touch the ground. She explained that this was due to a childhood experience:

'I only found that out a few years before my dad died. Um, I was actually almost drowned when I was about two. I was playing by the sea and apparently this wave came and took me and there were rocks...My dad said if it wasn't for a fisherman being there I'd be gone. He grabbed my foot, and as he grabbed me I went under again and gone...my dad said I had quite a bruised foot. I don't remember anything about it. And I never knew until a few years ago before my dad died. I said to him 'dad' I said 'what is it' I said 'that in my childhood we used to be by the river...why is it I was always getting out of the water? And he said 'oh' he said 'it's because you were nearly drowned, if it wasn't for that fisherman we'd never see you again'...And one thing that we, I am looking forward to retirement and being in here is that probably about once a week or so we're going to go to the swimming pools so I can make a right fool of myself (laughs) and see if I can conquer the swimming bit...Be nice to keep exercised, you know, something to look forward to.'

(Ellie, stage one interview)

For Barry, Rosie, and Ellie, places of nature meant more than somewhere to be physically active, albeit in different ways. Nature was a place that was intertwined with their self-identities. For Rosie in particular, nature was a place in which she could reach a 'pure' level of experience, something that no other environment could provide, as she commented: 'the natural environment is a place to be, it's not just a place to get healthy'.

These findings relate to three of Foley and Kistemann's (2015) themes regarding how health can be enabled in blue space: *embodiment*, *inter-subjectivity*, and *activity*. Defining moments of self – whether in the form of childhood memories or as those discovered in periods of reflection – can impact upon the meanings attributed to interactions with nature. By considering these moments when examining the relationships between nature and well-being, this finding adds to previous literature that has tended to focus upon descriptions, rather than meanings, of particular types of interaction with nature (Keniger et al., 2013).



This resonates with Kaye et al.'s (2003) view that productive ageing should incorporate both the external societal contributions made by individuals as well as the internal effects of an individual's thoughts and actions (for example, subjective well-being and sense of self). It is crucial to acknowledge internal processes, as the ability to self-manage can have a significant impact upon subjective health and well-being (see Huber et al., 2011; Ciarrochi and Mayer, 2013). By representing internal productivity, rather than economic or work related productivity, this finding adds to the understanding of what productive ageing narratives can mean (see Bass and Caro, 2001).

Tanya's interactions with nature during retirement had intellectual purpose, albeit in a slightly different way to Barry. For her, activities in nature provided an opportunity to continue practicing her intellectual interests:

"I've got involved with the transition group in the village, which is about sustainability and conservation...It's refreshing to find something intellectually challenging...This year we're going to get away from rock pool rambles...and run a shore lab...educate people...to be involved with groups outside rather than just retreating into your own home and family life and that sort of thing...And the intellectual stimulation...that's why I'm doing these other things, to keep me interested in the subject. And I volunteer at the biological records unit once a week. So I'm doing some pretty low grade stuff, just logging bird records. Just gone over eight thousand records I think. But, being in that environment again, you're up with the current sort of, what's going on, and there are a lot of training courses you can go on"

(Tanya, stage three interview)

This was particularly meaningful to her given her previous career and personal interests. Throughout my interviews with Tanya, it became increasingly apparent to me that an intellectual status was important to her sense of self, and that she took pride in her education and interests. To quite a large extent, her conservation and other nature-involved activities fulfilled her intellectual needs in retirement. Tanya's environmental activities were relevant for her sense of a satisfactory performance of her desired identity, and, therefore, her sense of well-being.

As noted by O'Brien (1981) and van Solinge and Henkens (2008), the number of activities individuals engage in is strongly related to retirement satisfaction. Participants' stories implied, however, that the *quality* of the activity being done was crucial to the satisfaction gained from doing it. Quality, in this sense, referred to how much an individual could personally relate to the activity, thus reflecting how much it meant to them and the value they attributed to it.

Places of nature can provide more than a space in which people can take part in activities and social interaction that provides 'relief from daily routines, sustenance for people's sense of community, [and] opportunities for sustaining bonding ties or making bridges' (Cattell et al., 2008, p.544); they can provide intellectually stimulating foundations from which to learn from and develop self-identities. Implications of this could lead to the inclusion of nature-based activities within active and productive ageing policies that promote lifelong learning (see Boulton-Lewis and Tam, 2012).

#### **6.4 Variety as Essential for Ageing Well**

The variety of natural environments presented another way in which nature was perceived as stimulating for participants. Variety was considered as a key characteristic of well-being and living 'the good life', and, as such, new experiences were sought out by participants in order to enhance well-being.

For the older workers that chose not to retire, work was viewed as an activity that prolonged the inclusion of variety in their lives. This was especially so in relation to social interaction, whereby work was a vehicle which led them to meet new and different people, whilst keeping them 'up to date' with changes in society, thus maintaining an interest in life.

"Variety is the spice of life; if you can't get variety you don't enjoy it anymore, after a while. Adapt and it works"

(Mark, stage one interview)

"It's just so variable. I think it's because, if you can go on the same walk, you can walk across a beach and it's never the same. The

tide's somewhere different, the waves are different, the weather's different, the scenery is different"

(Peter, stage one interview)

The biophilia hypothesis (Wilson, 2003) states that individuals are naturally connected with movement and life, which provides a reason as to why participants valued the variety of natural environments.

Participants expected both retirement and their interactions with nature to incorporate change. Barry, for example, felt a sense of connection to nature when he was in a position to appreciate the changes within it:

"it feels very comfortable and relaxing and I enjoy being in those environments and walk pretty fast...you can enjoy the changes in the environment if you're going at a better pace. We once went, years ago, cycling...I remember thinking cycling...was very comfortable...the environment that we went through was changing at a rate which you could enjoy but you were close enough to it to be a part of it. In a car, you go too fast and you're sort-of disconnected from it, but if you're walking, it didn't seem to change so much. Whereas actually now I'm finding that certainly the environments I go in, it is changing enough to be able to be get those different perspectives and notice change and yeah, it's really nice."

(Barry, stage two interview)

Similarly, Peter particularly enjoyed visiting different places of nature and going for walks with his partner. One reason why Peter continued to work was that he wanted to be able to afford to travel to places of nature. This was illuminated by his biographical object (figure 21), as his comments below reflect:

"It's a set of van keys to a Volkswagen T5 camper van. And the reason that, just after my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, I thought we need to have something to look forward to, something to plan. So I went out and bought a camper van, for several reasons. One, it gives us much more flexibility, but it actually forces us to use it to do other things, which is what I was interested in. You know, going out for the day, going camping for weekends, getting out. Which it sometimes, it's easy not to get out, you know. It's easier to sort-of just, well, but you can take this like a snail you can take your home on your back and you can go away...So this was a way of maximising our short-term getting out potential. Whether it's going locally to Cardinham Woods and going for a walk and picnicking back there, or off to Hayle, Gwithian, park on top of the beach. Whatever the weather's like, you can sit in the back,

cook something up, you can have a great time...It's been great. It's made us do more exercise. It's made us focus on not just hanging around at weekends... It's made quite a bit of difference to my well-being."

(Peter, stage two interview)



Figure 21: Peter's Biographical Object

For Peter, variety was important for ageing well:

"Ageing is a very strange thing, very strange thing. I think if you don't adopt change, if you don't move and do different things, I think you find change then almost impossible to cope with... you've got to just make sure there's change all the time. Different places, different routes, different walks... you just need to stay...as active as you can, mentally and physically...adopting new ideas, learning new things if you can do it...the oldest man, 114?...and he always adopted new things, always changed...you have to realise that you're not going to live forever... you just need to stay...as active as you can, mentally and physically. And ...certainly the adopting new ideas, learning new things if you can do it... Perhaps that's the key, variety"

(Peter, stage one interview)

The notion of variety for ageing well is supported by the activity theory of ageing (Havighurst, 1961), Third Age theories (Moen, 2011). Denzel also

believed that his well-being was founded on a life full of variety, especially in terms of his day to day activities:

“It’s about having something different to do. When they [my brothers] were up clay works they’d have their job and that was that. ‘Twas nice, ‘twas good money I know but, just boring to think you had to carry sand from this pit to another pit all day long, week in, week out. You know, t’int nothing very interesting, no... I prefer doin’ farm work all the time really. ‘Tis more interestin’ innut, really. There’s always piles of stuff to do, can pass away hours down there doin’ it, rather than be home bored sittin’ down doin’ nothin’. ‘Tis variety of jobs innut. One day you do this job, another day you do another job.”

(Denzel, stage two interview)

Tom found that retirement gave him the time to incorporate variety, which involved voluntary activities:

“I bore easily so I don’t like doing repetitive things and keep doing them, so I’m always looking for something new. What’s today, Friday, tomorrow I’m going to the lifeboat station because I am going, I’m volunteering to help the lifeboats”

(Tom, stage one interview)

Indeed, the natural environment was salient for facilitating new activities in Tom’s retirement, as illustrated below:

‘Jo: How has the natural environment featured in your retirement?

Tom: I don’t know what I would have done. I mean I do know people who retire, paint their house or move and do the house up, buy a new car, do a few National Trust houses and then go back to work because they’re bored. And uh, I would never do that because I’ve been able to change my life completely by getting out into the open air and doing what I want and finding new things to do. It’s not only the environment but it’s the fact that there are interesting things out there in it...I am learning bits about fish, birds, snakes and rabbits and things, and it’s all interesting but that’s the way I point. If I didn’t do that, I don’t know what I would do.’

(Tom, stage one interview)

As a constant source of variety, however subtle, places of nature enhanced participants’ sense of well-being. Seascapes in particular were noted for their continuous movements. By maintaining the interest of individuals and providing participants with a sense of variety needed in order to feel that they were intellectually stimulated, this finding supports the Attention Restoration Theory.

### 6.5 Physical Health, Heightened Existential Awareness, and Accepting Mortality

At some point during the retirement process, participants' stories were associated with loss and ageing as decline. Specifically, a sense of mortality was heightened by retirement, in relation to significant others. Death was closer to their conscience now than at any other time of their lives. Perceptions of time became precious, limited, and decreased. This was apparent in the way Daniel storied his perception of ageing, eight months into his retirement process.

Similar to Phoenix and Sparkes' (2009) findings, Daniel's story of ageing was relationally constructed by way of past experiences. Specifically, he storied his own life – and death - in relation to his family, as illustrated in his comments below:

'You start off in a nuclear family, in my case, mother father and three elder siblings. My father and my mother died, Thomas died, Charlotte died, Nick has died, I'm the last of that nuclear family...So that's a curious one, because it's like, nobody else knows your story in the way they did. So it's like the witnesses to your life...they were there at the start. They know more than you do in a sense, can tell you what you were like (laughs). Or things you don't know, things you're confused about in your family. So they're gone, so of course that means, or I felt, a kind of exposure. It's like, suddenly well, that leaves me, I'm next in line. So you, it made me...feel older or nearer to death because I'm the youngest - well they'll all be going before you are in a sense, you don't worry about it, it's not your turn. Then suddenly, oh, yes.'

(Daniel, stage two interview)

His family members played a significant role in his own life story, as they knew parts of his story – in the form of memories and perceptions - that he could not get at by himself. Their death did not just represent a loss of life, but a loss of *life story*. As such, this loss impacted upon Daniel's sense of self, leaving him feeling 'nearer to death'.

