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The spatial and gendered politics of displaying family: exploring material cultures in grandfathers' homes

Gender, Place and Culture

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the meaning that 27 men who are grandfathers ascribed to the domestic material cultures of their homes, during an exploratory study that investigated their contemporary social and cultural geographies. In recounting stories about a number of items and artefacts placed about their homes during the interviews, that they specifically related to their experiences as grandfathers, the men provided insight into the various ways in which ageing men position themselves in ambivalent ways in relation to cultural stereotypes about grandparenthood, masculinities and ageing. Moving beyond the surface of the objects on display, their discussions also revealed the complex ways in which the material cultures of their home spaces are shaped by, and reproduce, diverse family relationships and their associated politics. The article contributes to, and bridges agendas in social and cultural geography that examine the relationship between the shifting meanings of home for older men, the politics of attending to the material and both the family and older masculine identities as spatial projects.

Introduction

This article analyses the narratives of men who are grandfathers, focusing specifically on the stories they told about objects that were displayed in their homes that inhabited their identities as grandfathers. These stories are revealing of the ways in which home possessions and homemaking practices are connected in meaningful ways to their identities and familial relationships, which may not have been otherwise present or presentable (Hurdley 2006) in interview discussions. In so doing, it contributes to, and bridges agendas in social and cultural geography that examine the relationship between the shifting meanings of home (Blunt and Varley 2006), the politics of attending to the material (Tolia-Kelly 2013) and both the family and older masculine identities as spatial projects (Christou 2015; Harker and Martin 2012; Luzia 2010; Tarrant 2010; Valentine 2008).

Social geographers are establishing important links between space, place and the family (see Luzia 2010), opening up an empirical terrain for understanding how complex intimate relationships (that may be sexual, platonic friendships and/or familial) 'ebb and flow over the lifecourse, have different meanings to different generations, and may vary by culture and over time' (Valentine 2008, 2106). Within the current research landscape, focus on the meaning of family relationships and identities for older people and grandparents remains relatively absent, as the everyday spaces of parenting persists as a dominant concern. In a wider societal context where grandparents are increasingly relied upon for childcare (Wellard 2012) and are key resources for understanding postmodern family formations (Perlesz et al. 2006), there is need for much greater attention to the everyday spaces of grandparenting (Tarrant 2010). This is especially pertinent to men, in a social and cultural context where the emergence of a 'new' grandfatherhood, shaped by public ideologies of the 'involved father' relating to childcare and family support (Mann and Leeson 2010) has been identified, but also where ageing and associated life transitions are feared and have significant implications for men and their identities. Older men, for example, enact diverse identity work in later life because ageing can be a source of some men's lack of power (Hearn 2007). This has been associated with a number of factors including declining mobility and power of the body (Hearn 2007), retirement and changing relations to formal, paid work (Phillipson 1999) and reduced social connections and feelings of independence (e.g. Davidson, Daly, and Arber 2003; Smith et al. 2007).

Increasing expectations of involvement in childcare alongside concurrent lifecourse transitions such as those just identified are resulting in men's re-engagement with domestic spaces (Tarrant 2013). This article scrutinises these re-engagements with home, by exploring older men's contributions to homemaking practices, which reveal the complex and shifting interrelationships between later life masculinities, family and home. Methodologically, the exploration of material culture is valuable because home possessions and practices of homemaking are deeply connected to people's sense of self and embody, not only the material constitution of a home but also individual and collective subjectivities (Morrison 2013). Particular objects and their placements in the home also provide the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the otherwise under-theorised identity of grandfather but in a way that is politically motivated and that moves beyond the surface of objects (Tolia-Kelly 2013).

I begin by reviewing and linking the domestic material culture literature to an emerging agenda seeking to develop a new geography of intimacy (Valentine 2008), to demonstrate how the objects displayed in men's homes constitute a complex mosaic involving the doing of family, personal identity, family politics and domestic space. This aims to strengthen the argument that grandfathering, as an identity and familial role, is a spatial project and that displayed objects at home are imbued with meaning that may have been less accessible via interview methods alone. The research design and methods used are then outlined

and justified, followed by an analysis of the empirical data, which reveals the hidden complexity in what appears to be the taken for granted display of normative grandfather identities and family relationships.

