Imagining the unimaginable: Bisexual roadmaps for ageing

We're all pilgrims on the same journey - but some pilgrims have better road maps (Nelson DeMille)

Introduction

Life, as the old cliché states, is a journey. We journey into our own ageing but, apart from the end point of our eventual death, most people do not know where they are going to end up or the route they will take to get there. We use roadmaps to guide us into the unknown territory of our futures, roadmaps that give us a representation of the route we might take. These maps usually include major landmarks on the way, which will allow us to check that we haven't got lost and give a sense of predictability and progress to our journey. Conventionally, these major landmarks might be life events such as education, starting paid work, marriage, having children and retirement. We may also navigate by following well-worn roads or, if the path we are following is less-travelled, we may follow a trailblazer. While many people's journeys turn out to be different from the ones they had anticipated, whether through unwillingly becoming lost or a more positive choice to change the route, roadmaps for some people's journeys are much more difficult to identify.

This chapter discusses the roadmaps produced by one group for whom traditional roadmaps may be less useful; bisexual-identified adults with a high degree of unconventional life course features. It introduces the particular challenges of imagining bisexual ageing and examines the ways in which using creative methods in an unusual research setting enabled them to overcome this difficulty.

Imagining personal ageing

Gerontologists have noted for many years that people often find it hard to imagine themselves growing old, characterising this failure of imagination as both arising from and contributing toward ageism and the ill-treatment of older people (Bultena & Powers, 1978; Bytheway, 1995, 2005; Nelson, 2005). However being unwilling to imagine the future and oneself as older can have a variety of negative consequences (Jones, in press), both at a more macro societal level (e.g. inadequate planning and provision of care services [Pickard, in press] and environmental degradation and public health problems [Adam, in press]) and at a more personal level. It is clear that many younger people worry about growing older (Neikrug, 2003) and some expect old age to be miserable (Lacey, Smith, & Ubel, 2006). Lacey et al. argue that this expectation can lead to poor decision making in the present because a future aged self is not valued, as well as reinforcing inter-generational conflict and misunderstanding. Similarly, Moody (1988) argues that negative visions of old age as a time of tragedy, decline and loss can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

There is a small literature on what happens when researchers ask people (usually school, college and university students) to imagine the future course of their lives into
old age. It is clear that, while younger people often have negative and homogenised visions of old age (Kimuna, Knox, & Zusman, 2005; Mosher-Ashley & Ball, 1999; C. Phoenix & Sparkes, 2007; Scott, Minichiello, & Browning, 1998), they are often able to imagine that their own old age will be more positive (Bulbeck, 2005; Patterson, Forbes, & Peace, 2009). To the extent that people are able to imagine their own ageing, they often draw on older people they know, especially family members, as role models (Hockey & James, 2003; C. Phoenix & Sparkes, 2006). They also draw on cultural resources around them, such as films, books and other media (Masters & Holley, 2006).

These studies find that imagined future life courses almost always include marriage and having children (Bulbeck, 2005; Gordon, Holland, Lahelma, & Thomson, 2005; Patterson et al., 2009; C. Phoenix & Sparkes, 2008). These life course features, while increasingly available to some non-heterosexuals, can be considered aspects of a heteronormative life course (Goltz, 2008; Warner, 1991; Watson, 2005).

**Imagining queer ageing**

Enabling queer people to imagine their own ageing and later life is both particularly challenging and particularly important. Many authors have argued that older queer people are culturally invisible and this means not only that services and resources are often lacking (Fish, 2007; Grossman, D'Augelli, & O'Connell, 2001; Sales, 2002; Ward, Jones, Hughes, Humberstone, & Pearson, 2008) but also that older queer people are rarely available as role models for younger queer people. The commercial gay scene, in particular, is predominantly youth-centred and even hostile to older age, which may be defined as beginning as early as around age 30 (Goltz, 2008; Ward et al., 2008). Saxey (2008) argues that the prominence given to ‘coming-out’ stories, which are almost always portrayed as something occurring in earlier life, means that older queer people are also invisible in literature.