Interactions with nature encouraged a different attitude than the one described above. For Daniel, the contemporality narrative guiding his story incorporated an acceptance of the here and now. When applied to the subject of ageing, contemporality acted to counter the narrative of decline and enhance an acceptance of ageing, heightened by features of nature:

'when the weather's fine and the sun is shining and there's that feeling of Spring in the air, that helps. That's nice. Life feels good and you can live in the moment. Um, so it's something about accepting where I am. It's something about not wishing to be younger again...the time is my own. I can do, pretty much, what I want, when I want, how I want, um and that's lovely and there are good things'

(Daniel, stage two interview)

This was also apparent when other participants spoke about how they were reminded of *life* rather than death when interacting with nature. As such, when participants reflected on what nature meant to them, and incorporated this into their attitudes to life, they spoke more positively about perceptions of ageing. For example, Mark contrasted nature with urban environments and related this to his attitude to ageing:

'So the environment does have some effect on you, and it's nice to be able to stand and look for miles around and think this is great, this is what I'm here for, as we did yesterday standing on top of the beacon. And just as we got to the top the clouds came in, we couldn't see a bloody thing! But as we came down the clouds drifted away so, yeah. It was, it's invigorating, makes you feel better...I prefer running in the countryside. These coastal paths are just brilliant for running on...when I was in Abu Dhabi, I used to run through the city to get to the coast and then I could run in the fresh sea air. Um yeah, so by and large I prefer to run in the countryside... I think the perception of old is doddering around and wearing a flat hat and a walking stick and like when you're in town and you're in a hurry, and all these people are getting in your way, those are the people that are old. And so long as I'm capable of over taking them, I don't think I'm old...Physical and mental. If you mentally feel young then I think that helps your physical ability to stay young, all through your central nervous system. If that's switched on then you'll stay physically capable and with it your brain mentally active, as well. And you don't feel like retiring...I think possibly living in a city and growing old would be more difficult, you'd probably grow old quicker'

(Mark, stage one interview)

Further to this, the subject of physical health was central to the construction of newly retired lifestyles. Participants felt that physical activity was something they should dedicate more time to in retirement for both personal and social reasons. Significantly, the natural environment played a key role in facilitating physical activity in later life.

Stathi et al. (2002) have noted that physical activity in particular can improve attitude to life, and help avoid stress in later life. Barry's data is supportive of this in the context of retirement, as shown below:

"it [physical activity] really didn't change significantly before I retired because of the constraints of time. So now, it's gone up a lot...I started doing more walking...more than I would've expected to be doing...I've just loved it!...feeling good physically allows me to feel better in other ways. So I think it's more a wider sense of well-being that comes from feeling physically fitter...some of the sense of well-being happened before I started doing that, and that was about being able to let go, and some of it has definitely come with that. So the physical activities have helped well-being and vice versa. *Mens sana in corpore sano* and all that! ...at least a part of the improvement in well-being is related to being physically active and to be engaged with the environment. The 'why' I think is about the things we discussed earlier; those to some extent allow issues to happen, to go well beyond the physical, literal aspects of the physical activity or the particulars of the natural environment. Those things liberate a much wider sense of possibilities for identity and personhood and so-on. Um, but I would say that they are a significant factor in allowing that to be possible."

(Barry, stage two interview)

Similar to Peterson et al. (2005), participants in this study found that a pleasurable, meaningful engagement with activities contributed to a fulfilling and satisfying life. For example, Denzel's outdoor work as a Cornish farmer involved working with the changing and developing natural environment. Aesthetic features of nature played a role in the satisfaction that Denzel gained from his work, as his comments below exemplify:

"If you go out and plough the field, make it look nice, you got more pride in your work haven't ee, really...If you do a good job you can look back over and say oh I done that. Like sowing the seeds out and it's come up lovely and even, the grounds rolled down properly, you get more pride in that than if you went out down clayworks,



carrying sand from this pit to that pit. There's no pride in that is there? Not really. But farm work there is see. Yeah. And if you dug a big stone hedge in or anything like that, you know, once it's done you go back over it, it look proper really. I done that up just going up where Marylin got the goats there. Old trees, we pulled out the old trees and I built it up with stone and did a very respectable job of it really. Just the same as it is out in the field. You go out and build a nice hedge and it looks better and it's there for a long time innut, really. Yeah...If I'm doing, if I'm out ploughing a field, I like to do it properly...I ain't one of they things where you go in and do half a job and that'll be it, I like to see it done proper...You're satisfied with what you do every day. Mm. No I feel like if I was home just really, muckin' around, you know, when you'm home muckin' around you think well, I wish I was down there doin' something now instead of home here doin' nothin' like, sort of thing."

(Denzel, stage two interview)

For Denzel, the aesthetic qualities of working in places of nature provided him with a sense of pride, accomplishment, and achievement. This is supportive of the activity theory which 'posits that the maintenance of activity is critical to high levels of life satisfaction in old age' (Putnam, 2002, p.800). A focus on meaningful activities could benefit *healthy workplace* programmes, whereby a programme of activities is incorporated into the workplace to reduce stress and maintain the health and well-being of workers (see Grawitch et al., 2006, 2007; Conn et al., 2009). By ensuring the programme consists of activities that are meaningful to participants, likelihood that activities will lead to enhanced well-being for workers is enhanced.

Within participants' stories of physical health, the narrative of decline was present, particularly when they talked about how they felt about their bodies. Participants' spoke of not having long left to experience, and also not having long left to be fit and healthy enough to experience activities they found enjoyable. As such, physical health acted as a trigger for retirement.

Cathy's working lifestyle had implications for her physical health which prompted her early retirement. The practicalities of her job as a hairdresser meant that she 'never sat down'. As her comments below indicate, this amounted to her having poor health:

“From morning ‘til night I stood, which has really messed up me legs now... I got three ulcers on my legs, so that’s not good sign at the minute. I’m a diabetic now, which is not helping. And I was very poorly there in September, beginning of September. And I was off work with sickness in one thing or another, and I just felt the time was right. But I wouldn’t leave them in the lurch – I wouldn’t just finish so I said to them I’d finish in Christmas so then they had time to sort themselves out, you know. So yeah, the time was right, the age was there and the time was right.”

(Cathy, stage two interview)

These comments indicate that chronological and socially constructed meanings of age, the state of her physical health, and the situation of others to whom she was associated contributed to Cathy’s decision to retire.

Whilst experiencing retirement transitions, participants became more accepting of loss (and death) and more motivated to gain (and live). As Furman (2007, p.3) noted, ‘Facing death, each day can become an urgent quest towards self discovery and revelation. Dread occurs when the reality of death is present, yet is feared deeply as one avoids the call of death: to live each day as fully as possible’. Mullan (1992) observed that, at the core of existentialism, each individual must come to terms with developing his or her own personal mission and purpose. Questioning why and how we exist in this way can lead us to consider the future, and ultimately, death. Furman (2007) reflects on this notion, which led him to ‘accept the things I have, appreciate the connections between myself and others, and also accept how tenuous life really is. I am very privileged, and very lucky’ (p.4). Interestingly, the majority of participants noted how they felt ‘lucky’ or ‘fortunate’ during the transitional process of retirement. The process of re-configuration seemed to heighten participants’ existential awareness and increase their acceptance of mortality. It seemed that the space created by retirement is one in which individuals can accept ‘how tenuous life really is’, and therefore appreciate and enjoy living, and not fear the future, as promoted by the narrative of decline. In addition, by finding and interpreting new selves, retirement opens up an existential space in which individuals can be reflexive and construct a greater understanding of themselves, and how they can live, and age, well.

Rosie seemed to reflect a sense of urgency when commenting on her physical health in relation to her retirement:

“[Health is] very important and that’s one reason why I’m retiring when I can, not because I think working is unhealthy but because I, you hit 60, all your children are, all your parents are gone, all four parents are gone now. We’ve seen our parents decline in old age and my father died at 69, all of, suddenly, it all seems extremely important that you are healthy enough to enjoy some time being free to do, free in a time sense, to do some of the things that you might not be able to do or have to squeeze into the working life. And being physically healthy is a big part of that because, well again the cliché, without you’re health you’ve not really got, you can’t do these things. And I do want to be physically able to continue to climb a Munro for example, I want to be able physically to canoe for eight hours and so it’s in order to do those things”

(Rosie, stage one interview)

This urgency is ignited by her reaching the age of 60, a milestone in her life course that reminds her of her parents decline in later life. These *relational stories of decline* are taken on board by Rosie, encouraging her to associate retirement (and retirement age) with a time wherein it is ‘extremely important that you are healthy’. Here, meanings of ageing and stories of relatives decline can act to anchor the influence that the narrative of decline has on the stories we tell and live by.

Rosie’s comments about having to ‘squeeze’ things into working life gives the impression that when working time is full, there is not much space left for physically healthy activities. Indeed, the majority of participants’ anticipated exercise to increase after they retired and told *strategic* health stories (Frank, 2006) that involved a strategy or plan to achieve a greater state of health. The pressure associated with ageing, health and decline seemed to come with a sense of *embodied time*, a ‘body clock’ where attention is diverted to ‘the time of the ‘inner programme’, the ‘genetic code’, which dictates the term of one’s life’ (Nowotny, 1994, p.59). In Rosie’s case, the little time that could be dedicated to physical activities came with a different sense of pressure – one more related to performance and ability, particularly of her husband:

“we often have to walk up a hill, and that can be a pressure actually. This sounds just silly but um, for example, the canoeing...I can do that for 8 hours in a day with absolutely no anxiety at all. However if I

knew that I had to climb a hill, a mountain, and the walk was going to take us 8 hours, I would get anxious. I would get um, I don't always want to do it and I would have some anxious moments before going and that's because it's, I don't know if I'm going to be able to make it. It's a very silly thing because I always do make it and I get very tired, um, I think it's probably because um, my husband, as I've said, he's getting round the Munros so he's off today and he'll do about three Munros and I can't do that. Physically I can't do that and just, I can do a certain amount but I can't do as well as he can...it does create an anxiety in me."

(Rosie, stage one interview)

Here, Rosie portrayed a sense of pressure in relation to bodily fitness, and the previous comments above indicate that this seemed to be driven by a fear of decline and an incline towards a Third Age lifestyle. The positive notion of the Third Age as a healthy, opportunistic way to live paradoxically contributed towards feelings of anxiety. This supports Jones and Higgs' (2010, p.1516) argument that, in later life, 'the will to health... becomes the normative 'ought' of ageing'. As such, this health consciousness might seem to prompt a positive way to live in later life, it can also be problematic as individuals strive to reach an undefined state of 'health' or 'fitness' and consequently try to 'attain the unattainable' (Jones and Higgs, 2010, p.1518).

For Rosie, the sense of pressure she felt from physical activities was also relational, as further illustrated below:

"everybody has health worries, don't they? And that does increase as you get older, but I don't... dwell on it. I don't dwell on it a lot...it does have a huge influence though – all of that – on why we're retired now and wanting to do so many things that we are doing and able and are wanting to do. While we can. While we're still fit enough and literally able and mentally able to...I'm not and never have been as fit as he is, and don't know if I worked at it whether I would get ... I don't know; the body's a machine isn't it. So I probably would. But I can sustain... let's talk about walking, for example because that's a specific thing. I can sustain long, long walks but going uphill I find much, much harder than he does and that's the pressure – it's that, that I will get tired and I will spoil it for everybody – you know, for us both – and yes, so in that sense, I should work much harder at getting fit! (laughs) But that's got to be something realistic, hasn't it? I'm just not – I don't have the same makeup; I don't have the need to... well, I might have the need, but I don't have the desire to be (...) constantly keeping myself at a pitch of fitness"

(Rosie, stage two interview)

Rosie's comment that the 'body is a machine' relates to the notion that it is possible to have control over our bodies, and that individuals have a responsibility for what their bodies can and cannot do. This can create a pressure to maintain levels of performance. In Rosie's case, this led to her feeling as though she was a burden to others.

Similar to Cathy, Barry's bodily awareness body was present at work yet remained in the background, which changed in retirement:

"I'm probably more conscious of it [my body]. Because I just didn't have time to think about it before. I'm not particularly conscious of it in one direction or another – other than being aware when I was overweight and would need to do something about it. I think the combination of losing some pounds and feeling physically fitter feels good, and feeling good physically allows me to feel better in other ways. So I think it's more a wider sense of well-being that comes from feeling physically fitter and not being quite so overweight. Rather than a strong sense of body image driving things - I'm too old and jaded to worry about body image."