‘Displaying’ in the homespace

Walsh (2011) identifies an extensive interest in the home by geographers (e.g. Blunt and Varley 2006; Brickell 2012), located both in broader debates within cultural geographical research that have been concerned to rematerialise geography, but also a larger interdisciplinary literature on material cultures and consumption (Blunt 2005; Jackson 2000; Miller 2001). This research has established that interaction between agencies of material culture, the house and the individual, is part of a process of an ongoing construction of meaning (Hurdley 2006). More recently, scholars have become attentive to the link between processes of subjectivity construction and everyday material encounters, and the home has been identified as a rich environment for exploring the relationship between people and goods (Gorman-Murray 2008a; Morrison 2013). Material objects not only embody different facets of self and their sustaining inter-subjective relationships (including family relationships, Gorman-Murray 2008b) but as Young (2005 cited in Morrison 2013) argues, their meaningful arrangements also affirm personal and cultural identities. Gender is key to this interaction and feminist geographers have demonstrated its centrality to understandings of home as both a social imaginary and a space of lived experience (see Morrison 2013 for a review). Dominant or ideal imaginaries of the home are most strongly associated with femininity and the heterosexual family (Blunt and Dowling 2006) and as a consequence, ‘domestic space and domestically acquired identities have different connotations for women and men’ (Doucet 2012, 6). Much of this work has focused on women and their experiences of home (e.g. Rose 2004a, 2004b; Tolia-Kelly 2004 and see Brickell’s review of home 2012), obscuring men’s experiences. However, a burgeoning literature is emerging on men’s relationship to home (Atherton 2009; Gorman-Murray 2015; Konrad 2014; Waitt and Gorman-Murray 2007), broadly situated within the geographies of masculinities field. Gorman-Murray (2008b, 2015), for example, makes explicit connections between the intersections of home, domesticity and masculinity in Western societies. Drawing on a small but informative interdisciplinary literature, he illustrates that the construction of gendered identities and power relations is highly spatialised and that the home is a site where diverse, alternative or ‘new domestic masculinities’ can be negotiated and can contest normative imaginaries (Gorman-Murray 2008b; Pink 2004; Smith and Winchester 1998). He argues that arrangements of domestic objects and the materiality and use of homes are part of a process of affirming more diverse male identities through challenges to hegemonic models of domestic masculinity, such as ‘master of the house’ (Chapman 2004). Reflecting on the domesticities of bachelors, he illustrates how the home becomes a key site of self-expression and resistance to hegemonic masculinity. Unencumbered by familial obligation, the materiality and use of their home expressed different values and priorities that subverted domestic ideologies of femininity and the family. In recognising homemaking as a process and neither the home nor identities as fixed but co-constituted (Gorman-Murray 2008b), it is conceivable that new and diverse styles of masculinities can shape men’s varying relationships with home. One way in which these diverse styles of masculinities and their relationships to home might be further understood is by recognising identities as multi-faceted. The fluid combinations of gender, age, class and (grand)parenting, for example, are likely to produce ‘ever more subtle contours of domestic masculinities and masculine domesticities’ (Gorman-Murray 2008b, 376) that geographers should seek to understand. Some geographical research has demonstrated that the home may not represent a space of retreat and comfort for older retired men, as their identities may still be rooted in a breadwinning role and they may face alienation in what has become an otherwise feminine territory (Brickell 2012; Varley 2008). Varley and Blasco’s (2000) case study of older men in urban Mexico exemplifies how hegemonic masculinities based on men being providers disadvantage them; relatives are less likely to offer elderly widows a home and the men themselves report feeling ‘out of place’. However, these findings serve to reinforce dominant imaginaries of the home as a site of exclusion for men in a context where masculinities are now understood to be diverse, dynamic and fluid (Connell 2005) and changing domestic masculinities have been found to contest these normative imaginaries (Gorman-Murray 2008b). Consideration of familial identities such as (grand)parent/(grand)father complicates our understanding of domestic ageing masculinities further because it highlights that identities and homemaking practices are collective and relational, as well as individual. A more relational reading attests that the home is also a site of collective consumption in which meanings ascribed to goods are negotiated and occasionally disputed between family and household members (Valentine 1999). The consumption and presentation of a variety of objects therefore create and recreate relationships, as well as identities and are consequently highly social spatial practices, performing an important function in the construction and maintenance of these social relationships (Money 2007) and identities. Domestic display is not only an important practice in the construction of the home through consumption. It is one that contributes to the negotiation of identity within a network of social relations (Hurdley 2006).

In essence, these debates emphasise that as well as constituting home and identity material objects also function to display meaningful relationships, including familial relationships and are distinctly political.