Perhaps the most visible figure of an older queer person is an older gay man who is self-loathing, isolated, sexually predatory and closeted (Berger, 1996; Hostetler, 2004). While research suggests that this bears little relation to most older gay men’s experiences, its influence is argued to increase the tendency of young gay men to fear ageing (Goltz, 2008). Lesbian communities are generally claimed to be less ageist than gay ones (ibid) but in a previous study, we found that many older lesbians reported finding lesbian spaces increasingly unwelcoming and inaccessible as they aged, and lesbian communities largely age stratified (Ward et al., 2008). This suggests that younger lesbians may also be lacking in role models for queer ageing.

While a body of research literature now exists on the experiences of ageing for lesbians and gay men (e.g. Heaphy, 2007; Heaphy, Yip, & Thompson, 2004; Pugh, 2005; Rosenfeld, 2003), there is hardly any empirical work on bisexual, trans or other forms of queer ageing. For bisexual people, Weinberg et al.’s paper on mid-life bisexuals suggests some useful starting points (Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 2001) but is not about later life. The age profile of people attending BiCon, and of the bi-identified community in general in the UK, is somewhat older than that of the commercial lesbian and gay scene, but is still relatively youthful with an average age in the mid-30s (Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy, & Brewer, 2008; Jones, 2011).
One empirical piece of research explicitly asked queer people to imagine their own ageing and later life. Goltz (2008) ran a semester-long series of ‘generative pedagogical focus groups’ for undergraduates at a US university, aimed at imagining queer futures using creative methods such as writing, drawing, making up songs and dancing. Seven people, aged between 19 and 29 attended, four of whom were male, of whom three identified as gay and queer and one as queer and attracted to women, and three of whom were women and identified as queer and lesbian or bisexualii. Goltz’ study asks whether sexuality affects the capacity to imagine a positive later life. He found marked differences between the futures envisaged by the men and the women. The men imagined overwhelmingly negative later lives of isolation, loneliness, bitterness and early death. They did not imagine long term relationships or having children. The women imagined much happier futures, focused on long-term coupledom and having children but mainly limited to domesticity. Goltz argues that the extent to which the participants were able to imagine happy later lives was dependent on the extent to which they were able to imagine life courses which resembled traditional heterosexual ones.

Goltz’s study suggests that queer people need a roadmap with conventional landmarks in order to imagine their own ageing positively. The ‘Imagining Bi Futures’ project, while not exactly replicating Goltz’s study, was partly aimed at testing this finding.

**Methods**

The study drew participants from people who attended the main UK annual gathering for bisexual people, BiConiii, in August 2010iv. It is not claimed that either the research participants or people who attend BiCon are in any sense representative or typical of people who identify as bisexual, still less of people who behave bisexually (for more on the significance of this distinction, see Jones, 2010). As can be seen in Table 1, they are an unusual group demographically.

Table 1: Demographic features of participants in Imagining Bi Futures research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(n= 33)</th>
<th>Explanatory notes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>20-66 (av 37.5)</td>
<td>These were in the following age bands:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Under 25 5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35-44 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55-64 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bisexual?</strong></td>
<td>97% (32)</td>
<td>This figure is a response to a yes/no question ‘have you ever described yourself as bisexual?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>61% (20)</td>
<td>The question about gender identity was free response and many answers were non-binary. For fuller discussion of how they were coded, see Jones, 2011.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>18% (6)</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trans/genderqueer</strong></td>
<td>21% (7)</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White ethnicities</strong></td>
<td>76% (25)</td>
<td>The question about ethnicity was free response. Answers coded ‘white’ included ‘Caucasian’ and ‘Greek/American’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black British</strong></td>
<td>6% (2)</td>
<td>One person added ‘(person of colour)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mizrahi Jew</strong></td>
<td>6% (2)</td>
<td>..</td>
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</tbody>
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Other 12 % (4) These were all different and included mixed ethnicities.
Highest educational qualification
undergraduate degree or above 82% (27)
Disabilities 27% (9) In response to the question "do you have any disabilities?"
Currently single 27% (9) This information comes from a free response question "current romantic/sexual relationships" rather than systematic enquiry, so rates are likely to be an underestimate.
Currently married 15% (5)
Currently civil partnered 3% (1)
Polyamorous / non-monogamous 58% (19) This was in response to a question ‘Are you poly?’. Most people wrote simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but a few added elaborations.
Currently have children 18% (6) This was in response to the question ‘do you have children?’
Definitely expect or want to have children 6% (2) This was in response to the question ‘do you expect or want to have children?’

