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Grandfathering as spatio-temporal practice: conceptualizing performances of ageing masculinities in contemporary familial carescapes.

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*This paper examines the spatio-temporalities of the intergenerational caring practices that contemporary grandfathers engage in with their grandchildren, in order to critique old men's constructions and performances of ageing masculinities, and the gendering and ageing of contemporary carescapes. Findings are based on 31 qualitative interviews and two participant observations, conducted in the North-West of England with men who are grandfathers. The concept of carescapes (Bowlby, Gregory and McKie 1997) is employed to explain that grandfathering is both spatially and temporally organized. Findings suggest that men construct distinctly masculine spaces of care later in life, contingent on both their resistance to spatially embedded ageism and their comparisons of grandfathering to previous lifecourse subjectivities, such as fathering. Complexity and diversity in how men negotiate these factors is also apparent and is explored. There is evidence for example that some men's performances of ageing masculinities contribute to the maintenance of a gendered division of labour in family care work, while others perform alternative masculinities that offer potential to transform gendered carespaces. This is further mediated by intergenerational interactions with children and grandchildren. Focus on old men who are grandfathers necessarily complicates geographical perspectives on the spatio-temporalities of multiple masculinities, ageing and informal familial care.*

**Key words:** Grandfathering; family; carescapes; masculinities; age; identity

## **Introduction**

As a result of existing material, institutional and discursive framings, alongside a privileging of focus on gender over other dimensions of identity, care has come to be understood as private and feminized (Atkinson, Lawson and Wiles 2011) and the central role of mothers in relationships with children (Barker 2011). Other than consideration of geographies of fathering (Aitken 2000; 2009), men's situated practices of care in the family have received

much less attention (Barker 2011). This is true of contemporary theorizing about men, masculinities and male identities in social geography more generally, when compared to the more numerous studies that focus on women, femininities and female identities (Hopkins and Noble 2009). Nonetheless a growing body of literature indicates that masculinities are multiply produced because they are simultaneously intersected by a range of subject positions (Hopkins 2006) and are spatially and temporally contingent (Meth and McClymont 2009). Multiple masculinities exist and at different times and places some ways of being a man are culturally exalted over others, the most powerful of which has been conceptualized as hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995).

Geographies of familial care and intergenerationality, are also drawing increased attention to the spatio-temporal organization of care practices across the lifecourse (Bowlby et al. 2011; Vanderbeck 2007) that are transforming both the transmissions of values and subject positions within families (Hopkins et al. 2011; Hopkins 2006; Rawlins 2006) as well as the ways in which caring practices influence migration and housing decisions (Bailey, Blake and Cooke 2004; Mason 2004). In these literatures, the home, home making and home care practices have been constructed as the realm of mid-life adults, and mainly women (Del Casino Jr 2009). Taken together, these theorizations of care and caring practices indicate that they are both spatially and temporally negotiated and organised across multiple locations and multiple temporalities but are also structured by intersecting locations of difference, such as gender, but also lesser explored, age and other axes of difference. In the critical geographies of care literatures, these multiple sites and temporalities have been conceptualized as carescapes (Atkinson, Lawson and Wiles 2011; Barker 2008; 2011) incorporating a variety of caring practices that take place within and outside the domestic sphere (Barker 2008). Atkinson, Lawson and Wiles (2011: 567) argue that 'central to this approach is the negotiation of different discourses, demands, and actors in shaping situated practices of care'.

Increasingly grandparents are playing significant caring roles in contemporary families and are responding to care demand, created by diverse societies that are being shaped in distinctive ways by global trends, welfare state policies and socio-cultural norms and expectations (Arber and Timonen 2012). Grandmothers have typically been defined as key family kin keepers (Harper 2005) but only recently have men's roles as grandfathers begun to be recognized (Mann 2007); their situated practices of care in the family have rarely been acknowledged or critically examined and there is limited understanding of the caring spaces in which grandfather care and intergenerational relationships take place. Some studies do indicate that grandfather roles in family care are underestimated and that men express desire to engage in emotional and caring roles alongside the more instrumental tasks that have typically depicted their involvement (Mann 2007; Waldrop et al. 1999). It is therefore important that grandparent involvement and care work, including that of men, is recognized. This is especially salient given that in an ageing society, where gender roles and concepts of family are broadening, old<sup>1</sup> men are increasingly implicated in informal economies of care (Wheelock and Jones 2002) and are more likely to take on care work in which their socially constructed gender identities are challenged and confronted (Russell 2007).

Situated within multiple inter- and sub-disciplinary literatures including sociological and geographical conceptualisations of ageing masculinities, and geographies of care and intergenerationality, this paper recognizes old<sup>1</sup> men's care work in families, through an exploration of the spatio-temporality of contemporary grandfathering. Grandfathering exemplifies the ways in which old men negotiate the often contradictory intersections of their identities (Ando 2005; Mann 2007) that are considered to marginalise them in relations with other men, but also how these are produced, articulated and negotiated by men in relational ways, in and through their familial care practices with grandchildren.