(Barry, stage two interview)

This shadowed awareness echoes what Leder (1990) referred to as an *absent presence*. The shift in focus of time from other to self in retirement can be beneficial by enabling individuals to become more aware of their bodies. Underlying this increased awareness is the illumination of the narrative of decline through the taking on board of relational health stories. According to Leder (1990), bodily awareness can be heightened by experiences of illness. When *dys-* is understood as pertaining to the notion of '*hard, bad, unlucky*' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015b), the onset of illness can make the body *dys-*appear. In this sense, retirement encouraged bodies to *dys-*appear. It also seemed as though high-pressured and demanding jobs can promote working to excess and adhere to an unhealthy work ethic that backgrounds the body (Porter, 2004).

Stories about the poor health and death of significant others influenced participants decisions to retire, and also impacted upon what they expected of themselves during retirement. For Denzel, stories about his brother's death encouraged him to carry on working:

“so far I enjoy good health, but, I know I’m diabetic ‘cause when I found my brother dead under the tractor, the doctor said to me it was the shock that brought it out. ‘Cause there wasn’t no diabetes on our side before. So he said that’s what done it like you know. When, when he got killed with a tractor he um, well, I was just behind him and when the tractor tipped over, I got somebody with a digger to lift the tractor off like, and then I picked him up in me arms and I said what the hell’s he doing, and he just flaked out. Just squeezed me round the wrist like that and, gone. Yeh... If we had a safety frame when he went over like that the safety frame would have hit the ground, and he would still have had plenty of room to manoeuvre around. But he didn’t, ‘cause when he turned over like that the steering wheel crushed him right up here an’, he more or less died before I had chance to get him out like really. Mm. Yeh. So I thought, I’ll keep goin’ as long as I can... You know, when I go home like this evenin’, when I go in and have me tea, then after tea I go down, well, we got our fields and do a bit more like plantin’ beans and peas and all that sort of thing.”

(Denzel, stage one interview)

Witnessing the premature death of his brother encouraged Denzel to ‘keep going’ with his own life. For him, this meant continuing to be productive in his farming work and, therefore, not retiring.

Getting older and feeling the need to be healthy was also mentioned by Daniel. Daniel illustrated how retirement can act as a marker of getting older, and emphasise the narrative of decline:

“I think it’s a thing of getting older and the reality of people you know, relatives and friends suddenly being struck down, literally, just sort of ringing you up and saying we’ve got cancer and then dying...to have somebody who has always been there in your life, close to you for 60 plus years, and then suddenly gets ill out of nowhere and dies, it does make you very aware of your own mortality and shake your sense of security, that you can count on being here just because you’re feeling ok today, got 20 years to go, it’s like well, not necessarily... You know, so there’s a kind of fear, lurking, so any time I get an ache or a pain or I feel, where it’s like oh god what have I got, imagine the worst immediately, or can do. So, I don’t lead a very unhealthy life, as I said I know I can do more exercise and it would be good for me to do more... I am conscious of wanting to look after my health, yes, I am, very conscious of that. Much more than I would say I ever used to be.”

(Daniel, stage one interview)

Here, Daniel related his forthcoming retirement to health, decline and ageing. In a similar way to Rosie, he specifically mentions the age of 60, as though

chronology has symbolic significance for lifestyle and perceptions of health. Expecting to feel a certain way when we reach a certain number of years highlights the culturally constructed meanings applied to ageing (see Gullette, 2004).

A raised awareness of health, or health consciousness, was specifically related to expectations of retirement and was shaped by relational stories of poor health. These stories encouraged participants to retire at a certain age, plan physical activities in retirement, thus highlighting the *performativity* of stories. Taking these types of stories on board involved a temporal dimension, in that time was 'running out', creating the fear of 'missing out' in later life if time was not filled. This is exemplary of the Third Age narrative 'be active and productive whilst you are able'. Whilst promoting active lifestyles can be beneficial for older adults (Putnam, 2002), it can also create pressure constructed by a different sense of achievement/performance, placing more responsibility on the individual (see Jones and Higgs, 2010). Adams' (1995, p.54) comments describes this well:

'Recognizing time running out as our creation...enables us to review the mutual implication of time and health and gives us choice for action .... While birth-death and the rhythmic boundaries of the environment fundamentally entail becoming, clock time's invariable repetitions confront us with that which is irrevocably gone, with the relentless entropy of physical processes and with absolute finitude.'

Bringing the body back into focus can also have positive repercussions for health and well-being. Stories of other people's health, such as that of parents, can make an individual's body dys-appear, prompting a need for greater care of their body. This point is significant because dys-appearing bodies are rarely discussed in relation to healthful embodiment (Gimlin, 2006). Indeed, Leder's (1990) framework has been adopted almost exclusively by those interested in individuals' own experiences of illness and injury (for example, see Sparkes and Smith, 2008; Allen-Collinson, 2005).

Relating this notion to nature, environmental-psychologists Koole and Van den Berg (2004) argued that when people are confronted by 'situations with trigger death concerns' (such as 'hitting 60' in Rosie's case), they will distance

themselves from wild nature, wherein the scenery is perceived as highly uncontrollable and overwhelming. Rosie, however, sought relief from wild places of nature as they provided relief through a sense of solitude:

“I love man-made environments – that’s not the problem, but we need a sense of wildness as well, and the boat is fabulous for that... to get you to places you wouldn’t be able to get to without it, basically...It’s that, kind of...being able to experience a feeling of wildness and nature as it’s meant to be, and, it’s just some places in Scotland where you can touch on it being as it ‘should be’... to reach a mountain top or to get to some remote island via canoe and see what should be there because it’s untouched...people have just left it to be what it should be... So I can get from both of them, but I think if I had to choose then I would choose the wild environment, the natural environment – whatever’s considered to be an environment that’s not been affected too much by... like being managed. But it’s people, you know? It’s human beings. That’s what we do, isn’t it? We learn to manage our environment and that’s why we’ve been so successful at one reason, and I understand that and I don’t have a problem with it, but I do want to be able to access what I feel is close to wildness as possible.”

(Rosie, stage two interview)

Rosie’s choice of biographical objects were photographs of her spending time in wild environments (see figure 22 and 23). She described the photos as follows:

“The pictures show some of the things that we do, I do, and place of, a typical example of the sort of places that I like and would aim for. But it also had, why I particularly chose them was because of this: access to what is not entirely wildness, not entirely remoteness, but is fairly much as close as you can get to it now in our country... I would have liked to have got a picture with the wetsuits and the canoe and the bikes, and um, in the places that we’re in but I couldn’t. Again it’s access, and much as I worry about using a van for, you know, having to drive places, you know from an environment point of view, um, the van has enabled us to get places and do things. Now that we’ve got the time, now that I’m retired and not having to go to work we’ve got the time to do. Yeah, I think it just shows a little of what we can do, what I can do now.”

(Rosie, stage two interview)





Figure 22: Rosie's Boat



Figure 23: Rosie's Van

Rosie's interaction with nature was dependent upon the meanings she attached to it. This illustrates how interaction with nature can be dependent upon the meanings that individuals attach to it, and the stories individuals live by.

Particular places of nature, dependent upon an individual's relationship with nature and their childhood experiences, can enable access to deeper thoughts and feelings. Processing these thoughts and feelings can be beneficial to well-being by attributing to a more informed understanding of body-selves. This can be particularly useful during retirement transitions, when

individuals are forced to adapt to changes and potentially re-negotiate self-identities.

## 6.6 Summary

This chapter considered what was salient for participants' sense of self, health and well-being during the retirement process, noting what role nature played within this, if any. Nature played a role by way of activities, particularly physical activities. Participants' knowledge of their genuine selves was salient when recognising what activities were most valuable to them, and, therefore, the activities that would most likely contribute to a more satisfactory retirement. As such, they became more aware of what it meant to them to 'age well'.

Interactions with nature were identified as relevant to participants' genuine selves, and as such, activities in nature were perceived as enjoyable and contributed to well-being. In addition, nature provided a place wherein genuine selves could be re-awakened, involving both continuities and changes of self. Consequently, participants became more existentially aware during the retirement process, that is, more accepting of loss (and death) and more motivated to gain (and live). For some, nature acted as a reminder of life after loss, and attributed to a progressive view of ageing. Congruence between self and action was associated with a satisfactory retirement. This echoes Rogers' notion that living (and ageing) well is a continuous practice, rather than a state.

The following and final chapter concludes this thesis and summarises how the findings respond to the research questions, and the wider implications of this.

**Chapter Seven: Concluding Remarks**

Interactions with nature can attribute to well-being in cognitive, physiological, social and spiritual ways (Keniger et al., 2013). Previous research does not, however, go far beyond the descriptive and has tended to focus upon a specific type of benefit, a single discipline, or a particular type of interaction. As such, as Keniger et al. (2013) have noted, 'little is known about the mechanisms that are important for delivering these benefits and so key questions still remain.' (p. 930). This research not only supports findings of previous literature regarding how individuals can potentially benefit from interacting with nature, it also *adds* to knowledge by beginning to address the 'key questions' that examine what is important for each individual to benefit from nature. It has done so by taking a novel approach that allowed stories to be heard, with a specific focus upon the role of nature for well-being. In turn, this opened the door to nuances in the examination of why individuals interacted with nature and the potential benefits they perceived to have gained from that.

It was found that interactions with nature can be beneficial during the retirement process, depending upon how individuals identify with and attach meaning to nature. The aim of this thesis was to develop an understanding of the role played by places of nature during varied retirement transitions, and what implications this can have for older adults' identity, health and well-being. The emergent nature of this qualitative research led to the inclusion of older workers, which provided further insight into the key characteristics under study. Incorporating situational diversity allowed me to include another angle of interpretation regarding retirement decisions and what it can mean to age well. This was accomplished by way of a longitudinal investigation into older adults' lived experiences, which involved pluralistic methods of inquiry concerned with *why, when, where, and how* nature was engaged with throughout the retirement process.

This chapter provides concluding remarks by outlining the contributions made by this study. This involved clearly stating how each research question has been addressed, reflections on the use of pluralistic methods, implications

for policy and practice, limitations of the study, future directions, how judgment criteria were met, and finally, personal reflections.

## **7.1 Contributions: Addressing Research Questions**

### **7.1.1 RQ1: What role (if any) do interactions with nature play in older adults' experiences of the retirement process?**

A major finding from this study was that participants particularly enjoyed interacting with nature if the type of interaction resonated with their sense of self.

- For Peter, this meant trying new things and taking opportunities. Places of nature such as woodland or the beach provided him with new experiences every time.
- For Denzel, this meant being productive. By continuing to work as a farmer, he viewed his time spent in nature as productive. In his spare time, he would find an activity at home, such as attending to his vegetable patch in his garden.
- For Mark, this meant being able to be physically active. Running along the coast was how he enjoyed interacting with nature.
- For Rosie, this meant not feeling pressured to be a certain way, and instead to 'just be' and have a 'pure experience'. She felt this way when immersed in nature, for example, when she swam in isolated lakes, or spent time in wild nature.
- For Ellie, this meant seeing other people be happy. Watching her grandchildren play football in her garden represented how she enjoyed interacting with nature.
- For Cathy, this meant being able to perceive some sense of altruism. For her, watching animals graze in fields illuminated the care of nature, and the continuous life cycle that nature supported.
- For Tanya, this meant having the opportunity to apply academic knowledge and continue to develop her intellectual interests. She was

able to do so by taking part in conservation activities and volunteering for environmental awareness groups.

- For Barry, this meant being able to question things. Being in places of nature that provided vast landscapes allowed him to explore aspects of his developing self by questioning his own thoughts. Walking in such places gave him enough 'conceptual space' to do so.
- For Daniel, this meant being able to slow down and focus upon the present. He felt able to do so when he was in quiet places of nature, where he could allow his senses to connect with the environment.
- For Tom, this meant having the space and freedom to direct his own day, to make his own decisions. He felt able to do so in wide open spaces such as by the sea shore.