Thus, it can be seen that participants in this study, in line with people attending BiCon in general (Barker et al., 2008), have high rates of life course features which are not found on conventional roadmaps for ageing, such as being bisexual, polyamorous’ or transgender/genderqueer and being disabled in earlier life. Taking account of their age profile, relatively few participants had already experienced landmark life events such as getting married and having children. So many people at BiCon display these non-traditional identities and life course features that what is (temporarily) treated as ‘normal’ can be inverted (Barker et al., 2008; Bowes-Catton, Barker, & Richards, in press). I argue elsewhere that this was highly salient to the participants’ ability to imagine positive non-normative futures (Jones, 2011).

Data were collected during three one hour workshops attended by 33 people in total. Workshops were audio recorded and had a three part structure which initially focused on negative visions of old age, using the phrase ‘when I fear growing older, I imagine’ as a stimulus for discussion. This was followed by a focus on positive visions of old age, including an adaptation of a reading from the book *Growing Old Disgracefully* (The Hen Co-op, 1993). Participants were then instructed to make a picture of how they imagined their own old age or later life, using materials supplied – coloured paper, stickers, glitter pens, glue, felt-tips, scissors and so on. They were told that it didn’t matter whether they create a positive, negative, realistic or mixed picture of their later life. While participants were creating their images I talked to as many of them as I could, asking them what they were representing. When people finished their images they wrote a brief description of what the picture showed and filled in the demographic questionnaire. Finally there was some whole group discussion.

The data thus consist of: audio recordings of the whole group discussions and my conversations with people as they were making their images; written descriptions of the images and filled-in demographic questionnaires; and the images themselves. The qualitative data was analysed thematically, looking for patterns in how participants were able to imagine their own futures. Examples of some of the pictures created are included for illustrative purposes but their contents are not analysed here.
The remainder of this chapter discusses the four commonest ways in which participants were able to imagine roadmaps for personal ageing, characterising each theme found in the data as a different kind of route-finding technique. However, the discussion first elaborates on the relative absence of the route-finding techniques which have been found by other research into how people are able to imagine their own ageing.

**Relative absence of some common route-finding techniques**

As might perhaps be expected from a group with such high rates of current poly practice (58%) and even higher rates of past experience or willingness to consider poly in the future (a further 15% n=5), the landmark event of finding ‘the one’ (Patterson et al., 2009) life partner and settling down to happy monogamy is much less common in this data than in the other studies. Many people imagined poly futures or futures which might be either monogamous or poly – often using the formulation ‘my partner(s)’. Imagining a poly future may entail a higher degree of uncertainty about the future than imagining a monogamous future with an existing partner, since the people with whom you will age may not all be known. Given current divorce and re-partnering rates, many people who think of themselves as monogamous will not, in the end, grow older with the person that they imagined they would. But the expectation that they will age with one already known person may make it more possible to imagine their future than someone who may anticipate future change to the number and nature of their partners.

Adding to this a bisexual identity may mean that the gender of future partners is also not known. As Bunny (all names are self-chosen pseudonyms) said of the future partners shown in her picture (see Picture 1):

“I deliberately drew that they are a lot less detailed than I am, because I can’t imagine other people’s futures and I don’t know what gender they would have, so I deliberately left them kind of fairly vague, you know, because I didn’t think I could specify”

Picture 1:
Thus, imagining lifetime continuity through relationships with partners may be less possible for some bisexual poly people. Only 6 participants in this study specified that a current partner would be in their future.

Less than a third (n=10) of the imagined futures mentioned current or future children. Previous researchers have found clear gender differences in the extent to which people imagine having children (Altpeter & Marshall, 2003; Patterson et al., 2009), but these were not found in this data. Very similar low proportions of men (33%, n=2) and women (30%, n=6) mentioned the possibility of having children. Previous studies have not covered genderqueer/trans people; in this study 29% (n=2) imagined the possibility of having children. Thus, across all gender categories, around 70% of respondents did not imagine having children.

Other researchers have also found that biological or adoptive family play an important role in providing templates for life courses and ageing (Hockey & James, 2003). For example, Phoenix and Sparkes (2006) found that same-sex older family members were a particularly important resource for university student athletes attempting to imagine their own ageing. However, there was very little mention of older family members in this data set.