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The findings presented in this paper indicate that when grandfathering, men variously re-negotiate notions of hegemonic masculinity in response to their ageing, across a number of sites both inside and outside their homes. They do this in complex and diverse ways, constructing distinctly masculine spaces of care later in life in response to the spatially embedded ageism that constructs their identities, and through comparisons of grandfathering to previous lifecourse subjectivities, such as fathering. The multitude of performances of ageing masculinities in grandfathering evident even in this small study, contributes in some instances to the maintenance of a gendered division of labour in family care work. Others however, perform alternative masculinities that offer potential to transform and re-define gendered carespaces. Understanding carespaces as sites of resistance and transformation to gender and age norms in particular, reveal fruitful avenues for continued interrogation by social and cultural geographers.

Similarly, as a result of examining old men's familial intergenerational relationships and caring practices, this paper further contributes to what Hubbard (2011) describes as a lacuna of research published in *Social and Cultural Geography* more generally, concerning the spatialities of contemporary social relationships and intimacy (Valentine 2008), particularly in the socio-spatial institution of the family (Skelton and Valentine 2005). Both social relationships and intimacy are practiced (Jamieson 2011), relational and situated and these practices taken together define different forms of, often gendered care. An examination of men's care practices within these intergenerational relations and spaces with grandchildren, adds greater complexity to the ways in which men respond spatially to and negotiate the diverse intersections that shape and structure their identities over the lifecourse. Social geographers are well placed to critique the ways in which key categories of difference such as 'old age' and masculinities are problematic terms that in reality are relationally constructed and enacted in multiple and varied ways in different sites, in different institutions

(Mac an Ghail 1996) and at different stages of the lifecourse.

### **Grandfather identities; neglected intersections of masculinities and ‘old age’**

A small yet noteworthy body of sociological work is now attending to the apparent neglect of old men and ageing masculinities and it is this theoretical base that geographers could usefully exploit for developing and re-thinking the geographies of care as gendered, intergenerational and spatio-temporally organized, and masculinities as multiply produced, fluid and intersectional identities. The re-direction of focus to old men emerged only very recently from recognition that dominant portrayals of men and masculinities appear to end before old age, focusing almost exclusively on younger men and men in their mid-life, at the expense of old and ageing men (Calasanti 2004; Hearn 2007). One possible reason for this is that hegemonic masculinity as a concept is based on youthfulness (Whitehead 2002). Consequently little research has theorized about older men’s masculinities and even fewer studies have examined how old men perceive their own masculinities (Emslie, Hunt and O’Brien 2004). Despite a lack of any deliberate and explicit focus on older men, existing social geographical scholarship suggests that old men encounter spaces in different ways as they age and that this is closely linked to the material realities of ageing, as well as constructions of space along axes of difference including gender and age (Pain, Mowl and Talbot 2000). In synthesizing literatures from sociology, feminist gerontology and to a lesser extent social geography, Tarrant (2010) demonstrates that space is central to the architecture of what it means to be, and to behave as, a man in the later stages of the lifecourse.

Sociological literatures investigating the intersections of ageing masculinities highlight that in Western societies in particular, ageing is predominantly depicted as a journey into decline, dependence and submission, sustaining normative assumptions that ageing populations are problematic. This is maintained through processes of ageism that

preserve specific stereotypes of old people that belie the diversity of attitudes, behaviours and values of those over a particular age, as well as the broader social and cultural contexts that shape their lives. Conversely, cultural ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) in these societal contexts emphasize and uphold contradicting notions of independence, productivity and strength that may be achieved during adulthood and mid-life. Some commentators have gone as far as to argue that difficulties faced by old men are caused by their devaluation and even de-gendering by hegemonic masculinity (Spector-Mersel 2006; Varley and Blasco 2000). These assumptions are problematic however as they are premised on essential understandings of both old age and hegemonic masculinity. Nonetheless this is theoretically interesting because the paradoxical and contradictory nature of these normative values suggests that ageing presents significant challenges to men as they get older and as they face the potential for gendered disempowerment resulting from the material processes of ageing.