Each example of how nature played a role of nature in participants' lives is different, reflecting the diversity in the construction of meaning and the dependency upon individual circumstances. A commonality, however, was the overarching positive tone regarding older adults' interactions with nature.

When nature was relevant to participants' sense of self, interactions with nature represented some of the most enjoyable and meaningful ways to spend time in later life, and provided a sense of purpose in retirement. Enjoyable activities included interacting with nature, for example, gardening, allotments, walking along beach or in woods, watching birds, and looking out of their window at the view each day. The surroundings may elicit fascination and occupy attention, but the 'non-imposing' element allows unlimited focus on the self should this be necessary. In this way, places of nature can provide a useful platform from which to focus attention on the self as self-changes are experienced. According to biophilia hypothesis and the theory of embedment (Stevens, 2010), every human being can identify with nature, thus, interacting with nature can potentially help all older adults experiencing retirement to feel more in touch with themselves.

For some, being in places of nature enhanced body-self relationships. Existing research indicates that the more in touch we are with our sense of self, the more we are likely to care about how we feel and how we act (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Indeed, congruence with genuine selves was found to be important for

participants' well-being. As such, interactions with nature can facilitate well-being during ontologically disruptive retirement transitions.

A greater awareness of bodies encouraged some participants to participate in physical activities during retirement. Places of nature were often preferential environments for this, as spending time there often initiated and/or encouraged physical activity. Pre-retirement activities practiced in places of nature, such as walking, boating, and swimming in wilderness, were often returned to in retirement. Particular preferences for types of nature were relative to childhood experiences, at least in terms of the physical landscape, similar to Adevi and Grahn's (2012) findings. Unique to this study, however, is the depth of data and analysis in this context, and the subsequent ability to extend beyond descriptive results. For example, rather than retired consumers reflecting an increase in breadth and depth of identity-related consumption referred to as 'consumer identity renaissance' by Schau, Gilly, and Wolfinbarger (2009), identifying with nature in retirement was found to attribute to the continuation of lifelong aspects of identity and foster meaningful activities beneficial to the health and well-being of older adults.

As noted by Rowles (1983, p.114); 'Place becomes a landscape of memories, providing a sense of identity'. Engaging with places of nature that reflect familiarity can create a sense of belonging which can be appealing when going through a process of detachment, such as retirement. This supports the view held by authors such as Wang et al. (2011) and Fehr (2012) who argued that familiar connections can help people cope with the emotional stress brought on by transitions. Nature can also provide opportunity for relationships with others to develop through environmental activities, such as voluntary conservation groups.

The existential connections between nature and retirement were recognised in the form of a raised awareness of death, and the multiple meanings this held for individuals experiencing later life, comforted by transitions between seasons occurring in nature, and the transitions experienced during the human life course. Enhanced awareness of body-selves and existential elements of human-nature relationships can sustain reasons for living, which is imperative given that adults over the age of 65 (and

particularly those experiencing retirement) are likely to encounter a myriad of changes that may increase their risk of suicide (Westefeld, 2014; Kissane, 2006).

As many existentialists have recognised, nature is inherently associated with both life and death (see Goldenberg et al., 2000). My findings support existing literature concerned with human-nature relations and existentiality, and extend it by considering it within the context of retirement. A connection between the existential elements of retirement and the existential elements of nature emerged from the stories of participants who were experiencing the retirement process. Existing literature regarding human-nature relations illustrates that existentialism has a profound influence on people's interactions with nature. Existentialist theory states that, through our own consciousness, we create our own values and determine a meaning to our life. It is this consciousness that can be disrupted by retirement and rekindled by engaging with places of nature.

Findings support previous research that reports how health can be enhanced during retirement transitions by participation in physical, social, and intellectual activities (see Maddox, 1964; Atchley, 1971; Havighurst, 1987; Gauvin and Spence, 1996; Menec, 2003; Mein et al., 2005), as well as research that indicates that an engagement with nature can significantly enhance and restore aspects of health (see Ulrich, 1983; Wilson, 1984; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Guite et al., 2006; Thompson, 2007; Depledge et al., 2011).

In addition, some participants found that combining aesthetic features of natural environments and physical activities were important factors for reflexivity and an overall sense of well-being. For one participant in particular, Barry, the natural environment illuminated the embodied nature of the self. That is to say, the natural environment raised his awareness of his thoughts and feelings, which initiated a sense-making process relative to the changes he was experiencing throughout retirement.

Accordingly, as Cattell et al. (2008, p.551) note, 'environmental or aesthetic considerations are more likely to be important when they are seen to support activities deemed significant to well-being'. These findings extend previous research that relates the value of aesthetic features of nature (Ulrich,

1984; Brady, 2006), further illuminating the potential benefits of nature in relation to identities, health and well-being in later life.

The identification of narrative types that framed the stories participants told revealed that nature can facilitate the practice mindfulness, which is apt for those who want to focus on the present and live in the moment. Nature also provided the space for participants to perform their identities (see Butler, 1988). For example, if variation and change were important to a participant, they might seek places of nature that reflect variation in order to relax. If being self-driven and decisive was salient for a participant to be themselves, they might choose to spend time in places of nature that provided open space, away from others.

Participants' that told stories dominated by a relational narrative sought relationships and interactions with others during retirement in order to maintain relational selves. Places of nature acted as a potential relational resource that was supportive of the relational narrative, as they allow individuals to care for 'the other'. For example, volunteering on a farm with animals could potentially feed the need to care for the other, whilst also providing other benefits such as relaxation from aesthetically interesting environments (Kaplan, 1995).

### **7.1.2 RQ2: What can nature offer in aspirations to 'age well'?**

Findings support the argument that the WHO definition of health - which focuses upon a complete state of mental, physical, and social well-being as well as the absence of infirmity - is somewhat inadequate. The environmental model of health, with emphasis on an internal dimension that appreciates a sense of self, and Huber et al.'s (2011) re-definition of health as 'the ability to adapt and self manage in the face of social, physical, and emotional challenges' were found to be more relevant to subjective health and what it means to age well.

Health and well-being in later life is considered a salient area of research due to increasing longevity (Fésüs et al., 2008; ONS, 2012). When adaptation and self-management were considered as central features of health, being able to achieve good health became much more applicable to the older adults who participated in this study. For most, the willingness to accept change as progressive was pertinent for a



satisfactory retirement. For others, being close to significant others was illuminated as important. In both cases, individual circumstances and the context of experience were key to understanding.

It was found that associating nature with ageing can challenge the narrative of decline. Rather than fight the ageing process in an effort to avoid decline, decline can instead be re-interpreted as part of life that is necessary, that loss is a part of life's journey, and that beauty can be found in that. Furthermore, places of nature were discussed as supportive of older adults' lifestyles, especially in relation to how they made sense of ageing, and, in some cases, how they managed their dys-appearing bodies. This was crucial, given that the narrative of decline holds the ability to 'shape one's sense of future possibilities and ultimately threaten' an individual's entire life (Gimlin, 2006, p.703). The communication of alternative storylines to those associated with ageing and decline can benefit conceptual developments within gerontology regarding the notion of ageing well, and add to the current limited understanding of how the Third Age is experienced in everyday life (Rowles and Manning, 2011).

## **7.2 Reflections of Methods**

### **7.2.1 Reflections on Timelining**

Participants who completed timelining, such as Barry, found it to be useful, as illustrated in the following comments:

"I think it's a vehicle around which we can discuss lots of stuff – as we have...it does allow you to think about things...retro-fitting how one felt at a time when one might have been deceiving oneself as to how one felt. You're able to unpick some of those elements of self-deception and I think it's quite a useful tool."

(Barry, stage two interview)

Peter, Rosie and Barry were confident with timelining and drew their timelines prior to interview. Other participants, such as Tom and Tanya, were more dubious. Their reactions to timelining related to how they made sense of

the world, thus providing a greater insight into their sense of self. This was apparent before the timelines had even been drawn.

Jo: I would be interested if you could, kind of, visualise that for me, what we've been talking about. So, basically what I mean by that, is draw on this, kind of, timeline...

Tom: I see they, they, they mix together. You need, what's it called? Analysis of variance. Ever done that?

Jo: No I haven't done that.

Tom: That's fun. I've, I've done that in the real. You can get a computer program to do it, but I didn't trust the program, so I did it in the real. Got the same answer. After that I let the computer program do it. But the, the idea of analysis of variance, is where you've got several variables all, all going at once, affecting something. It might be affecting, in my case, the fuel consumption of a car. And you, and what, what analysis of variance can do, is to actually separate out the variables, so that you can see which ones are having what affect.

(Tom, stage two interview)

Tanya: So you want me to do some graphs do you?

Jo: Yeah, so all the letter said was some basic information about what this activity was, so that it wasn't completely new to you. They're just on that chair there (points)

Tanya: Oh yeah (picks them up). You know what I thought that was, I thought it was a blood drawing kit, and I thought, ooh, that's interesting!

Jo: No, that's not my area (laughs)

Tanya: Looking for endorphins or something

Jo: Um, yeah so my idea is to visualise what we've been talking about in a graphical sense, and then seeing what comes from that really.

Tanya: I think I'm going to be a terrible subject here...I've actually kind of shut out a lot, it's kind of in the past and if you asked what I was feeling in 2010 I'm not sure I could be very honest or accurate about how that was. But anyway, see how it goes...I'm a scientist, I'm sorry, there's no kind of scale and I find it hard to relate.

Jo: You can make your own scale, I mean these are yours and I'm interested in is your interpretation.

Tanya: Ok. Could I put a scale on it for my own sakes?

Jo: Of course

Tanya: Sorry. (laughs) It's just scientific training

(Tanya, stage two interview)

Tom's reaction was relative to the philosophical concept of causality, which raised my awareness of 'cause and effect' relationships when analysing his interpretations of the world. Tanya's comments highlighted how the paradigm adhered to by an individual can impact upon their perception and participation in research methods, as well as illustrating that timelining is primarily participant driven.

In contrast to Tanya's scientific view, for Daniel, a measured scale did not represent a useful aid. His career as a psychotherapist reflected his preference for relating his lived experiences to the impact they had on his life, rather than to a numerical scale. His comments raised some particularly interesting points with regards to how stories can seem more monotonous with age, reflecting a stable narrative:

"My problem will be (laughs) remembering how I felt...In what way was 2010 different from 2009, or 8 or 11, um. What were the particular things that were happening...What happened to me two years ago isn't very memorable, because it isn't much different to what happened to me four years ago, or six years ago...And um, actually just sitting here, trying to think, what happened in 2010 particularly, that I could (..) relate my well-being to?"

(Daniel, stage two interview)

Daniel's comments suggest that his narrative had not changed in any memorable way in the recent past. As Jonsson et al. (2000) note, narratives interweave with and change directions as a result of life events and experiences. Whilst Daniel's comments create the initial assumption that his working life provided a routine that lacked events, the timelining task encouraged him to think deeply and concentrate on his life, which, in turn, revealed significant moments that may have otherwise been overlooked.

After Daniel had drawn his timelines, he was not entirely inspired by what they represented, as he explained:

“I’m convinced that physical exercise and contact with nature are positives for me, they do improve my mood and if I don’t have them my sense of well-being is worse. I don’t know if it shows (...) So I’m not sure that does show well enough that there’s a correspondence, because it cuts straight across. My sense of it is seasonal, in that the activity and contact with nature is less in the winter than it is in the summer...”

(Daniel, stage two interview)

Initially, it seemed as though the timelining method was not particularly useful for Daniel, in that his timelines were not representative of his lived experiences. Yet, as the timelines were part of a qualitative data collection, it was not their purpose to be ‘true’ representations of experience; to conceptualise timelining in this way would contradict the assumptions of narrative inquiry. The performative aspects of timelines, that is, what timelines can *do*, however, illuminated that timelining was useful in eliciting key points of how nature had an impact on the stories Daniel told, that might not have otherwise been spoken about.