Family relationships are displayed as well as a product of practice. Finch (2007, 67) conceptualises display as 'the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions ... constitute "doing family things" and thereby confirm that these relationships are family relationships'. She argues that several tools are used to convey these meanings including physical objects such as photographs or domestic artefacts. This approach, premised on Morgan's (1996) conceptualisation of family as a verb and as a doing, recognises the spatiality of family and the role of material objects in the home in communicating meaning and the quality and character of relationships.

The spatiality of family has only recently captured the attention of social geographers (e.g. Harker and Martin 2012; Haugen et al. 2015; Luzia 2010; Ramdas 2015; Valentine 2008). A key argument within this literature is that theorisations of the family as practiced or as a set of meaning laden activities have great potential for understanding the spatio-temporal dynamics of family life. This entails focusing on what people do in their families, and where they do it (Luzia 2010), drawing attention to the variety of everyday spaces where familial relations are enabled, facilitated or supported and where cultural values, practices and identities are transmitted, contested and transformed (Luzia 2010). This literature might usefully be extended by focus on the displaying, as well as doing, of family and with greater attention to intergenerational relationships beyond the parent-child dyad.

The study

The data presented and analysed in this article come from empirical research about the everyday geographies of British grandfathers. Data were collected between July 2008 and July 2009 and men were recruited within the Lancaster District area of the UK using a variety of methods including direct contact targeted at social groups in the area, snowballing and the use of gatekeepers from local third sector organisations. Snowballing was the most fruitful method of recruitment and while I had anticipated that the men would be difficult to recruit, most reported that they were pleased to take part and supported the recruitment process. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 31 men who self-defined as grandfathers. During the interviews, the men were encouraged to produce narratives, tools of display (Finch 2007) through which they could construct stories about themselves and their family relationships in an attempt to connect and understand their experiences to wider social meanings about family and identity.

The men interviewed ranged in age from 51 to 88 years, reflecting wider demographic trends that are shaping a more diverse experience of grandfatherhood in contemporary Britain. The men's personal and familial circumstances were also varied and wide-ranging. Eighteen of the men were still married to their first and only partners and shared homes with them, six were remarried following a divorce, five were living with new partners and two were widowed and living alone. Several of the men also had divorced children, one grandfather had adopted grandchildren due to issues with fertility in the central generation and one was a father to a young daughter of a similar age to his grandchildren. The sample was limited with regard to ethnicity, sexuality and class. All identified as heterosexual, meaning that the displays observed were specific forms of hetero-masculine domesticity, and all were white British, except for one who had Jamaican heritage. Elsewhere, I provide a more comprehensive, reflexive account of the ways in which our complex positionalities shaped the research outcomes (Tarrant 2014). Interviews lasted between 30 min and two and a half hours and were transcribed and analysed by the author using Atlas.ti.

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted in the homes of the men (the rest took place in their work places or a room near to my own office), which shaped the conversations and provided opportunities for observation. All of the interviews took place in living rooms and occasionally I was invited to look around the rest of their homes. As a consequence, while the men's displays of objects in the home were not the main focus of the study as a whole, the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the choice of location meant that I gained additional insight into how the men displayed their identities and relationships. In alignment with Elwood and Martin (2000), interviewing the men in their homes enriched some of the explanations they offered, especially in relation to their experiences of their homes as grandfathers. On occasion, I was also offered the opportunity to take photographs of certain displayed objects that had become 'talking points' (Hurdley 2006 – some of which are presented in this article) and that the men deemed important in relation to their identities as grandfathers. The combination of verbal and visual narratives for exploring domestic material culture has been well justified in material cultures literatures (i.e. Hurdley 2006; Money 2007) because the importance and meaning of certain aspects of material culture can be validated visually (Money 2007). In this study, the narratives produced around specific objects including photographs and gifts from grandchildren, rendered these 'objects as meaningful participants in the social work of identity-building' (Hurdley 2006, 718). More in-depth discussion about the display of the objects was also important for revealing how and why they had come to be displayed as they were and for revealing what they were accomplishing in the home. A limitation of the study was that I could not access all of the men's personal spaces, such as their workspaces or personal spaces (i.e. sheds, garages), and I was not always invited by the men to look