### **Geographies of ageing masculinities**

To some extent the theoretical assumption that old age acts to de-gender old men has been replicated by social geographers, who rarely focus explicitly on old men and ageing masculinities. However limited research does suggest that old men's locations in age and gendered relations are of interest to geographers (Tarrant 2010). At one extreme, old men have been found to avoid public life altogether and are therefore more vulnerable to isolation in later life (Davidson, Daly and Arber 2003b). Other commentators suggest that older men experience disengagement from or exclusion from public spaces, (which have typically been constructed as masculine (McDowell 1999, and also private space as feminine)) because both discourses of gender and old age construct these spaces. Davidson, Daly and Arber (2003a) for example found that old men predominantly avoid social clubs such as Day Centres

because they construct the activities provided as more passive than active (i.e. playing Bingo, chatting and sitting around), and therefore more appropriate for 'old women'. These practices and men's consequent lack of engagement in these spaces construct Day Centres through gendered and age specific relations that reproduce men's disengagement and exclusion. Men were found to be more likely to attend clubs and organisations where activities were exclusively for men and had a specific purpose such as the Freemasons or British Legion (Davidson, Daly and Arber 2003a). Other research by Ormsby, Stanley and Jaworski (2011) suggests that men actively seek gender appropriate public spaces post retirement. In the Australian context, men aged 65 and over are participating in community-shed projects, whereby sheds provide specifically gendered spaces they define as 'men's space' that provide refuge and a sense of belonging (see also Ruxton 2006 and Featherstone, Rivett and Scourfield 2007).

What these examples suggest is that rather than becoming de-gendered, men's lives later in life, including the spaces where they feel included or excluded, continue to be subject to their gender and aged identities. Experiences of retirement for example represent a significant life event in the lifecourse when men become disconnected from traditional sources of power such as their work identity causing them to seek refuge in alternative spaces. Pain, Mowl and Talbot (2000) for example examine old men's experiences of Working Men's Clubs and the ways in which the intersections of multiple social relations, including gender, age, class and ability, shape and influence their experiences of later life. They found that some old men, particularly those deemed middle-class, use these spaces as a continuation of leisure allowing them to draw upon more positive discourses of masculinity and ageing. For economically disadvantaged men however, segregation between younger and old men (perceived by the old men to result from a more limited ability to drink and dance, and afford to buy rounds of drinks) contributes to the construction of the club as an 'aged'



space, that acts to exclude them. This paper significantly conceptualizes old age as a negotiation of difference, highlighting the diverse and multiple experiences of old age men may have.

### **Ageing masculinities and the home**

So far, each of the examples discussed explores old men's negotiations and practices in public and leisure spaces, but the boundaries between public and private are increasingly blurred (Smith and Winchester 1999) to the extent that activities and practices in the home, such as care for children and the elderly are defined in relation to work; often constructed as feminine, non-productive and devalued in the capitalist sphere (Del Casino Jr 2009). Consequently, the home, defined by Blunt and Dowling (2005) as a nexus of power and identity and a space that is differentially experienced based on axes of difference (Brickell, 2012), is an important site of re-negotiation for many men post retirement. In fact domestic masculinities and what Gorman-Murray (2012) defines as place-based masculinities are only just being interrogated in a more coherent way very recently, with a specific emphasis on the home (Brickell 2012; Endfield and Morris 2012; Gorman-Murray 2008; Walsh 2011).

For old men in particular the home has been found to be a site of resistance and contention. In adulthood, masculine identities are normatively connected with men's work environments (Smith and Winchester 1998) and paid employment so forced or encouraged transitions away from these hegemonic identities post retirement have been identified as causing men to experience contradictory and difficult emotions around the home. Varley and Blasco (2006) contend that homes can be particularly constraining for retired men, not only as they become divorced from work but also because they experience a loss of privacy from family members (Brickell 2012). While these transitions may be difficult, men must re-negotiate and construct new domestic masculinities indicating a continued blurring of

boundaries between work and home, and their relational nature, in alignment with relational theorisations of landscapes of care that define carescapes (Bowlby, Gregory and McKie 1997).

Other commentators however argue that constructions of men's heterosexual identities at home, particularly as fathers, remain intimately connected to hegemonic patriarchal constructions of masculinity through portrayals of the 'breadwinner' and 'master of the house' (Chapman 2004). While men lose some connection to the workplace and paid employment when retired, these discourses still permeate and blur public/private boundaries between work and home, constructing the home as a site of possibilities and contestation (Smith and Winchester 1998) whereby men's homemaking and domestic practices offer the potential for men to reconfigure masculinities (Gorman-Murray 2008).

Stuart Aitken's (2000) work on faltering fathers has also unsettled these highly gendered cultural ideologies of fatherhood by exploring day-to-day fathering practices, suggesting it is important to be aware that experiences of these identities and spaces are more diverse and multiply produced than wider discourse indicates. The home then is always being made and re-made by individuals later in life, particularly as individuals begin to face the challenges of ageing (Bhatti 2006). In returning to experiences post retirement, Mowl et al (2000) argue that rather than feeling entirely disempowered, men are also presented with an opportunity to actively negotiate their relationships with the home, which they tend to construct around notions of femininity and old age. In their study of the ageing body and the homespace, men in particular were found to be actively resistant to spending time at home in the fear that this accelerated 'old age'. In particular men related being confined to home in old age to bodily decline and loss of productivity. Negative discourses of old age are therefore pervasive and construct particular spaces in various ways, yet ageing can also

present opportunities for the re-negotiation of identities, by bringing more powerful elements to the fore.