As a researcher, I was taken back with how the method of timelining worked as a research method. Following my stage two interview with Barry, I made note of how I felt in a journal entry (see figure 24).

Journal notes 09/03/12

That interview was easy!

Timelines are definitely a great interview aid...For semi-structured interviews, they seem like ideal tools to utilise. They set the context which keeps the research topics in view (literally). They allow the participant to talk openly whilst connecting points of their narrative to the dates on the timeline. As the interviewer, I felt as if I didn't need to work as hard to connect what they were saying; they did it for me. The participant was very involved and often created and responded to questions without any input from me. There were also times when, if I commented upon a sharp incline that the participant had drawn on the timeline, for example, fresh stories were told, relative to the research questions.

The timelines created a space for me to focus on what was being said. The timelines became interview guides. A very useful aid – particularly for those who have little experience of performing interviews.

Figure 24: Journal Extract - Reflections on Timelining

### 7.2.2 Reflections on the use of Biographical Objects

In hindsight, biographical objects were a useful and meaningful method of communication for participants such as Rosie, who I interviewed over the telephone. She sent her photographs by e-mail prior to our telephone interviews. On reflection, she commented that:

'It's very hard to put stuff into words...you feel all these things but when you're asked to put feelings into words it's quite hard...These pictures, to some degree, sum up my feelings about retirement in relation to the outdoors...'

(Rosie, by e-mail)

Barry and Daniel brought self-written poetry as their biographical objects. Barry reflected upon how poetry was a useful method for making sense of the changes that occurred during the retirement process:

'I started writing poetry again, which I hadn't written for, 15 years or so...I'm finding that that may be a better vehicle for what I want to say, 'cause it captures some of the sort-of ambiguities. It conveys different things...not just the knowledge thing but the emotional and

spiritual connection to make, or have to make, in order to be effective. And at the moment I'm actually finding it really quite useful and interesting and I'm not forcing it.'

(Barry, stage two interview)

For Barry and Daniel, poetry acted as a facilitator during the sense-making process of retirement. Their poetry gave me a unique and artful insight into their experiences, and added a dialogical element to my research findings (Butler-Kisber, 2002). As an innovative research method, biographical objects enable participants to freely communicate their experiences in ways that are meaningful to them.

### 7.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

My findings adhere to Paterson's (2001) conclusion that transitions are an on-going process of shifting perceptions, and supports the key assumption that lives as stories are made up of both facticity and possibility, and are therefore open to change (Kenyon et al., 2011). As such, my findings support Grenier's (2012) call for flexibility in models of late life transitions, rather than fixed, static models that fail to consider context.

It also became apparent to me that retirement policies and policies concerned with 'ageing well' should not necessarily focus on *doing* activities in retirement in order to meet expectations constructed by active ageing narratives. Rather, a focus upon *being* may be more useful for older adults experiencing transitions, as well as being more achievable and, therefore, more attractive. This is because experiencing retirement involves constant negotiation between what we want to do, what we can do, and the sources of meaning in our lives. For the participants in this study, it seemed that, over time, the best way to balance these negotiations was to live 'for the moment'.

Policy is considered by Grenier (2012, p.67) to be 'a site that shapes knowledge and provides interpretive frames for late life'. According to Biggs (2001, p.313), 'there is an astonishing absence of diversity in policies' regarding 'personal and social priorities' associated with ageing and health. By implication, research such as mine - amongst a larger body of evidence - can

help to bridge the gap between the diversity of lived experience and current policy narratives (Grenier, 2012) and therefore develop knowledge regarding ageing and health.

Communicating subjective perceptions of health and ageing as situated within meta-narratives can have direct relevance for social policy. Sparkes (2005, p.202) notes that individuals can be constrained to particular narrative types, which are often reinforced by dominant narratives within public policy, and that 'an awareness of such issues, and a greater understanding of the processes involved, would benefit' both individuals and the policies aimed at these individuals.

Applying the environmental model of health to policy has the potential to change the way health is measured, which would have implications for future policies concerned with ageing and health. WHO's (2002) Active Ageing policy framework, for example, shapes health in relation to 'physical, mental and social well being as expressed in the WHO definition' (p.12). Incorporating an updated definition of health (see Huber et al., 2011) into such policies could result in a more applicable and relatable conception of health being communicated. Indeed, 'replacing perfection with adaptation...frees us to be agile in the face of shifting forces that shape the wellbeing of individuals and populations' (editorial, *Lancet*, 2009, p.781). As a result, guidelines could promote a more balanced outlook which considers that a lack of activity could mean an increase in the practice of mindfulness, for example, thus resulting in more inclusive retirement expectations, and more inclusive and achievable expectations of health in later life.

#### **7.4 Limitations of the Study**

Throughout this thesis, I have strived to communicate my decisions and interpretations with transparency and clarity. The strengths of this study are with its longitudinal, narrative approach, and the original contribution to knowledge made by considering the role of nature during retirement transitions, and in the lives of older workers. There are, however, several limitations associated with this research project.

Temporal and financial restrictions limited the area from which I could recruit participants, and participants did not reflect ethnic diversity. Indeed, no ethnic minority groups were involved in this research project. None of the participants' in this study declared any mental or major physical disabilities or any learning difficulties. Participants' job types were lacking diversity and the range of retirement types involved were limited. The inclusion of participants in more diverse situations would benefit this project by providing more varied socio-cultural angles from which to interpret experiences of retirement.

Arguably, though, Cornwall is not known for its ethnic diversity. Out of 532 thousand people living in Cornwall, only 10 thousand are classified as non-white (ONS, 2011). As such, research based in Cornwall is not necessarily applicable to other countries that are dissimilar to Western societies and other ethnic groups.

A unique aspect of the findings I have presented is that they shed light on older adults' engagement with places of nature. They indicate that older adults do not necessarily just focus upon domestic environments in the context of their participation in leisure activities, as suggested by Scopelliti and Giuliani (2004). Rather, places of nature can play a strong role in facilitating leisure activities, particularly during retirement. However, the sample of participants consisted of people who already engage with nature in some way, so this claim needs to be strengthened by further research that considers a more diverse range of individuals.

## **7.5 Future directions**

The largest domain of environmental health research is arguably devoted to children's health, whereas older adults represent the most under-researched cohort in relation to this field. Little is known about how older adults story the natural environment in relation to their health, and whether it plays a significant role in their lives in this respect. Whilst this research contributes to addressing this lacuna, there is a need to expand the body of research relative to ageing, health and human-nature relations.



One research area that Bell et al. (2014) have advocated as in need of attention is the role of nature during life course transitions. This study identified that interactions with nature can be beneficial for individuals who have experienced a loss, with a particular focus upon retirement. Whether or not this resonates with individuals who have experienced loss in a different context could be a focal point for future research.

By performing an in-depth narrative analysis, more genuine aspects of participants' identity were revealed. According to the eudaimonic perspective of well-being, the extent to which an individual's lifestyle is congruent with their genuine self is relative to their well-being and overall satisfaction with life. Adopting this perspective could be useful in developing further understanding as to how individual's relationships with nature impact upon their experience of retirement, and other life course transitions.

## 7.6 Judgment Criteria

This section outlines how judgment criteria detailed in chapter 3, section 3.6, were met throughout this study.

### 1) *Worthy Topic*

Chapter 2 served as a constructed argument as to why the topics under study were worthwhile. In addition to chapter 2, Grenier (2012) and Rowles and Bernard, (2013) advocate the timeliness of researching these topics. For Grenier, whose focus is on studies of transitions, the most prominent areas of study are retirement and health, 'where age boundaries and expectations are shifting dramatically' (p.62). Rowles and Bernard also argue for environment and ageing to be regarded as salient, as articulated in the following:

We are on the threshold of a new era in our knowledge and understanding of older people's relationship to place, an era in which environmental gerontology has the potential to use deepening understanding of the manner in which older adults relate to place...helping us make progress along a path toward greater...awareness of the lived experience of older adults, which has the potential to improve quality of life for us all.

(pp.19-20)

2) *Rich Rigour*

For Tracey (2010), rigour depends upon how appropriate the theoretical frameworks are, how material was collected, and how much time was spent collecting data. My research was situated within an interpretive paradigm, which complements the assumptions of the narrative theoretical frameworks utilised in this study insofar as experiential accounts were documented by way of biographical semi-structured interviews. These were scheduled over approximately 21 months, according to the longitudinal research design. As such, a significant amount of time was dedicated to the collection of data.

3) *Sincerity*

Sincerity was illustrated throughout by way of employing a number of strategies to continuously and reflexively develop the research process. In chapter 1, I located myself in relation to my research topics by sharing subjective, personal experiences. In chapter 3, I positioned these subjective personal experiences within my socio-cultural context. Indeed, Tracy (2010, p.849) argued that 'the most successful researchers are willingly self-critical'. Rather than try to control and separate my subjectivity as a researcher, I chose to acknowledge it and communicate this with journal extracts. Such aspects include key moments, words, and feelings in a research journal which, besides the therapeutic effects of writing (Pennebaker, 1997), helped me to realise where I was and what I needed to do to move forward, both in relation to the thesis and myself. The inclusion of journal entries can also benefit the reader as it provides them with a more informed explanation as to how and why research decisions were established (Mruck and Breuer, 2003). Furthermore, the inclusion of a personal narrative throughout can widen the angle from which interpretations are made, thus enhancing the potential for understanding, adding flesh to the bones of abstract theory (see Jago, 1996). Having a reflexive awareness throughout the research process also aided my personal development as a researcher by helping me document my thought- and sense-making processes (Ortlipp, 2008).

4) *Credibility*

Utilising pluralistic methods of both data collection and analysis enabled the construction of complex, highly detailed, contextual data and interpretations, as discussed in chapters 4, 5, and 6. These methods were grounded in existing methods literature, and procedures were followed that were outlined in this literature.

5) *Resonance*

My research established resonance for participants, as illustrated by personal correspondence via e-mail that I received from a participant (see figure 25). The storied nature of my research permitted me to (re)present my findings in a relatable way that can be accessed by a diverse audience. I also utilised forms of communication that are known to evoke empathic reactions, such as poetry.

Journal notes 14/02/13

*E-mail received from participant:*

Dear Jo,

Thank you for another illuminating and interesting discussion/interview today.

I have really appreciated these conversations, at many levels, not least as key milestone markers during a very particular transition in my life, but even more as valued opportunities for important reflection in a very comfortable context. Thank you for achieving that, and I do hope that they are of value to you...

Figure 25. Journal notes to Illustrate Resonance

6) *Significant Contribution*

Theoretically, in order to develop the field of environmental gerontology, Scheidt and Schwarz (2013) express the need for more research that acknowledges the context of everyday practices. Crucially, they emphasize the need for research that examines the relationship(s)

between people and their 'sociophysical' environment, that is, *place*. By focusing on places of nature, my research has the potential to contribute to this field of research. On a practical level, the findings of this study were generated from everyday experiences of older adults and presented in an understandable, relatable format. For this reason my findings are apt for public dissemination, for example, on the AgeUK website.

7) *Ethical*

This project was reviewed and approved by the ethical committee of the College of Life and Health Sciences, University of Exeter, and the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry (see appendix 2). In line with the ethical approval that this study received, particular steps were taken to ensure understanding, confidentiality, consent and fair treatment. This involved the dissemination of information sheets and consent forms (see appendix 3). Throughout the entire research process, participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary. Participants were thanked for their involvement in the research following the final interviews. Pseudonyms were used in place of all participants' names at every opportunity, such as in transcripts of interviews (which were also tactfully modified with respect to identifying circumstances), presentations at academic conferences, and within conversations with others. All information and material gathered during the research process was stored securely at the European Centre for Environment and Human Health. Access to this information and material remains restricted to myself and my primary supervisor for 5 years post completion of this study.

8) *Meaningful Coherence*

Throughout this chapter, I have justified my use of research methods by detailing the philosophical underpinnings of my approach to research, and by reflexively relating them to my research aim and questions.