around the entirety of their homes. While one participant had a picture of his grandson framed on his desk at work (which I had observed during an interview), I only had access to one office, the result of many of the men being retired. Future research could focus more specifically on the spaces in which men, and indeed women, display their family relationships and explore the social structures that mediate this. Similarly, a more detailed ethnographic study would allow greater access to the public spaces in which grandfather and other familial identities are displayed, to provide a more complicated understanding of the men's care terrains or 'caringscapes' (Bowlby 2012). Nonetheless in examining the material objects and homemaking practices of men who are grandfathers, the ways in which they constructed and performed their personal and collective identities and consequently created home were revealed. The analysis that follows is split into three sections. The first section examines how the men's experiences of the self were manifest in a number of domestic artefacts and items that were displayed in their homes. Moving beyond the surface of the objects, their stories reveal the ambivalence men feel with regard to their identities as ageing men, as well as the emotional value and meaning of such items. This is followed by a more in-depth investigation of the placement of objects in the home, which reveals the family politics involved in the display of grandfather identities. The final section briefly considers object display and performance beyond the homespace.

Beyond the object: masculinities, age and emotion work in the display of grandfatherhood

The grandfathers who took part in this study, especially those interviewed in their homes, frequently referred to significant objects during the interviews. This included paintings and drawings done by (usually) younger grandchildren, photographs and postcards and a number of bought items or artefacts that carried specific discourses constructing grandfatherhood, such as cushions and mugs. The narratives that the men constructed about these objects became implicated as participants in the men's identity building, providing additional insights into how they positioned themselves, both in relation to specific identities connected with grandfatherhood and in the context of their family relationships. Drawings and paintings done by young grandchildren were frequently commented upon and many of the men were mobile during the interviews, getting up to show me where they were displayed in their homes. This included kitchens and home office spaces, although notably, rarely the living room. Particularly, poignant was Wally's narrative; a 56-year-old grandfather, who only had one granddaughter at the time of the interview and who felt he was her main 'daddy figure'. Wally pointed to her paintings and drawings, which had been displayed above his desk at home:

To some extent, I'm the daddy figure [to granddaughter] whatever that may be ... so yeah, I just enjoy having her. We do all sorts of things that we can do and you know, she'll come out in the car with us and we'll go for a drives and things and we'll just chat or we'll just sit down and she'll do paintings for me and drawings ... that one up there you see (referring to paintings on the wall next to his desk), which I think you know for a three and a half year old little girl, self portrait, I think it's amazing. I'm just so overwhelmed by that.

These paintings were in a central position above Wally's desk and were located in a focal place. Prior to this discussion, Wally had identified his son-in-law as an absent father, labelling him a 'pillock'.¹ The painting is therefore symbolic of his evident pride in his granddaughter's work (represented by its position and his narrative) and his self-identified role as a 'daddy-figure'.

As well as drawings and paintings that had been created by grandchildren, some of the men also discussed gifts and items specifically marketed to family members. Figures 1 and 2 visually represent the kind of normative and culturally specific identities and qualities that these objects propagate:



Figure 1. This photograph was taken at Alan's home after his interview on 15th July 2009. This was a gift from his grandchildren that he proudly displays in his conservatory. Photograph © the participant, taken by author with participant's permission at the time of interview.

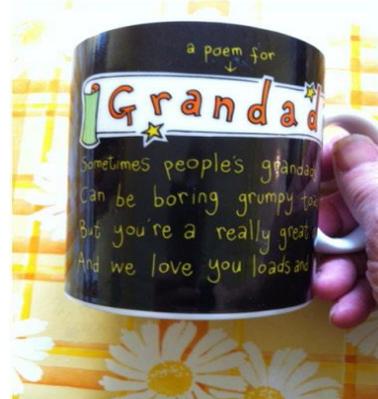


Figure 2. Image of a contemporary material object representing a normative construction of the grandfather identity. © the author.

Cultural artefacts such as these were especially provoking because of their multiple layers of meaning. At one level, they reveal normative imaginaries relating to gender, age and family, as well as specific identities like grandfather, actively communicating norms and ideals that consumers buy into. Secondly, they are also sites of collective consumption, reflecting how family members who buy the items, construct meaning in relation to their (grand)fathers and recognise certain qualities in them.² Within the homespace, they explicitly re-enforce specific idealised traits that reflect the intersections of masculinity and age including being 'boring' and/or 'grumpy' and 'fixing/loving'. As such, the consumption and display of these objects are social performances, implicated in the 'doing' (West and Zimmerman 1987) of gender and age, and the maintenance and even exaggeration, of specific identities. In the context of ageing masculinities, they produce a paradoxical masculinity in which the men are considered nurturing and loving, but are also fixers. Theoretically, older men benefit from sexism but are disadvantaged by ageism (Hearn 1999) and this paradox is manifest spatially in the display of objects in the home.