The reviewed literature strongly indicates that men's experiences of ageing are practiced and emplaced and that their identities and experiences of different spaces are mutually constituted and mediated in and through spaces of everyday engagement. Both ageing and masculinity as intersecting social relations structure old men's practices and various inclusions and exclusions from a range of spaces, especially given that ageing masculinities conceptually at least, represents a shift or transition into subordinate masculinities (Calasanti 2004; Connell 1995; Varley and Blasco 2000) within a broader structure of gender relations.

It is at this point, that the article returns to thinking about care and caring practices. Geographical discourses of the home, whether about productivity, gender or parenting/fathering, indicate that caring responsibilities and obligations at home and in the family both regulate and collide with the identities of men. Davidson, Daly and Arber (2003b) neatly tie together the ways in which grandfathering practices represent the negotiation of old men's ageing masculinities and their familial obligations, suggesting that grandfathering allows men to become more nurturing in relationships with grandchildren than they were with their children (implicating age and lifecourse) and also to perform a sage like wisdom, characteristic of masculinity. Grandfathering and caring are therefore significant to performances of ageing masculinities.

In this theoretical context there is still a great deal more work that geographers and others can contribute to these debates by exploring the socially and spatially contingent nature of the intersecting power relations that comprise old men's identities (Tarrant 2010) and those elements that influence their lives as they age, including their intergenerational

relationships and caring practices. In focusing on grandfathering in particular, the analysis of the paper describes and analyses those everyday, mundane caring practices that are often taken-for-granted, to understand men's locations in both gender and age relations but also how these are part of broader carescapes that are both spatially and temporally contingent as well as mutually constituted. While these are not the only contexts in which men interact and experience ageing, in a study on men's familial relationships this emerged as significant to the participants who took part in the study. The empirical data presented in this paper is taken from interview and observation data collected for my doctoral research. Through an examination of men's, predominantly proximate<sup>2</sup> intergenerational carespaces and embodiments of masculinities and ageing, it builds an argument that men continue to adhere to traditional gender roles and practices while they can, as a way of spatially negotiating their paradoxical positioning in intersecting systems of (in)equality.

## **The Study**

The data presented in this paper are from a larger research project that examined contemporary constructions, performances and geographies of grandfatherhood in the UK. The interviews were organised around themes that explored men's practices of grandfathering (because broader social norms of fatherhood and grandfatherhood exist, yet the realities and diversities of 'doing' grandfather are not always fully captured by these ideas) and the spaces (both proximate and distant) in which men engage with their grandchildren and family members. Thematic analysis revealed the key spaces in which the contradictions inherent in performing ageing masculinities emerged for men. The study, from which the empirical data presented in this paper were collected, was qualitative and comprised of 31 semi-structured interviews with men who self-identified themselves as grandfathers. During the interview phase, two further complementary participant

observations were also conducted with two of the interviewees, which involved observing the men while they were interacting with their grandchildren.

The participant sample was diverse in relation to the men's ages, personal and familial circumstances and social backgrounds, which had a noticeable impact on the variation between the men's accounts and directly challenges essentialist constructions of grandparents. The age range of the sample was 51 to 88 years reflecting the socio-historical and demographic context in which men are currently grandfathering. While the age range of the men bridged middle and old age, the shared experience of being a grandfather prompted discussion of 'old age', 'feeling old' and also men's experiences of ageing, a key focus of the research. At the time of interview, 24 of the men were retired, two were employed full-time, one part-time and one was self-employed. Data concerning the men's current and past employment collected from a brief questionnaire prior to the interview, revealed that there was some variation in class between the men although this is difficult to define and conceptualise. The implications of this inevitably influenced men's identity formation but there is insufficient space to fully develop these arguments here.

The participant sample was more limited in diversity with regards to participant sexuality and ethnicity reflecting the difficulties of recruiting a hard to reach group of individuals. All participants identified as heterosexual and all but one of the men, was white British (one identified as Black with Jamaican heritage). The implications of these differences inevitably influence men's identity formation and constructions of grandfatherhood in different ways but it was felt that the sample provided a good representation of the locality from which the men were recruited (the Lancaster District in the northwest of England). The findings are not intended to be wholly representative of grandfathering in the UK but to explore personal accounts of grandfathering and their implications for constructing spatialized ageing masculinities. The sample recruited for this

study did allow for an exploration of difference although future research could broaden the scope of this project and examine the implications of ethnicity and sexualities on contemporary performances of grandfathering and ageing masculinities.

The men were recruited from a variety of social clubs and organisations, and work places in the Lancaster District, and were contacted either directly or using snowballing techniques. Given the nature of recruitment and the research focus on grandfathering, there was limited access to men who have been described as at increased risk of being isolated or excluded. The data subsequently focuses on more positive experiences of ageing by men (i.e. those that the men wanted me to know) but are nonetheless revealing of the diverse ways in which some men are experiencing ageing. The data from the narratives are not intended to be generalisable but do aid in questioning how the intersections of ageing and masculinity influence and structure men's lives and caring practices.