## 7.7 Personal Reflections

‘What is education if not an intense, probing scrutiny of moral choices and dilemmas?’

(Bochner, 1997, p.434).

During my first week as a PhD student, I was told: ‘if you don’t change by the end of it, you won’t have done it right’. From that moment, I expected my ideas and plans to change and evolve on an unknown PhD journey. I wondered how I would change as a person. Whilst this advice gave rise to an underlying anxiety, I was nevertheless thankful to have been made aware of it. As Boden et al. (2005, p.70) have noted, inexperienced researchers can be disadvantaged if they think of research as ‘a seamless, neat and linear process’. Rather, it is beneficial for researchers to be aware of the ‘muddle, confusion, mistakes, obstacles, and errors’ (p.70) that are likely to occur throughout.

In hindsight, I can say that I have changed just as much, if not more, than the content of my PhD, which was not seamless, neat, or linear. At first I focused upon physical activity and ageing and saw myself as a social scientist. I then developed into what I believed to be a social gerontologist writing about retirement and physical activity in natural environments. A turning point then shifted my focus from physical activity in natural environments, and towards a more inclusive ‘engagement’ with places of nature. Upon finishing the thesis, I positioned myself as an environmental gerontologist concerned with how places of nature were engaged with by older adults as they experienced varied retirement transitions, and the implications this had for their identities, health, and well-being. What started as a PhD that I needed to get to know became a PhD that I had come to know myself through.

Furthermore, the reflective notes from my research journal presented examples of the complex dynamics and ‘messiness’ involved in my research process. Making this visible to those who read my research avoids ‘producing, reproducing, and circulating the discourse of research as a neat and linear

process' (Ortlipp, 2008, p.704), thus presenting a useful resource for future inexperienced researchers to draw upon.

I have learnt a great deal from completing this thesis. I have developed as a person, and have found strengths (and weaknesses) that I did not know I had. I have discovered what helps me to work well, and what I regard as obstacles. In the process, I encountered situations that I found extremely difficult to deal with and I was forced to re-consider moral choices. Completing the thesis has, however, helped me to realise what I want from my career, which makes me excited for the next steps.

As I have endeavoured to illustrate throughout this thesis, health and well-being are subjective concepts. We are constantly reminded of health by way of stories circulating in society, either maintained through devices such as national services and the mass media, or on local levels in interpersonal interactions. Meanings of health and well-being, therefore, depend upon situational context. I would add to this by noting that the maintenance of self-respect should also be considered. As adults - young or old - we are expected to have the ability to know how to self-manage, adapt, and self-respect, thus leaving us responsible for our own health. The maintenance of these three characteristics of health can help individuals to live more satisfying lives.

In the following and final section, I summarise the main contribution of this research in terms of its uniqueness.

## **7.8 Summary**

This research has advanced both gerontological and environmental literature in terms of the notions of health, well-being, ageing and relationships with nature. In particular, it has brought nature into retirement literature, and retirement into nature literature. It also developed an important methodological approach through the creation of narrative journeys at key moments of the transitional process of retirement.

The narrative analysis revealed that, initially, pre-retirees' stories were guided by a narrative of decline, akin to the notion of *being aged passively* by

society and culture. Facilitated by a relational narrative, these stories were often illustrated by 'dys-appearing' body-self relationships.

In contrast, older workers' stories were driven by the notion of *actively growing old* in the era of the Third Age, where the focus was on activities, opportunities, and possibilities. These stories were facilitated by an individualistic narrative. In the later stages of data collection, retirees' stories were also guided by a narrative of *growing old*, whereby embodied decline was overshadowed by aspects of being, such as spirituality, intellectual stimulation, and mindfulness. Stories of *growing old* were complemented by a developed sense of self, highlighting the significance of self-awareness in later life.

The role played by places of nature was diverse, and depended upon the context of each individual's lived experiences, as appreciated by my research design and the use of pluralistic methods that adhered to a narrative framework. This included the innovative method of timelining, adapted from Sheridan et al. (2011). This method was participant-driven, and engaged participants in the generation of data in a novel way that illuminated the importance of their story being told in a way that made sense to them. Furthermore, participants were offered the opportunity to tell of their experiences through other means of communication, such as photography and poetry. As such, participants were offered a greater measure of agency within the research process. Where appropriate, participants' interview talk was re-presented in poetic form by myself, in order to maximise the impact of their story in terms of resonance, and provide the reader with additional means of interpretation.

One theme that emerged from the majority of participants' stories was that of stimulation, facilitated by variety in terms of differences in experiences. Participants told of how places of nature provided them with sensory stimulation due to the variety inherent in living environments. For some, this was coupled with intellectual stimulation and the exploration of areas such as spirituality, education, and mindfulness.

Another theme was pleasurable memories, the majority of which were related to childhood experiences. For some, the pleasurable memories of playing in places of nature as a child were reignited when they interacted with nature as an older adult. This brought back feelings of youthfulness, which

inspired physical activity and, as such, acted to benefit their health and well-being. In this way, perceptions of ageing and personal histories become part of a larger nature-human health story.

This story became more complicated when the body was brought into focus. Feelings of youthfulness driven by memories competed with feelings of decline driven by physiology and the powerful narrative of decline, thus presenting a tension for older adults who were purposefully physically active in places of nature. This was especially so for the older adults in this study who were resilient in character and whose stories were guided by an individualistic narrative, as these individuals seemed to be more attuned to backgrounding their bodies. These stories were told by the resilient older workers who wanted to keep working and predicted retirement to be dissatisfactory.

For some retirees, the transition to retirement brought a sense of urgency regarding the body in the shape of a need for physical fitness and an increase in physical activities. For some, places of nature provided a platform from which they could be physically active in a non-prescriptive way coupled with a sense of autonomy, which had benefits for physical health and well-being. As such, the analysis of participants' stories identified the body as a major reason behind the decisions made regarding work, retirement, and interactions with places of nature. Future research in this field needs to appreciate the salience of the body in lived experience.

Spending time in natural environments also involved being *mentally* active, illustrated by participants who found themselves engaged in a spiritual and emotional process of negotiation whilst interacting with nature, whereby selves were re-discovered from the past, contemplated in the present, and constructed for the future. Having the opportunity to discuss this process within research interviews allowed participants to realise this gradually, and was something that four of my participants commented upon at the final stage of data collection. As such, I have chosen to end this chapter, and this thesis, with their reflexive comments about what their participation in this research meant to them during their retirement process.



*Barry*

'It's, it's been great. I think I said to you before, I found it very useful to have a, sort of, safe place in which to discuss this journey. Cause it's, you know, it's been complicated, important, not without hazard. And, actually, having an opportunity to talk about it, with somebody who, apparently receptive (short laugh) very receptive. And, and yet, because we don't know each other in any other sense, I don't have to make any, sort of, apologies or concessions or limitations, to do with anything else. I can, I can just be me. So it's, you know, it's very clear, it's very straight. And I think there've been, been great opportunity. I've truly valued it. And I'm aware that what I'm going through is something that many people find difficult, either in anticipation, or in reality. And, if your work can help to give some pointers and if I'm part of doing that, and you can distil from the multiplicity of the interviews, things that can be helpful for other people, then that's great. So, it's been, it's been very pleasant to do. I've not felt at all constrained by it, or the format, partly because you conducted it very nicely. And it's given, as I say, a good safe and comfortable space to explore important things...just having the opportunity for these conversations, is not without merit in its own right. So, you know, I think, you could say, well, you know, maybe that, maybe people need these sorts of spaces, these sorts of opportunities. Because, you know, you do stand back and look at things and reflect on it differently, because you have to say stuff that may be in there. But, but just saying it, gives it a shape and a structure and helps you move on to the next step.... it's a valuable project, generally. It's been valuable to me and I'm very appreciative, and if the spin-off of that is good for your project, then that's great.'

*Cathy*

'Fine, yeah, been fine. Yeah because sometimes you, you can talk about things and you think ooh, I didn't know that was there. You know? Didn't know I was so passionate about that! And I think that that's important too, I think groups, singular, one-to-one, I think it's important to talk. And I think a lot of marriages go wrong, a lot of relationships, because people don't talk anymore. You must communicate, even if what you say isn't what the other person wants to hear. Whether it be work, home, marriage, relationship, whatever. May not be what the other person wants to hear, but I'd rather hear it than live in a fool's paradise. It's good to talk, and it's also good to listen. But we all need to talk. We all need to talk and have someone maybe listen to us.'

*Daniel*

'Well, I've enjoyed talking to you, Jo. It's very nice to be interviewed and asked to speak about oneself because, I suppose in a way, I do think about these things anyway. You know, it's not, not that I wouldn't have talked about the things we've spoken of. But as always, when, when you have to put thoughts into words, it does clarify things to some extent...that next step of finding a way

of expressing what it is you're feeling can be helpful. And, obviously, to have it heard by somebody else, who's not making any judgement on it. Paying attention, paying heed, but not commenting. Yes, and, and not, not involved. So I don't have to protect your feelings, you know, I can say anything. Whereas if you're a family member or a friend, I might want to hide, you know, if I was feeling... I don't think I have felt particularly despairing, but if I was feeling particularly despairing, you know, that I wouldn't want to burden them with that. Whereas, unfortunately, I wouldn't mind burdening you with that, (short laugh) in this role. Because you're not going to be emotionally, apart from a fellow human being, you're not going to be emotionally involved with me, in the way that they are'.

*Rosie*

'I've enjoyed it. It's, you know, I've often had to think, oo, what would I answer to that question. What will I say. Just looking out, as I say I read a lot about the environment and just looking at what people say and why it's important to them, so it's made me reflect which is good. I'm a reflective person anyway but it's given a focus to, um, I look forward to seeing what you produce'.

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***Appendices***

## Appendix 1: A Conversation with Mum

*Me: So what I wanted to ask you was, what comes to mind when you think of ageing?*

*Mum: Ageing sounds like a process, you know, 'ing', age-ing, rather than becoming older. Ageing sounds worse than saying something like becoming older, doesn't it, because it makes you think of, um, when plants get older they start to wither and then they die. And so you say your plant's ageing if it's doing that, so it makes you think of that...When I was younger, I used to say, oh I'll grow old gracefully. I'll not worry about my hair going grey and wrinkles and stuff like that. But that's a load of rubbish! (laughs) 'Cause when you're getting there you realise no no no, you need to dye your hair, you need to put cream on your face and make-up on to make you look a bit younger.*

*Me: When did that change?*

*Mum: It changed when I started to notice white hairs in my head, and particularly when my jaw started to sag. I started to notice myself in the mirror, looking old. You'll know what I mean when it happens to you. No-one could have told me, it's just when you catch yourself in the mirror or in a photograph, and you think – I look so old! And you don't feel old inside. When you look at yourself in the mirror and try to make yourself look all nice, you don't think you're old. It's when you catch yourself unawares, or you see yourself as other people might see you, and suddenly, it hits you. It's like a brick wall hitting you.*

*Me: How did it make you feel?*

*Mum: Terrible! I felt it, the inevitability of it was really, really daunting. Getting older, signs of ageing pertaining to you rather than somebody else, you know? I don't know why it should feel terrible. I think in other societies, in other cultures, um, the old people in the family are really respected and looked up to, they really look after their elderly people.*

*Me: Yeah, like in Japan*

*Mum: I think this country breeds this sort of feeling that older people are just have-beens, rather than someone that is, you know, respected and part of the community. Oh I'm sounding melancholy aren't I!*

*Me: So the cultural meanings of ageing can really affect how you feel about yourself*

*Mum: Yeah. Because if you think about some tribes that still really respect their elders-*

*Me: -Yeah I watched a programme about a town in Japan that parade you through the street when you turn 100, a huge celebration*

*Mum: -I mean there are still tribes that, it maybe happens in other countries as well, I've seen programmes on the telly where they really celebrate the age of their older people. And the older you get the better it is. And they look forward to their hair losing its colour, they look forward to wrinkles and sagginess because they know that's a sign that they've been there and done that, got the t-shirt, and they can help anyone else that's on that journey. They haven't done all of it, but a good bit of it. There are still things they can do. And I really think it should be like that here, but it's not.*