How, then, did participants managed to construct roadmaps for their own ageing?

**Navigating by landmarks**

While participants in this study predominantly did not use the conventional landmarks of marriage and having children, they did use other types of landmarks, most prominently stereotypes about what older people’s lives are like. These stereotypes seemed to function as landmarks on the road ahead, which made later life recognizable and familiar. So, for example, when participants in the first workshop
when asked to describe the things they feared about growing older, they very quickly and fluently produced the following list:

- Running out of money.
- Running out of brain, one’s mental capacity.
- All my friends dying first.
- Having no control over your life.
- Not being listened to.
- Needing a lot of physical help.
- Feeling vulnerable.
- Not being able to have enough fun, it sounds quite broad, but not being able to do the things that one finds fun or not being able to things that one finds fun at that time. Kind of stuck in a nursing home with the telly on and nothing else to do.
- I was thinking of running out of energy.
- Being left out of things.
- Being patronised.
- To bring it right down, elder abuse.
- Not quite understanding what is going on, these young people, what are they doing these days?

These are the kind of fears that many people have about growing old (Neikrug, 2003; Nelson, 2005) and the participants in this research seemed to be able to imagine that these experiences might be theirs too. While these topographical features are unwanted, they clearly can be imagined and thus they provide landmarks for the future.

Less negatively, some participants drew on the idea of old age as a time characterised by a more home-based life, withdrawn from the hustle and bustle of younger people’s lives, a common idea about later life (Patterson et al., 2009). For example, Doris was describing and drawing a picture of her imagined future house in the countryside (Picture 2):

Doris: … and the telegraph wires to sort of be connected to the outside and stuff, so it’s not completely out in the country.
Rebecca: Is it more on your own in the country than now? Is that something you would envisage?
Doris: I think maybe a little bit more yes. Or at least there will be more flexibility about, you know, when I want to engage with the wider world. I think I see it as being more of a time of choice rather than a time of sort of necessary engagement I suppose.

Picture 2:
Many gerontologists and organisations working with older people have rejected as an unhelpful stereotype the figure of the frail and dependent older person (Bytheway, 1995). Others have rejected the vision of a privatised consumerist later life offered by more apparently positive new ways of ageing (Katz, 2001-02; Katz & Marshall, 2003; Minkler & Holstein, 2008). However, this dataset draws attention to the ways in which such stereotyped notions about the characteristics of later life serve to help make it possible for people who are not yet old to imagine that they one day might be so. Evidence of the useful role that stereotypes play in enabling people to imagine the future can perhaps also be seen in two participants’ choices of pseudonym; Doris and Pearl. Doris and Pearl were sat next to each other in the workshop and imagined futures that included each other. Did playfully giving themselves what I, at least, read as ‘old lady’ names help them to imagine themselves into a future older persona? We don’t know but it seems possible that it did.

Bodily change is one of the commonest ways in which older age is culturally signified, through markers such as grey hair, wrinkles and stooped posture (Twigg, 2007; Ward & Holland, 2011). We might therefore expect that the images produced in this study would include representations of visibly aged bodies. However, this was not the case - very few pictures showed bodily changes. One participant indicated that they expected to have put on weight by the time they were older and Rosemary, when explaining her picture to me said:

Rosemary: And that’s my other partner, [name]. I have put glasses on him; he doesn’t normally wear glasses.
Rebecca: Okay yes, but this is part of imagining him older,
Rosemary: Yes
Here, because of our common shared ideas about what happens to people’s bodies as they age, I am able to recognise that the glasses signify her partner’s ageing and Rosemary confirms my understanding.

Most participants did not represent their own bodies at all, or did so only with a stick figure. The only person to produce a detailed future portrait was Silentium. Their picture of their future self looked remarkably like their present self and their annotations attend to this: ‘Still look like I’m only 18...’, ‘maybe on hormones?’ and ‘natural white stripes on black hair’. They captioned the whole picture with an underlined ‘HARD TO IMAGINE…’. It is tempting to speculate that the absence of representations of bodily change and the generally positive nature of the imagined futures (Jones, 2011) are correlated.