All of the interview data was transcribed, analysed and anonymised personally by the author and the names used in this paper are pseudonyms, assigned to protect the identities of the participants. While ages and marital status are published, all references to personal data are removed to avoid the potential for identification of the participants. Ethics were an important consideration in conducting the interviews and participant observations with the men. As a young female researcher, not only was I negotiating multiple positionalities and differences, I was frequently entering men's homes unaccompanied. Sometimes wives were present, but predominantly the interviews were one-to-one<sup>3</sup>. I deemed interviewing at the men's homes necessary for encouraging participant comfort in discussing their familial identity and also for the observational insights being in their homes provided. As Elwood and Martin (2000) argue, people's homes provide insight into people's identities through their micro-geographies. The observations were also held in the homes of the participants, which

was their choice and indicated the importance of the home as a site for grandfathering. In these contexts, wives, children and grandchildren were present.

### **Negotiating public and private caring spaces to grandfather**

Several geographers have demonstrated the local and spatially variable nature of parenting (Aitken 2000; 2009; Valentine 1997) and care work; activities that are constituted of the places in which they are practiced (Atkinson, Lawson and Wiles 2010; Barker 2011; Parr and Philo 2003). Caring spaces, where the intergenerational care relationships of grandparents and their grandchildren take place, are less understood. Spaces of everyday intergenerational engagement were often implicit in the men's narratives about grandfathering, but were nonetheless significant to the ways in which they described their involvement in their grandchildren's lives. As a largely middle class group of men (employment information is described in the methods section), the grandfathers placed emphasis on going out and doing things with grandchildren outside of the home, representing a continuation of practices that many men establish when fathers (Brannen and Nilsen 2006; O'Brien and Shelmit 2003; Scraton and Holland 2006). Being active and doing leisure activities outside of the home was considered important to their care work and defined their geographies of care (Barker 2011), especially for grandfathers with young grandchildren. Some of the men also made distinctions between their practices, and those of their wives, partners and grandchildren. In particular, this reflected the men's normative gendered understandings about men and women's roles as grandparents, which they considered to be something different to what parents could offer:

*What tends to happen is if we [he and his wife] have...both [grandchildren] for a couple of days, we will split up, my wife and I, and take one each for some of the time... it's the best way of coping with them really (laughs) I mean they're great, they're not difficult, but they*

*are young and lively, and I'm better, I think I am definitely better, if you wanted to sort of see the difference between the way my wife and I operate with them, I need to have somewhere to go, and somewhere to look at and something to show them. My wife is absolutely brilliant at sitting down at the table like this, and getting them interested in absolutely everything. I tend to say "right, we'll go to, somewhere" so we'll go say to, when Preston North End [football team] are playing, and we'll go to the match*

Arnold, age 65, still married

*I think the children see... my wife, more as the, provider of food and home comforts if that's? and I'm more the Butlins redcoat you know, like I always take them swimming or, riding their bike on the prom, well we sometimes do that, I do that kind of thing and [wife] does more of the (tut) I suppose it's an awful thing to say these days isn't it?, especially to a young woman, the more domestic aspect of it. Like I'm hopeless at dressing them and bathing them, and ought like that*

Philip, age 61, still married

In alignment with findings by Brandth and Kvande (2001) and Barker (2008) concerning fathering, grandfathers do not replicate the care given by their wives. They discuss different caring practices that indicate grandfathers construct a distinctly masculine concept of caring (Barker 2008). This is spatially contingent and the men draw on spatial metaphors and gendered divisions of labour established earlier in the lifecourse to justify and make sense of their practices as grandfathers. While Scraton and Holland (2006) based their argument on a limited sample they also found that the established division of labour between leisure and childcare from fatherhood often continues into old age because men are reluctant or unable to break these patterns. This suggests that the occupation of particular spaces is significant to the performances of intergenerational interaction, and consequently how men perform their



identities and caring obligations as old men, reproducing these gendered carescapes later in the lifecourse. This reveals that intergenerational carescapes are central to the reproduction of social difference for old men, and in particular, performances of masculinity. While recent research indicates the emergence of a norm of 'new grandfatherhood' in the UK (Mann and Leeson 2010) in which men, particularly those under 65, express the desire to become more nurturing, caring and involved with grandchildren, it is still important to note that these caring practices and spaces of care betray this continued gendered division of labour, constructed through a public/private dichotomy and reproduced as men negotiate their age. Traditional socio-cultural expectations of fatherhood and motherhood are clearly enduring into grandparenthood and influence men's engagement in a variety of public spaces that are deemed gender appropriate.