*Me: What do you think stops this culture from-*

*Mum: Well I think a lot of it is the breakdown in families. Not anything too particular, it's just the way of society, because the world's become a smaller place. People are living – look at our family. Grandma is in Scotland, Auntie Shelia's in the South of France. Christine's in Greece. You know, people are living further away. In days gone by people lived in tighter communities.*

*Me: Like in Italy*

*Mum: I'm not saying that's a brilliant thing either, I'm just saying that because of that, for instance, a lot of children don't grow up with their grandparents very much. I mean, you saw a bit of your grandparents, but not enough. And that means you don't know your grandparents well enough, like children would have in years gone by. And also people are living longer as well, and living longer means that...in some respects you've got that long part of retirement set in front of you. You don't really know how long it's going to last, you don't know where it's going to go. A bit like the song, 'You're on the road to nowhere'.*

*Me: I think that's a really interesting point about family and why our culture depicts ageing in the way it does. And um, I think, because you were saying it's better to know your grandparents. And I think the reason for that, I think ageism revolves a lot around people thinking of old people as all the same, a homogeneous group. You then distance yourself from it because you think, you label it and you think that's a group not anything to do with me, completely separate. They're thought of as a different type of people, but they're just people who have lived longer than we have. I think it's when people start to think of them objectively, as objects, as an old person – that means you can't run fast, you can't do this, and whatever other stereotypes are associated with it. That's when, I think, you start getting the problems, that's when you start believing that being old is a bad thing, you start thinking you don't want to associate with that group at all, be it grey hairs, wrinkles, things like that. It makes us want to change who we are because of an objective ideology. If we knew our grandparents better, and built relationships with them, maybe that distance would shorten and we wouldn't be as ageist...*

**Appendix 2: Ethical Approval**



**SPORT AND HEALTH SCIENCES**  
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**Certificate of Ethical Approval**

Proposal A4 (23/02/11)  
Title: Developing New Identities through the Natural Environment, Retirement and the Third Age  
Applicants: Dr. Cassandra Phoenix with Professor Michael Depledge and Ms. Joanna Ross (PG Student)

The proposal was reviewed by a Representative on the Committee.

**Decision: The proposal was approved from April 2011 to April 2013**

Signature:  Date: 29/12/10

Name/Title of Ethics Committee Reviewer: Dr. J. Allen-Collinson

*Your attention is drawn to the attached paper which reminds the researcher of information that needs to be observed when Ethics Committee approval is given.*

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### Guidance for Researchers when Ethics Committee Approval is Given

1. Researchers are reminded that the research project has been given approval only in relation to its acceptability from an ethical point of view. It is not the role or responsibility of research ethics committees to give legal advice, nor are they liable for any of their decisions in this respect. Irrespective of the decision of a research ethics committee on a particular application, it is the researcher and/or sponsor who has the responsibility not to break the law.
  2. Requests for extensions to the finish date of the project or proposed changes to the methodology and protocols outlined in the original submission must be submitted to the Chair of the Committee via College Office using the appropriate form (Appendix 7 of the Policy and Procedures document) for approval. The principal investigator and his or her research sponsor, and not the SHS Ethics Committee, are responsible for ensuring that a study follows the agreed protocol and for monitoring its progress.
  3. A report should be made to the SHS Ethics Committee if any serious and unexpected adverse reactions are noted during the course of the study.
  4. If a study is terminated or suspended the researcher must provide the SHS Ethics Committee with a detailed written explanation of the termination or suspension.
  5. Researchers are reminded that ethical issues are given added salience where teaching and research involves children. The University of Exeter has published guidelines for staff working with children. These may be found at the following website:  
<http://www.ex.ac.uk/safety/docs/otherpolcp/ChildrenOnCampusPolCopGnsV1final11.pdf>  
Guidelines for the appropriate conduct of research studies involving children and exercise are available in the Children's Health and Exercise Research Centre laboratory manual.
-

**RE: PhD ethics**

Carol Barkle [carol.barkle@pms.ac.uk]

**Sent:** 16 May 2011 11:26

**To:** Ross, Joanna

**Cc:** Oonagh Corrigan [oonagh.corrigan@pms.ac.uk]; Cassandra Phoenix [cassandra.phoenix@pcmd.ac.uk]

**Attachments:** PCMD Info Sheet 2.doc (295 KB) ; PCMD Consent form 2.doc (290 KB)

Dear Jo

Thank you for providing all the documentation relating to this study.

I have now had an opportunity to discuss your study with Dr Corrigan we have agreed that a change to the final versions of the information sheet and consent form that you use is required. As I advised in my e-mail of the 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2011, responsibility for the ethical approval of this study rests with the College of Life and Health Sciences, University of Exeter Ethics Committee who provided the full ethical review. The PCMD REC has only provided approval by Chair's Action for your study to proceed and interview study participants on PCMD premises at the Knowledge Spa, Truro.

This must be clear on all paperwork and therefore I have amended the wording on these two documents and attach them for your use.

Best wishes.

Carol

**Carol Barkle  
Administrator to PCMD Research Ethics Committee/  
PA to Dr Andrew Tillyard, Clinical Academic Lead for Medical Ethics and  
Law**

Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry  
Knowledge Spa  
Royal Cornwall Hospital  
TRURO  
TR1 3HD

**Telephone: 01872 256460  
Fax: 01872 256401  
e-mail: [carol.barkle@pms.ac.uk](mailto:carol.barkle@pms.ac.uk)**

## **Appendix 3: Information Sheet and Consent Form**

### **Information Sheet for Participants**

#### **Title of Research Project:**

Health and Well-Being during Retirement: The role of the natural environment

#### **Dear Participant,**

You are invited to take part in my study, which is a PhD research project that is joint funded between the University of Exeter and the Peninsula Collaborations for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (PenCLAHRC). I want to make clear that I am academically trained and am not a medical practitioner. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take some time to read the following information carefully. If anything is not clear or you would like more information, please ask. Contact details are provided at the end of this information sheet.

#### **What is the purpose of this project?**

The main aim is to explore the role of the natural environment in the lives of older adults as the experience retirement. The project will focus on individual experiences to explore various meanings. Specifically, it will draw upon where, when, why and how the natural environment is engaged with in later life and the implications this might have for health and well-being.

#### **What does the research involve?**

I would like to interview you three times over 7 months. The interviews are informal and will take place at the European Centre for Environment and Human Health in Truro or at a place that suits you. The length of each interview is negotiated with you, but it is common for interviews to last for 1-2 hours. All interviews will be carried out and transcribed by myself. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers; what you tell me is up to you.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

You can stop the interview or withdraw from the study altogether at any time. Participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage.

**What are the benefits of taking part?**

The project will involve talking about your life and your experiences which many people find enjoyable. In addition, our interviews will contribute to important areas of knowledge. Your participation in this research will help to provide a unique insight into the various ways people experience the retirement process and the natural environment, with an aim to develop better ways of living for others in the future.

**What are the disadvantages of taking part?**

Completing the interviews may take some time. Taking part may also cause some disruption to your normal day to day activities, although best efforts will be made to arrange a time that is convenient for you.

**How will my information be stored?**

All information will be securely stored at the European Centre for Environment and Human Health. The only people that have access to this information are myself (Joanna Ross) and my research supervisor (Dr. Cassandra Phoenix).

**Are there plans to tell people about the results of the study?**

Yes. The information gathered during the study will be part of a written PhD thesis, and may be published in academic journals and books in the future. However, *no details about you or any other participants will be personally identifiable*. All information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality and personal details will not be made publicly available. Only myself (Joanna Ross) and my research supervisor (Dr. Cassandra Phoenix) will have access to the information. The use of personal information conforms to the data protection guidelines set out by the relevant ethical committees (see below). You are welcome to request access to the completed PhD thesis and any publications that arise as a result of it, if you so wish.

**Has the task been approved by a research ethics committee?**

Yes. This project has been reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of the College of Life and Health Sciences, University of Exeter. Approval has also been granted by the Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry Research Ethics Committee for the PenCLAHRC element of the project.

**Any Questions?**

If you have any questions about my research, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor using the details at the bottom of this page.



If you would like to take part in my research project, please read the attached Participant Consent Form. Please bring the consent form with you to the interview where we can both sign it.

Thank you very much,

Jo Ross

---

**Researcher:** Joanna Ross  
Dr. Cassandra Phoenix

**Research Supervisor:**

**E-mail:** Joanna.ross@pcmd.ac.uk  
Cassandra.Phoenix@pcmd.ac.uk

**E-mail:**

**Tel.:** 01872 256435

**Address:** The European Centre for Environment and Human Health,  
Knowledge Spa, Treliske,  
Truro, Cornwall.  
TR1 3HD

### Participant Consent Form

#### Please complete the following:

Have you read the Information Sheet concerning the research project and understand what it involves? Yes / No

Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the research? Yes / No

Have you received enough information about the research? Yes / No

#### Do you understand that:-

Your participation consists of three interviews within 7 months Yes / No

The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed Yes / No

Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary Yes / No

You are free to withdraw from the research at any time Yes / No

Information may be discussed in a PhD thesis and future publications Yes / No

Your identity will not be revealed at any time Yes / No

-----

I agree that information provided by myself can be used in future publications Yes / No

Do you agree to take part in the research? Yes / No

.....  
..... (Date) (Signature of participant)

.....  
..... (Date) (Signature of researcher)

**This project has been reviewed and approved by the College of Life and Health Sciences, University of Exeter ethics committee. Approval for the PenCLAHRC element of this study has been granted by the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry Research Ethics Committee.**

---

Researcher: Joanna Ross E-mail:  
Joanna.ross@pcmd.ac.uk  
256435 Tel.: +44 (0)1872

**Appendix 4: Survey**

## Research Survey

**PLEASE ONLY COMPLETE THIS SURVEY IF YOU INTEND TO  
RETIRE FROM WORK BEFORE JANUARY 2012**

This survey is the first step in a larger PhD research project being undertaken by Joanna Ross on behalf of Sport & Health Sciences (University of Exeter) and the European Centre for Environment & Human Health (Peninsula Medical School). The purpose of the larger project is to understand people's experiences of retirement and the time that people spend (or don't spend) out of doors during this time.

Using this survey, we would like to find out some general information about you, your thoughts about retirement, and any exercise you might do (or not) out of doors. Please note that we are equally keen to hear from people who **do** and **don't** exercise out of doors!

For your information:

- Your answers will be dealt with confidentially. It will not be possible to identify you individually because we will always deal with the results on a group basis.
- If you have any questions prior to or after completing the survey, please e-mail: [Joanna.ross@pcmd.ac.uk](mailto:Joanna.ross@pcmd.ac.uk)
- This project has been approved by the Sport & Health Sciences ethics committee at the University of Exeter.

At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you would like to continue being involved with this research. If you do – thank you – we very much appreciate it and look forward to speaking with you further about this exciting project. If you don't – thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your assistance has helped important research in this area.

Please circle your answer unless the question states otherwise.

**General Information**

1. Are you:
  - i. Male?
  - ii. Female?
  
2. What age group do you fit in to?
  - i. Less than 45 years

- ii. 45-50 years
- iii. 51-55 years
- iv. 56-60 years
- v. 61-65 years
- vi. More than 65 years

**Employment**

3. What does the company/organisation you work for mainly do?

---

4. How many people are employed by the company/organisation you work for?

- i. Less than 25
- ii. More than 25

5. What is your main job?

---

6. What do you mainly do in your job?

---

7. Do you currently work:

- i. Full time?
- ii. Part time?

8. Please circle the number on the scale that best describes your feelings about retirement:

|               |          |                             |         |                             |          |               |
|---------------|----------|-----------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1             | 2        | 3                           | 4       | 5                           | 6        | 7             |
| very negative | negative | more negative than positive | neutral | more positive than negative | positive | very positive |

### **Exercise Participation**

Exercise is defined as planned, structured and repetitive bodily movements that are performed to improve or maintain your level of physical fitness. We are interested in exercise that takes place outdoors.