**Avoiding well-known landmarks**

An opposite strategy to drawing on stereotypical ideas about later life is to deliberately counter them and position your imagined future in opposition to expectations about life courses and later life. The roadmap for ageing can be imagined through the landmarks which are explicitly avoided. For example, a participant in Workshop 1 said she feared “people calling me grandma even though I have specifically chosen not to have children”. This was the most common strategy used by participants in this study but is not discussed in this chapter for reasons of space. Instead, see (Jones, 2011). Clearly, one setting in which roadmaps for unconventional ageing can more easily be imagined is a space such as BiCon which supports the expression and representation of bisexual and other uncommon identities.

**Following a trailblazer**

Although older family members were seldom mentioned as role models for ageing, there was significant mention of older friends who played a role similar to that of a trailblazer in making it possible to imagine non-conventional paths into ageing. This was particularly the case in Workshops 1 and 3 which had the smallest number of participants (6 in each) which made more substantial group discussion possible.

Few people knew many older bisexual people, but older people with whom they shared other identity features functioned as role models for some. So, for example, in Workshop 1 Amy said:

I am a Quaker and I think one of the many, for me, good things about that is that I have got loads of friends who are old and really active still, because that seems to happen to Quakers. I think it is part of just being involved in community, so I have got friends in their 80s who still go hiking in the Peak District.

A few minutes later the following exchange between Amy and Laura took place:

Amy: That’s something else I get from Quakers as well, because there are queer people there. I don’t know any in their 90s or possibly even 80s, but seventies downwards who I know and who I know are happy, yes, it’s helpful.
Laura: I do know one older feminist practice woman who I don’t think is, I don’t know if she is queer or not, it wouldn’t surprise me either way. She has just
moved to Hebden Bridge [laughter from group] so that kind of changed the balance of my guess a little, but she is just awesome, she is one of those people that I kind of look at and go ‘I want to be like you when I grow up’ she is ex-Greenham Common, a teacher who occasionally teaches workshops in climbing, in locking yourself up trees and things.

Amy: I have a sort of Godmother who isn’t queer but is an activist. She went on a course last year or the year before on non-violent direct action, and she is 81 I think now. She says it doesn’t matter if she gets a criminal record now!

Here, the participants, unprompted by me, talk about whether or not their role models are queer and orient to this as salient to their ability to map their own future life courses. Trailblazers, it seems, do not need to be exactly like the person who will follow them but just sufficiently similar in important respects.

Laura’s childlike formulation ‘when I grow up’ rather than ‘when I grow older’ was also used by Lisa in Workshop 3:

Lisa: I have one role model and that’s [name of older LGBT activist, present at BiCon, but not in this workshop] who I just look at and go wow, you are fierce. And, you know, you are completely pagan and out about being SM [sado-masochist] and really activist and you look fantastic and I just thought yes, you know, I could be you when I grow, I was going to say grow up, I can’t bear to say grow older, it’s really raw, but that’s so precious. […] [Activist’s name] is fantastic and having had the opportunity to be in a space where role models can come together of all ages and they can meet each other [BiCon], it’s so precious.

Imagining your own age can be highly emotionally charged, even for people with relatively conventional life courses (Neikrug, 2003; Nelson, 2005), so trailblazers can be hugely significant when people expect their life course to deviate from well worn paths.

**Focusing on the traveller**

The fourth main way in which participants were able to imagine their own journey into later life was by focusing not so much on the map as on their own characteristics as a traveller. They did this through drawing on the idea of personal continuity. So, for example, Jenny said:

So when I am old I hope that I can still be politically active and that this, like my ideology and political attitude, can be present in my life. They form a background for everything I am doing now and I hope that will be so when I am old and this also represents my wish to be active politically and academically and artistically.

Other participants spoke explicitly about the ways in which their current activities and interests would be maintainable into old age. For example, Rosemary said:

I do indoor rowing and I do, one of the nice things about indoor rowing is that as a sport, I mean we don’t just have seniors […] it’s all sorts of ages, and I know somebody called [name] and she is about 85 or something like that.
We’ve actually had somebody who is 99 coming to one of our competitions, wins the 90 plus category! So yes, as long as I can keep going, I want to.

 Appropriately, given the analogy of life as a journey, Laura’s personal continuity was itself a mode of transport:

 Cycling is more or less a kind of identity statement for me so I’d have to be quite knackered not to find, um be quite physically out of it, not to find some way of operating a bike, um, but yes I think I just tend to assume maybe, I will just find other ways to compensate for the physical aging process. I already have various, not age related, there are bits of me that don’t work quite right and I am so used to working around those, I think I just assume I will find ways to work around whatever else crops up, which as I say might be unreasonably optimistic, but I think I would rather go along assuming that until something happens to make me not be able to do that.