For Arnold taking grandchildren out is not only gendered, but is also a coping strategy structured around age difference between himself and his grandchildren, reflecting the diversity of reasons why men may find it more difficult to alter traditional gendered care patterns. Arnold's narrative also suggests that this can be attributed to the ways in which men strongly associated being a grandfather with being old, a dominant cultural construction (Attius-Donfut and Segalen 2002). 74-year-old widow Roger for example said: I didn't like [becoming a grandfather] at first (laughs). I suddenly thought "I'm old" you know although I wasn't particularly old. I was probably in my late 40s when the first one was born". These examples imply that while men emphasise distinctly gendered care practices and spatialities that produce and reproduce gendered carescapes, other social relations, and in particular age differences, shape their interactions in fluid and complex ways, as a result of context and the nature of relationships with wives and grandchildren.

As previously mentioned, the participants did not only defend the use of specifically masculinized spaces; there was also evidence of new forms of grandfatherhood in which men

were adopting more nurturing and caring roles. In public spaces this more nurturing role became a source of exclusion and feeling out of place for some men suggesting that men's experiences and performances of masculinity and ageing when grandfathering continue to be mediated in public settings. Gerald's narrative in particular highlights the ways in which his bodily appearance as an ageing man acts as a significant marker of difference and subtly challenges his sense of belonging in a broader carescape outside of the home:

*when [daughter, age 7] was born, I used to be the one off a lot [working from home] but, went to playgroups with her and so, you can imagine that was slightly difficult, not only because I was a man, that was difficult enough because there were very few men, main carers, so there might be one other man or 2 other men but of course they were 20 years younger than me, so I was this older man! So that was you know, 9 years ago I was, I was already then 50 whatever I was, 54 or something, in amongst all these young women with babies and I, you know I was odd, I got some funny looks, and people you know say "who's that old grandad?" and they'd call me grandad*

Gerald, age 63, re-married

Several social relations determine Gerald's experience of the playschool where he takes his youngest daughter. He evidently feels out of place and this is attributed to both being a man, but also being an older man in a carespace where traditional configurations of gender (Barker 2011) and also age and family, are pervasive. Even though ideas about fatherhood and masculinities are changing, old men are evidently regarded as being outside of familial relations and carespaces (Barker 2008; Mac an Ghail 2007). Not only are these carespaces gendered and aged, but Gerald's embodiments of ageing masculinities also determine his sense of inclusion or exclusion by the other parents in this particular space. Challenges to hegemonic masculinities are produced by cultural expectations that old age equates to

'grandfather', highlighting the highly emplaced nature of the challenge to masculinities that are embodied when ageing, and are pertinent when men engage in gender constructed spaces.

### **Situating caring practices: 'old age' and lifecourse experience**

The data discussed in the previous section supports the notion that men place emphasis on leisure and the outdoors as intergenerational carespaces, relating their activities to public space and productivity that relate to work domains where they were previously empowered. When grandfathering post retirement however they also spend increased time at home and are therefore involved in the production and reproduction of domestic masculinities and the gendered reconstitution of the home. Significantly the embodiment of masculinities and age in domestic and/or care spaces were also central to the men's narratives of their grandfathering practices, perhaps unsurprising given that how individuals make sense of their ageing is intimately connected to their bodies and its abilities (Laz 2003; Pain, Mowl and Talbot 2000). Connell (1995: 45) has also argued that 'true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies', but it is also a site where the contradictions and complexities of masculinity are revealed (Robertson 2006), particularly in old age.

The embodied experience of becoming older as a man is less understood in geography certainly, but negative discourses of old age were powerful in framing how the grandfathers in the study negotiated their identities in these spaces, and was particularly salient in discussions about play and physical interaction with grandchildren. In describing their intergenerational practices with grandchildren the participants actively and emotionally resisted discourses of 'old age' in diverse ways by embodying masculine practices such as physical play and activity as Peter's narrative suggests:

*I think its good for you as a grandparent to be held down and made to run after a football and stop being lazy and sat in front of a television so there's a...a positive sort of health*

*dynamic there, and I think not just with the grandchildren but with children as well. A lot of our closer relationships are with the next generation down, and I think in, in old age I think it keeps you younger and, wiser and your feet closer to the ground. I think there is a danger with the older generation of sort of nodding off into Coronation Street for the next 30 years*

Peter, age 65, re-married

For Peter, and several other men whose narratives aligned with this statement including Arnolds discussed earlier, bodily changes as a result of ageing contribute to the distinct social geographies of care in grandfathering. This perspective indicates that grandfathering, and its association with old age and disability justifies the seeking of spaces of care beyond the home. In this respect grandparenting enables continued access to public and leisure spaces by men through their involvement in intergenerational caring. It further highlights that intergenerational care practices are multidirectional and interdependent (Morgan and Holdsworth 2005), benefitting grandchildren, and also the men themselves. The spatial negotiation of ageing and masculinities is therefore more than about structural constraints and social inequalities, but is negotiated in complex ways in interactions with grandchildren and in response to essential discourses that belie the complexity of ageing and being a man.