A green environment is defined as outdoor space where greenery is present, such as grass or plants.

9. How often do you exercise in green environment?

- i. Less than once a week
- ii. 1-2 days a week
- iii. 3-4 days a week
- iv. 5-7 days a week

If you answered ii, iii, or iv, please provide details of this exercise:

---

A blue environment is defined as outdoor space where water is present, such as the sea or a river.

10. How often do you exercise in blue environment?

- v. Less than once a week
- vi. 1-2 days a week
- vii. 3-4 days a week
- viii. 5-7 days a week

If you answered ii, iii, or iv, please provide details of this activity:

---

11. If there is anything else you would like to tell us about the topics referred to in this survey, then please use the space below:

Thanks for completing the survey. We would really like to follow up this research with interviews and would be delighted if you are happy to participate.

12. Would you be happy to participate in further research?

- i. Yes
- ii. No

If you answered yes, please provide your contact details below:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

—

\_\_\_\_\_

—

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone

number: \_\_\_\_\_

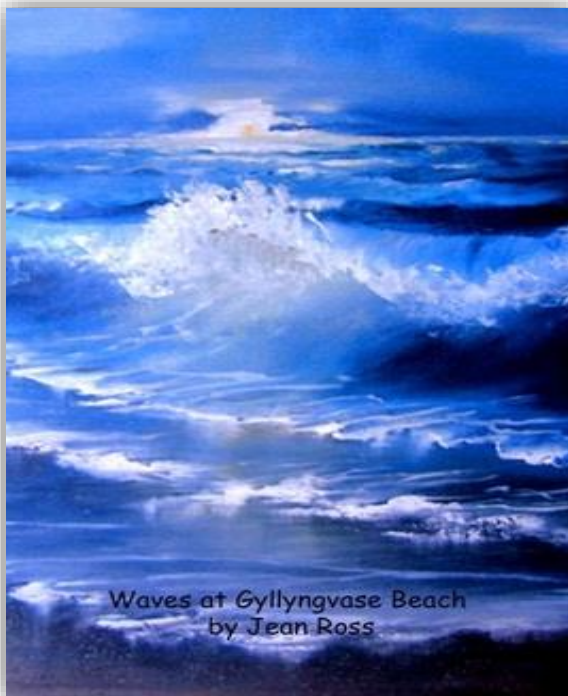
Thompson, J.L. (2009). Exercise in improving health v. performance. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*. 68. p.30.

Questions 3-6 adapted from SOC2010 (ons.gov.uk)

## Appendix 5: Recruitment Poster

### Are you planning to retire before Jan 2012?

If so, we would like to invite you to be part of some important research taking place in Cornwall. This research<sup>5</sup> aims to:



- Explore how people may / may not use the natural environment during the process of retirement
- Understand how this might contribute to health and well-being

**Interested?**

**E-mail: [Joanna.Ross@pcmd.ac.uk](mailto:Joanna.Ross@pcmd.ac.uk) or Phone Jo on 01872 258174**

---

<sup>5</sup> This is a PhD research project being undertaken by Joanna Ross: **European Centre for Environment and Human Health, Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry (University of Exeter)**. "The **European Centre for the Environment and Human Health** (part of the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry which is a joint entity of the University of Exeter, the University of Plymouth and the NHS in the South West) is supported by investment from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Convergence Programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly."

## Appendix 6: Example Interview Guide

### Interview 1

#### Context

Tell me something about yourself

Could you tell me about your childhood and where you grew up?

Schooling? Other siblings? Hobbies? Key memories (childhood / early adulthood...)

- Former engagement with environment types

Can you tell me about how you see yourself as a person?

('Who is x?')

Do you think this has changed over time?

#### Work

Tell me about your working life

- Past to present
- How do you feel about this aspect of your life?

Can you tell me a bit more about being self-employed?

- What does it involve?

How would you describe your working environment (space / indoor / lighting etc.)? How did this environment make you feel?

Could you describe what a typical working day was like?

- Is there anything you really liked about work?
- Is there anything you didn't like about work?

What was your last day at work like?

How did the article with the local press come about?

- Was it your decision?
- Why did you want to talk about retirement?
- What does retirement mean to you?



## **Perceptions of Retirement**

Why did you retire?

- Time, choice, self, outdoor activities?

How do you feel about yourself now that you've retired?

What has your retirement been like so far?

- Probe: loss of routine, structure of work, interaction with others

Do you miss anything about your work?

- What and why?

What do you think of as the worst / best thing about retirement?

What do you plan to do in your retirement?

- How did you decide that?
- Any outdoor activities? Why/why not?

What do you do in your spare time?

- Engage with natural environment?

## **Natural Environment**

How do you define the natural environment?

Can you tell me about your experiences of spending time outdoors?

- How, how often, when, where, why?
- Before and since retiring
- Physical activity (How much? How often? Why those specific activities?)

How does this make you feel about yourself?

In what way?

Where do you go? (Blue / Green space) What do you do? Who do you go with?

- Why do you go there?
- Where do you prefer to be? Why?

Is there anything else you would like to add about being outdoors?

### **Health & Well-Being**

What does the term well-being mean to you?

- What do you think are the important factors?

How important is your health to you?

Has the way you think about health changed since you retired?

Why do you think this is (or isn't)?

What makes you feel satisfied with your life nowadays?

- Role of natural environment?

## Appendix 7: Intervals between Interviews

| Pseudonym | Sex | Retirement date (RD)            | 1 <sup>st</sup> interview      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview       | 3 <sup>rd</sup> interview      | Interval between 1 <sup>st</sup> – last interview | No. of interview transcript pages |
|-----------|-----|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Tanya  | F   | 1 <sup>st</sup> July 2011       | 20 <sup>th</sup> May 2011      | 17 <sup>th</sup> October 2012   | 28 <sup>th</sup> January 2013  | 20 months   | 66                                |
| 2. Rosie  | F   | 21 <sup>st</sup> July 2011      | 4 <sup>th</sup> July 2011      | 24 <sup>th</sup> September 2012 | 24 <sup>th</sup> February 2013 | 19 months   | 56                                |
| 3. Ellie  | F   | 20 <sup>th</sup> December 2011  | 26 <sup>th</sup> October 2011  | 15 <sup>th</sup> February 2013  | Un-available                   | 16 months   | 44                                |
| 4. Daniel | M   | 11 <sup>th</sup> August 2011    | 3 <sup>rd</sup> August 2011    | 12 <sup>th</sup> March 2012     | 31 <sup>st</sup> January 2013  | 17 months   | 60                                |
| 5. Barry  | M   | 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2011 | 17 <sup>th</sup> May 2011      | 9 <sup>th</sup> March 2012      | 14 <sup>th</sup> February 2013 | 21 months   | 117                               |
| 6. Peter  | M   | older worker                    | 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2011     | 28 <sup>th</sup> September 2012 | n/a                            | 15 months   | 36                                |
| 7. Mark   | M   | older worker                    | 5 <sup>th</sup> August 2011    | 25 <sup>th</sup> September 2012 | n/a                            | 13 months   | 33                                |
| 8. Denzel | M   | older worker                    | 13 <sup>th</sup> May 2011      | 25 <sup>th</sup> September 2012 | n/a                            | 16 months   | 39                                |
| 9. Tom    | M   | 2004                            | 1 <sup>st</sup> July 2011      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> October 2012    | n/a                            | 15 months   | 117                               |
| 10. Cathy | F   | 24 <sup>th</sup> December 2011  | 23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2012 | 1 <sup>st</sup> February 2013   | n/a                            | 12 months   | 76                                |

## Appendix 8: Letter for Participants prior to Stage 2 Interviews

Jo Ross  
European Centre for Environment and Human Health  
Knowledge Spa, Royal Cornwall Hospital  
Truro, Cornwall  
TR1 3HD  
Tel: +44 (0)1872 256435  
E-mail: [Joanna.ross@pcmd.ac.uk](mailto:Joanna.ross@pcmd.ac.uk)

### Information for Participants: Second Interview

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

First of all, I would like to thank you for taking part in my research project which explores retirement, well-being and the natural environment. It was great to interview you. I really appreciate your participation as my research would not happen without you!

With your permission, I envisage interviewing you 3 times in total, to explore your experiences over time. Our second interview will take place on \_\_\_\_\_ at the address at the top of this letter. On the day, please go to reception and tell them you're here for an interview with Jo Ross. They will let me know and I will come and meet you.

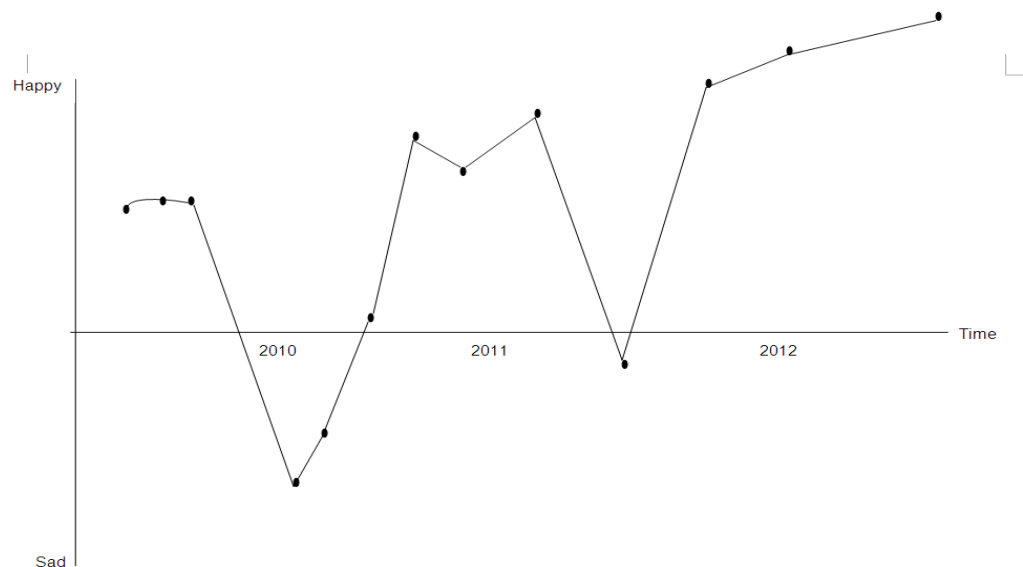
The purpose of the second interview is to discuss how things have developed since we first met.

I would be very interested if you could bring an item to the interview that says something about you in relation to your experience of the natural environment during retirement. For example, this could be a poem, a picture, a photograph, a diary entry, or another object or document of your choice.

As a part of the interview, I would like you to draw three timelines. I plan to include the use of timelines to aid our conversation.

## What is a timeline?

Drawing timelines provides a different way for you to tell me about your



experiences over time. An example of a timeline might look like this:

In the example above, I have used feeling 'happy' and feeling 'sad' as the context. The dots indicate periods of increased happiness (for example, year 2012), or particular sadness (for example, year 2010). In our interviews, however, rather than using happiness and sadness, I plan to use three specific contexts. These are:

- Your levels of **well-being** over time
- Your levels of **physical activity** over time
- Your **engagement with the natural environment** over time

You may want to start thinking about what your timelines might look like, and you might even want to draw them beforehand. Either way, you will draw or develop timelines during the interview itself, and I will be there to answer any questions and help you if needed. What the timelines look like are completely up to you.

If you have any questions at all, please do contact me (my details are at the top of this letter). If at any time your circumstances/contact details change, please let me know.

I'll look forward to our interview and want to thank you again for supporting my research. At the end of the project I will be circulating a summary of what was found, which will hopefully be of interest to you.

Kind Regards and Best Wishes,

Jo

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*Postgraduate Research Student*  
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*E-mail: Joanna.ross@pcmd.ac.uk*