The men's talk about these objects revealed more about how they, and their family members, variously identified with these otherwise essentialist discourses. Alan, a 72-year-old grandfather who has three granddaughters (aged 16, 13 and 11), and one grandson (age 13), explains the cushion, given to him by his daughter (Figure 1):

When [grandson] comes, he brings up his bike and goes out with one or two of the boys

He continues,

Now his bike, he's always pulling it apart, and he'll sometimes bring it in bits you know, and we've put it back together again, so I suppose that's probably why that cushion, because I was always fixing his bike yeah.

For Alan, the message on the cushion reflects a reality of the kind of practices he enacts as a grandfather. According to Cheal (1987, 150), 'gift giving is described as a means through which individuals communicate the values which they assign to their significant others', and in this case, the giving of the cushion is no different. The message signifies what Alan does with his grandson and more broadly represents the ways in which children and grandchildren value the practices their fathers and grandfathers enact in family relationships. Interestingly, however, rather than identify with the loving, emotional facet of his identity (perhaps because this is assumed already), Alan focuses on being a fixer. Fixing and DIY, that several of the men explained that they did around the house, represented expressions of masculine identity relating to physical activity. 66-year-old Reg, grandfather to two young grandchildren, one a newborn girl and one a grandson, aged two years old, similarly describes himself through this specific configuration of masculinity:

I'm more the sort of the crafty, the wood type of thing yeah. I was bought a little plaque which said 'Grandad's are for loving us and for fixing things', let me show you. I am the fixer // I was bought that last weekend (laughs). Typical me as well, but I've always been sort of fairly practical I suppose really

The narratives presented here indicate that display is much more dynamic than simply decorating or 'making' the home. These items represent the paradox of grandfather identities spatially. While the men are more likely to prioritise the masculine aspects of their identities than their caring, nurturing side and do so by emphasising these in their narratives, the very display of these items signifies the meaning and the emotion invested in being a grandfather.

Some of the men were more critical of the limiting discourses on the gifts they received, especially those that they felt transmitted ageist stereotypes about grandparenthood. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the youngest grandfather interviewed, 52-year-old Sam, who became a grandfather through his marriage to a woman who already had children and grandchildren from a previous marriage, reflects on the way in which objects display messages about being old that do not align with his self-identity:

People buy you grandad presents (laughs) so you get, cups with 'grandad' written on them and old person's slipper's and you know (laughs) and the kinds of things that ... I would buy my mother and father thinking they were really old you know. They didn't buy me an iPod for crying out loud you know. I've got this World's Greatest Grandad Cup ... thanks a lot (laughs), which actually you know one side of me, one side of me is so proud and over the moon, you know, and the other part's, 'well where's my iPod?' (laughs)

As one of the younger men in the study, Sam does not identify with objects that he deems to be more suited to someone old, or at least older than himself. The cultural association of grandparents with old age is no longer entirely representative of contemporary grandparenthood given a number of demographic trends that mean more people are becoming grandparents during midlife. While Sam strongly resists these problematic stereotypes relating to old age in his narrative, his relationships with his grandchildren hold

greater significance and he feels proud to be the recipient of these gifts. As previous findings support (Hurdley 2006; Money 2007), the displaying of gifts is as much about a familial, moral obligation as it is about constituting identity and as a grandfather by marriage as opposed to biology, this is symbolic of his belonging to this family.

The material cultures discussed in this section were implicated in the identity building of these grandfathers but revealed men's ambivalences towards their identities relating to both gender and age. Their narratives also pointed to the various ways in which the homespace became implicated in the paradoxes of men's experiences of ageing, but also highlighting the fluidity of ageing masculinities. While the men accentuated the masculine aspects of their identities within the limited discursive framings of these items, the surfaces of these objects enabled the men to articulate emotions, indicating that the quality and characters of family relationships are also constituted in visual displays and supersede discourses relating to gender and age. In the section that follows, I explore this argument further by considering the ways in which family politics and power dynamics within family relationships shape displays but are also reproduced by the material cultures of these men's homes.