The embodiment of ageing is clearly important to the men and is imbued with social meaning that men negotiate through their caring practices, however there are very real material realities to ageing including the decline of the body which has real biological and physiological characteristics i.e. it will age and will die (Slevin 2008). Several of the men discussed how interactions with grandchildren, as well as the influences of ageing constrained their bodies, revealing the complex and contested nature of caring for grandchildren:

*[granddaughter, nine months] comes round and we give her breakfast and then we play... with toys and this sort of thing...and of course she's at that stage now where she's exploring, she's started to crawl and not far from walking either, so it's good fun trying to keep her out of mischief, well it's not good fun actually it's bad for the back (laughs)*

James, age 62, living with partner

*As you grow old you become more infirm...you're unable to do a lot of the physical things you once did and it begins to affect you mentally. I have an awfully bad memory for, for names, and...it gets worse as time goes on and this sort of thing. This is the main thing, your physical and mental degeneration if you like. It is compensated for by a lot of experience and wisdom, you haven't got when you're young*

David, age 86, still married

*The grandchildren will start the chasing game you know "catch me grandpa if you can" and I could do myself a mischief so, like a lot of men my age I suppose, if I'm well, I'll pick, I'll put [grandson] up on my shoulders. He's now 10 and growing fast and might occasionally even now try that and my son will say "be careful with grandpa" and I'm aware that I can't do it without you know sooner or later, I'll harm myself...I want to be a dad again... (laughs) but I haven't got the energy at all. It's very frustrating as a grandfather, we still think of ourselves as 25, look in the mirror and say "oh you poor old man" you know (laughs) yeah.*

Bill, age 72, still married

The participants evidently respond to their ageing and perception of old age in different ways, drawing on discourses of embodiment and (dis)ability relating to old age to explain what they

do. They do this in diverse ways. In alignment with Davidson, Daly and Arber (2003a) David negotiates his embodied ageing by emphasizing his wisdom and experience, avoiding the 'undoing' of his identity as a man that age causes, by focusing on more masculine practices that enact 'sage' like qualities. James as the younger of the men is aware that his abilities to play with his granddaughter in a physical way is bad for him and potentially harmful to his back and both James and Bill, reflect on why their physical caring practices become more restricted. Nonetheless they continue to engage in these potentially risky practices associated with bodily performances of hegemonic masculinities, a common discourse in men's health literatures (Courteney 2000; Robertson 2006).

Moreover, Bill in particular frames his frustrations in the context of his fathering practices in the past; he is getting older, he wants to remain physical with his grandson and to play with him, but his body is becoming less able and what he sees in the mirror, embodies a different reality to the 25 year old, powerful man he was in his youth. Playing not only represents compliance with a more youthful kind of masculinity, where physical activity, performance and competition are venerated, but it is also a version of masculinity typical to fathering. From an intergenerational care perspective, it is interesting that it is his identity as a father that he considers to be being challenged and eroded in the third generation.

These findings nuance how the intersections of masculinities and ageing might be viewed through the lens of intergenerational familial caring practices by revealing that what men do in the family is shaped and structured by men's individual responses to norms and expectations, but also by real structural and embodied constraints and abilities. More significant however is that examples indicate that men position their caring practices within a broader spatial and temporal carescape, by making sense of their contemporary caring practices and spaces in relation to fathering. Rather than seeing how the intersections of old age and masculinities are 'done' and 'undone' (Valentine 2007) through men's performances

of hegemonic masculinity, men see physical play as about trying to ‘be a dad’ and performing like a dad. Rather than simply the outcome of re-enforcing gendered spatial carescapes, Bill also links his caring practices of play to a temporal carescape; one in which his subjectivities as a father are challenged both in the context of his lifecourse and in the material constraints ageing causes when embodying gendered caring practices.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Through focusing on the caring practices of men who are grandfathers across multiple sites both outside and within the home (conceptualized here as carescapes), this paper has begun to interrogate the complex ways in which men re-negotiate notions of hegemonic masculinity in response to their ageing. Social geographers recognize that both masculinities and old age are diverse and are multiply and spatially produced (Hopkins and Noble 2009; Pain, Mowl and Talbot 2000) but have rarely considered how they intersect to construct multiple masculinities and diverse experiences of ageing for men in a variety of everyday localities. To start to do this, the narratives of grandfathers have been explored in this paper because theoretically this is a role and identity in which old men negotiate the intersections of age and masculinities (Mann 2007) and more generally men are increasingly being recognized for their contributions in informal economies of care.

The data discussed in this paper suggests that men are active in subverting the predominantly negative norms that accompany old age and ageing and that performances of masculinities, and intergenerational interactions in gendered carespaces are central to this process. This adds complexity to existing assumptions in both sociology and social geography that old age always acts to de-gender men and results in various forms of exclusion from public spaces. Instead grandfathering and the gendering of grandfathering practices provide men with opportunities for continued access to various public and leisure

spaces. Possibilities for transforming spaces such as the home, that are currently constructed through notions of femininity and old age (Mowl, Pain and Talbot 2000), are also created through performances of new domestic masculinities.