 Here, there is a continuity of cycling still being a major part of her life and also of her own skills in finding ways around physical limitations. The destination and the route of participants’ life journeys may be unknown but by focusing on their own characteristics as travellers they are able to imagine a personal vision of what it might be like to grow older.

**Implications**

This chapter has used the analogy of a road map to discuss some of the ways in which participants in the study were able to imagine unconventional ageing and later life. It has argued that, however much gerontologists and older people themselves might want to resist stereotyped ideas about ageing, stereotypes can provide useful landmarks to enable people to imagine what later life might be like. However, the most prevalent way in which participants were able to imagine their own ageing was by explicitly countering stereotyped ideas about ageing and by asserting their difference from what is usually treated as normative (Jones, 2011). Thus, landmarks can function both to provide guidance on the way and as places to be intentionally avoided. The third main way in which participants were able to see the route into their own ageing was by following trailblazers whom they saw as on a similar life journey to themselves. These trailblazers were mostly not older bisexual people, since few people knew any older bisexual people, but people with whom they shared other identity features such as commitment to feminism, religious practices, and other forms of queer identity. The fourth main way in which participants could imagine their future was by focusing not on the route to be taken but on their own personal characteristics as a traveller. Through drawing on the idea of personal continuity, they were able to project forward and into their own imagined lives. While participants in this particular study identified as bisexual, and unconventional life courses may be more likely for bisexual and other queer-identified people, many heterosexual people also end up having non-traditional life courses. Practitioners need to be careful not to assume either that service users will have had traditional life courses or that they imagine or desire them.

I do not conceptualise the futures imagined in these workshops as, in any sense, predictors of what is likely to happen to these individuals, still less to bisexual identified people in general. The accounts produced, and the navigatory techniques employed, are thus understood to be highly context-dependent on the particular social,
historical and, especially, temporal-spatial setting. The accounts may, however, themselves influence the future if participants change their behaviours in the light of having taken part in the workshop, as several reported to me subsequently. They also provide evidence that it is possible, for some people in some circumstances, to imagine positive non-normative later life. As other researchers have argued (e.g. Gauntlett, 2007), creative methods can free people up to imagine things they would not usually think about or which they may find problematic, such as their own ageing. Simple creative methods, such as drawing and doodling, can be employed by practitioners in everyday contexts in order to help people to articulate their experiences and wishes.

The analogy of a roadmap for ageing has proved fruitful but is it perhaps a rather old-fashioned one? In these days of G.P.S. and route planning software, travellers may not use maps and so do not need to envisage their journey more than a few turns ahead. Can we extend the analogy and say that nowadays, when some people's life courses are argued to have become more fluid and less structured (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Leccardi, 2008), there may be less need for people to be able to imagine where their life is heading? That would be a large claim to make indeed. It is more reasonable to note that focusing on the immediate future is more common in everyday life than thinking about one’s own ageing and later life.


1 ‘Queer’ is used here as an umbrella term to include all non-heterosexual people and all people whose gender identity does not match well with the gender they were ascribed at birth or is not simply ‘male’ or ‘female’.
Goltz unhelpfully collapses these categories in the rest of the paper into ‘the gay men’ and ‘the lesbian women’.

BiCon stands for Bisexual Conference and/or Bisexual Convention. See www.bicon.org.uk

With the exception of the 6 participants in the pilot workshop. This convenience and snowball sample of bi-identified people had, however, all (except one person) previously attended BiCon, most of them many times. Several people remarked afterwards that taking part in the pilot workshop had felt like being at a mini BiCon. The visions of the future produced at the pilot workshop are indistinguishable from those produced at BiCon itself in all significant respects. They are therefore included in the analysis.

Polyamory (often abbreviated to ‘poly’) means negotiated, consensual non-monogamy. See, e.g. Haritaworn, Lin & Klesse (2006).

While percentages are sometimes cited, the sample size is small, so all the quantitative findings need to be treated as indicative only.

When participants identified as anything other that straightforwardly male or female, I have used ‘they’ as a singular pronoun where one is needed.