The politics of display and family politics

Photographs are key tools in displaying kinship and intergenerational relationships (Finch 2007; Rose 2004b). They were highly visible in the men's homes and were discussed by the grandfathers by way of exploring their relationships with children and grandchildren. 73-year-old Percy showed me several framed photographs of his biological granddaughter, aged three. These were especially important to him at the time of the interview because she lived in Canada and he only saw her infrequently. While Percy cares for his second wife's grandchildren regularly, photographs of his biological granddaughter carry particular significance for him:

I enjoy their company [his step-grandchildren] because they are so easy to have around and that's with, if you like my regular substitute grandchildren because there's much more contact isn't there? and then, with [biological granddaughter], you know I'm always happy to receive photographs and to hear her and she'll become more and more, I shall understand her and we shall communicate and then, when I do see her of course it's all the more enjoyable yes ... you know it's just I regret that it's not possible for me to fulfil the role, in a more regular way with my natural grandchild but, that's just something I've got to come to terms with

At this time in Percy's life, the need to display and discuss these photographs is a result of circumstance and is about maintaining a connection with his granddaughter across physical distance. Finch (2007) argues that there are various degrees of intensity in the display of objects and that the degree of intensity is highly contingent. In this instance, Percy is ambivalent about the photographs. He is happy to receive them so he can watch his granddaughter grow up from a distance but they also remind him that he is unable to 'fulfil his role', and this is something he regrets.

As well as picking up framed photographs it also became apparent throughout the research process that the placement of photographs in the men's homes was meaningful. Indeed, it became evident that in some men's homes, decisions about where to display photographs were not always an unconscious or unquestioned act but were shaped by the politics of family life. During Roger's interview, a 74-year-old widowed grandfather to two girls and two boys and who lived on his own, it struck me that a whole wall in his living room was filled with school photographs of his grandchildren; I had even noted this in my research diary:

Roger had photographs of each [grandchild], provided by his daughter and son of key events such as school and graduation, that he pointed out immediately. They were placed on cupboards and shelves around the room, behind the chair he was sitting on, and on the mantelpiece

Author's observation notes from Roger's interview: 07.04.09

Leading the conversation about the photographs above him, Roger explained:

[the photographs] they're all school ones ... and if either the parents come and the photographs are not there they shout at me you see (laughs) especially if there's one missing, so you'll notice there are four, four different ones there yeah, so that's why they're there really, but no, I quite like the photographs there anyway

Rose (2004a, 5) argues that photographs in the home are 'the product of relations that extend beyond the home' and represent the extension of domestic space. As Rogers narrative reveals, the display of photographs in his home is a lot more about the relationship he has with his children than his own desire to display pictures of his grandchildren in his living room. While he indicates that he likes them being there, it is clear that there are consequences for his relationships with his children if any are excluded. Intergenerational power relations and social conformity are consequently situated within, but also reach beyond the home.

This extension of domestic space also highlights the spatial manifestation of generationally structured power relations in Roger's example. Based on his explanation of why the photographs are hung where they are and why they are organised as such, it is revealed that the photographs of his grandchildren

in his living room at home not only represent the importance of his identity as a grandfather but are even more meaningful in relation to who controls that space. As a man who lives on his own and in the absence of his wife who had died some years previously, his children have an invested interest in which photographs are displayed and where. Consequently, while he likes them being there, as an analytical tool they also reveal power dynamics in his intergenerational relationships with his children. Displaying, and the placement and arrangement of photographs is therefore significant in that it simultaneously produces the intergenerational relationships that construct the men's identities, but is also a product of those generational relationships with children and acts as a tool to negotiate and maintain cohesion across the generations. The display and associated politics of 'family like' relationships also goes beyond biological relationships, largely due to the increased diversity in family relationships. There is evidence in this study, for example, that men are also engaging in family-like relationships with younger generations regardless of biological connection. Bill, age 70, has two adopted grandchildren. He explained that following his great sadness that resulted from the discovery that his only son was unable to have his own children, the adoption of his grandson and granddaughter was 'extraordinary' and a 'real gift'. The adoption of the children even prompted Bill and his wife to live closer to them. As such he strongly identified with his identity as a grandfather and this is represented through the family practices and displays he engages in:

It took 18 months for each of them [grandchildren] to be adopted ... I've got a photo upstairs which I still keep in my study, of him as an 18 month old kid and I mean it's just lovely to see a kid like that