Despite debate about the emergence of a 'new grandfatherhood' (Mann and Lesson, 2010) and changing gender identities and roles in the family, there is evidence that some men continue to frequent particular gendered spaces, seemingly as a result of resisting subjective notions of old age. This reproduces a persistent gendered division of labour in grandparenthood, continually gendering the spaces in which caring is enacted across the lifecourse. In contrast to findings by Scraton and Holland (2006) however, these men are not using these spaces because they see care for grandchildren as work and therefore detrimental to their ability to seek leisure. They are incorporating their grandchildren in these spaces, constructing distinctly masculine practices of care later in life in response to the needs of their grandchildren, as well as their ageing highlighting the relational nature of identity performances. These findings challenge the existing theoretical consensus in social geography, which suggests that the home is a potentially exclusionary space for old men (Brickell 2012; Varley and Blasco 2000). Instead grandfathering, and the carescapes across which grandfathering is enacted, provides opportunities for sustained resistance to spatially embedded ageism and social relations such as old age that construct grandparent identities, and that men subjectively understand to be problematic.

The carescapes concept also encompasses the temporality as well as spatiality of care and caring practices however (Bowlby, Gregory and McKie 1997) and lifecourse subjectivities such as fathering and changing patterns of care over time are also influencing the diverse and complex ways in which men negotiate their ageing masculinities in different spaces. Some of these narratives indicate that feeling old and the feeling that masculinity is



under threat is a result of not being able to perform masculinities that the men had once enacted as fathers.

However, the material realities and embodiments of ageing clearly challenge the re-visiting of gendered parenting practices established earlier in the lifecourse and this suggests some potential for change to traditional gendered caring practices. As grandfathers, men react to this differently; some will engage in potentially risky embodiments of masculinity such as physical play while others emphasize their wisdom and experience. These findings indicate the transformative potential of grandfathering and care in the shaping of multiple masculinities, offering possibilities for social and cultural geographers to explore these diversities in much greater detail and in different contexts. Interesting to consider are the complex roles both spaces, lifecourse experience and familial roles play in the reconfiguring of masculinities over time. In particular it would be fruitful to explore in more depth how grandfathering may also provide opportunities for men to become increasingly nurturing and consequently to play a role in the transformation of those spaces in the men's carescapes that are constructed in particular ways by age and gender.

Additional to these insights from the empirical data, that old men negotiate and perform masculinities in diverse ways in later life, these findings contribute to wider debates in social and cultural geography about the intersectional geographies of masculine (and indeed old age) identities. A recent special issue of *Social and Cultural Geography* includes articles that aim to account for the ways in which other forms of identification and relationality are present in the performances of masculinities in different places at different times (Hopkins and Noble 2009). Old age and later life caring identities were not explored within these debates, yet as this paper indicates they clearly contribute to constructing diverse emplaced performances of multiple masculinities and provide valuable insight into the

dynamic and fluid identities ageing individuals adopt and negotiate, and that are present when masculinities are performed in different contexts.

Thinking through the relationality of masculine identities in the context of ageing also demands a rethink and a reconceptualization of the relationships between ageing and place. In a society where both ageism and sexism remain deeply embedded, individuals are seeking ways of ageing positively and are avoiding ‘a unitary ageing subject...increasingly envisioned as socially and spatially marginal as well as materially and socially unproductive’ (Del Casino Jr 2009: 248). Geographers are well placed to further examine how old age is diversely experienced and articulated in different contexts, but also how ‘old age’ identities and the relationships old individuals have with place, are relationally produced. In short there is an opportunity to re-conceptualise old age by thinking through the range of ‘vectors of relationality’ (Hopkins and Pain 2009) that are present when age identities are performed in different places and at different times. An examination of grandfathering is just one example where ageing masculinities are multiply performed in the context of lifecourse subjectivities and intergenerational interactions with grandchildren across gendered carescapes.

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### **Notes**

1. I use the term ‘old’ throughout, as opposed to ‘older’, in alignment with arguments made by Toni Calasanti (2003). She argues that “older” is one-way of conveying old people as middle-age and therefore more acceptable. Using the term ‘old’ is one way of reclaiming

- the term to instill it with positive valuation and thus challenge the attached, socially constructed stigma.
2. There isn't the scope to discuss this here, but the participants also discussed communicating with grandchildren across distances using a range of communication technologies, transforming their forms of care and intimacy with grandchildren.
  3. Previous studies have raised the issue of 'interviewer vulnerability' in interviewing men (e.g. Lee, 1997), so like Gatrell (2006) I followed strict safety protocol for each interview that was designed to protect me and the participants' personal information unless it absolutely had to be revealed.

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