Bill, age 70, still married

Another of the participants, named Arthur differed, in that the absence of display with respect to certain relationships was poignant. Data collected during a participant observation session at Arthur's home further revealed that the display of relationships is increasingly meaningful in a demographic context in which family reconstitution means that men are also becoming step-grandfathers. Arthur's familial circumstances are complicated. He has been married to his wife for 53 years and has two sons; one who lives in Australia and has two teenage children and another son who lives proximately to him. His son who lives locally has three daughters (now teenage) from his first marriage, and three stepchildren and a three-year-old son through his second marriage. This makes Arthur a step-grandfather. Arthur explains in his narrative that he is much more involved with his biological grandson on a regular basis than any of his other grandchildren. His granddaughters are all teenagers and are 'too busy' with school activities. His relationship with his three-year-old grandson is facilitated by a positive relationship with his daughter-in-law and while he has had some involvement with his step-grandchildren, this is limited. During observation, it was striking that the strength and character of this meaning was also reflected in the decoration of his home space. Notably, there were several photographs of his, and his wife's biological grandson but there was only one of their step-grandchildren, something I asked Arthur to elaborate on during the observation:

He then ... showed me the kitchen. The fridge was located unusually on the top of the counter and was decorated in its entirety with magnets and photographs. Arthur explained that the magnets were from the various places they had visited for holidays but what interested me the most was that they had several picture magnets of their grandson and granddaughters. In the middle of these magnets and photographs was one picture of his step-grandchildren. I asked Arthur about this and he explained that because of the complicated situation of the family, they were his step-grandchildren and so were not displayed in the house as much. The photographs were mainly of his biological grandchildren, the ones he sees the most.

Observation notes with Arthur's family: 07.08.09

In Arthur's example, the fridge and the magnets as memory and material spaces move beyond decoration. They represent an extension of relationships beyond the home with grandchildren, whether biologically or socially related. The magnet of his biological grandson and the relative exclusion of his step-grandchildren from these photographic displays are indicative of the quality and character of his relations with his grandchildren and also the complexities of the social relationships that emerged as a result of his son's divorce and remarriage and that had made Arthur and his wife step-grandparents.

The reduced social and emotional quality of relationships with the step-grandchildren was particularly notable, represented by their lack of visibility and exclusion in comparison with their biological grandson in this space and their absence during the observation itself. Displaying family beyond the faceto-face performance of family practices is incredibly powerful (Finch 2007) but so too, are the absences of display. While Finch (2007) argues that display is about togetherness and conveying relationships of a family-like quality, not displaying suggests that Arthur is performing relative estrangement as well. While in Roger's narrative, the central generations play an active and explicit role in shaping the arrangement of the school photographs the power of the central generation is only implicit in Arthur's narrative. He mentions that his new daughter-in-law mediates his relationship with his youngest grandson and that she decided she wanted them to be involved. This contextual information further highlights

that the central generation, and in this case the mother, has a strong influence over the practices and the level of men's involvement with their grandchildren, which subsequently influences their homemaking.

Idealised versions of kinship?

While the data presented in the previous sections are compelling in that the men added greater nuance and explanation to the reasoning behind the placement of their material objects and photographs (i.e. in the making of self identities, representing the importance of intimate relationships and generational control), other narrative themes that emerged also revealed that the men tended to portray idealistic versions of their family life through their displays at home; presenting the families they lived by (Gillis 1996) and felt strong connections with. Several of the men, while proud of their relationships with their grandchildren and happy to display them in their personal spaces, regardless of how they came to be placed, also adhered to narrative norms of grandparenting (Mason, May and Clarke 2007) explaining that they want to be there for their grandchildren, but that they also do not want to interfere with their children's wishes and that they are ready for their grandchildren to go home again. These narrative statements reveal inconsistencies and contradictions in the significance of grandchildren to their everyday lives. Beyond the home, intergenerational relationships and grandfathering identities were discussed less, particularly within a peer group in public spaces, indicating that men's ambivalence as grandparents is also realised spatially. The narratives revealed tensions in the ways in which the men recognised the impact of their intergenerational relationships on their own sense of identity beyond the spaces of the home and family, and the presentation of its character was shunned by some. Some of the grandfathers, for example, while considering their identity as a grandfather to be important at home, did not identify openly with being a grandfather when outside of their family spaces and interactions with other men:

I've got colleagues who are grandfathers and a good friend of mine who's a colleague is constantly travelling to see his granddaughter and he's full of her, talks about her all the time. Drives me crazy. I think you know,

George, age 62, employed full time and divorced, two grandsons

I don't mention being a grandfather much really ... it's just that it never crops up. I mean they're talking about golf and they talk about football, they talk about things. I think if I started saying what a nice granddaughter I've got, they would think I was a bit strange wouldn't they? I mean my next door neighbours, will ask me how my grandchildren are getting on, and they talk about them there, but the friends I've got ... no we don't mention it much

Roger, age 72, widowed

The narratives presented here reveal a distinct public/private gendered dichotomy in which the meaning and importance of the men's intergenerational and kinship relations remain specific to the home and its material spacings. The display of extra-familial identities and their character and quality is evidently gendered and generational, but also spatial, to the extent that the men are active in deciding when and where it is appropriate to reveal this identity and to discuss their family lives. Put in context, this would suggest that while display represents a spatial extension of the meaning of intergenerational relationships and identities to men, they are also an idealised version of family cohesion and are less revealing of the tensions and nuances of familial relationships as they are negotiated in different ways over the lifecourse and in different spaces.

Conclusions

This article has analysed the narratives that men construct about items of domestic display in their homes; paintings and drawings done by (usually young) grandchildren, gifts from family members that carry discourses about grandfatherhood, and photographs. Such an endeavour required forging a deeper connection between relevant interdisciplinary literatures concerned with gender, ageing, homemaking, family and the spatiality of identity construction. In turn, the analysis presented sought to extend those literatures. Methodologically, these findings were enhanced through the combination of narratives as tools of display (Finch 2007) and observations within the interview setting, as championed by previous researchers of domestic material cultures (Hurdley 2006; Money 2007; Tolia-Kelly 2004, 2013). Accessing these narratives has aided in the process of moving beyond the surface of the objects to explore their material politics. Each is inscribed with meanings, emotion, values and beliefs (Blunt 2005), they reflect and reproduce both individual and collective identities and relationships and are shaped by, and reproduce, various inclusions and exclusions that contribute a more complicated understanding of the politics of family and family relatedness at the microscale.

Unlike the men in Varley and Blasco's (2000) study of retired men in urban Mexico, these grandfathers did not report feeling 'out of place' at home. Nor did they seek to consciously subvert hegemonic ideals relating to domesticity and family. The objects themselves, however, represented a spatial manifestation of the paradoxes of ageing male identities. The mugs and cushions, items that are specifically marketed to grandparents and family members who have grandparents, constructed grandfatherhood through discourse, propagating culturally specific stereotypes about older men including being loving, grumpy,

the fixer and so on. These are not stereotypes that align easily with hegemonic masculinity such as being a provider or breadwinner and in this respect, at the surface level at least, the objects act as additional re-enforcements of the men's declining semblance to hegemonic masculinity in relation to age. While this article did not seek to understand why consumer capital constructs grandfathers in this way, through their narratives, the men variously (dis)identified with these otherwise essentialist discourses presented about grandfatherhood, revealing much greater fluidity in the ways in which older men construct their identities and domestic masculinities. As previous research with fathers of different generations indicates (Brandth 2015), rather than feeling constrained by hegemonic masculine ideals and the decline associated with ageing, grandfathers widen their repertoire of practices through display, placing greater emphasis on their relationships with their children and grandchildren, than on gender and age. The very nature of displaying the gifts and items re-enforces this point because in not identifying fully with the discourses presented on the items, their display meant that the representation of the men's loving and caring qualities was more significant, not least because the men were heavily invested in the items emotionally. Both Wally and Sam, for example, as younger grandfathers in the study, talk about their immense pride in their grandchildren and Percy reflects on his deep felt sadness and the ambiguity that the photographs of his biological granddaughter raise for him. To some extent, the images help him to overcome his distance from her but at an emotional level, they also reinforce that distance.

Finally, in analysing the domestic items and photographs in the men's homes that relate specifically to their identities as grandfathers, the findings in this article adds weight to the assertions of geographers seeking to re-centre the family as a spatial project and unit of geographical analysis. A particular contribution was the focus on display, not only as a family practice that contributes to the material constitution of the home, but also as a practice that takes place to convey and confirm, and indeed exclude, some family relationships. Tools and practices of display are strongly implicated in the everyday 'doing' and politics of family relationships. Moving beyond identity work, domestic displays reveal more about the complex spatiality of intimate relations, about how power relations between generational groups extend within and beyond the home and also convey but sometimes purposefully mask complex intra-family relations (Morgan 2011). Homemaking is a relational, as well as individual practice that constructs both identity and relationships as meaningful. However, displaying appears to be confined to the realm of the home for some men, especially those who did not talk about being a grandfather outside of the home, re-enforcing the association of home and domesticity with femininity and family and further contributing to the identity paradox of being an older man.

Notes

1. 'pillock' is a British slang word meaning idiot.
2. Another study would be required to find out what motivates grandchildren and children to buy such items for their grandparents.

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