Chapter 9

Grandfathering: the construction of new identities and masculinities

Anna Tarrant

Introduction

Men's roles and identities as grandfathers are insufficiently explored in social science literatures (Bates, 2009; Tarrant, 2010). There has been a proliferation of interest in fathering and grandparenting in Britain (Clarke and Roberts, 2002; Dench and Ogg, 2002), but this has not resulted in further interest in grandfathers, whose roles, relationships, identities and practices remain inadequately theorised (Mann, 2007). However, some researchers have argued that grandfathers' involvement in the lives of their grandchildren is equal to that of grandmothers' (Leeson and Harper, 2009). The gendered nature of earlier research on grandparenting has resulted in men being excluded from most analyses, based on assumptions that they are less interested in family life than women who are deemed the key kin-keepers (Harper, 2005). Despite insufficient attention to grandparent identities more generally (Reitzes and Mutran, 2004), it is evident that being a grandfather influences how men perform and construct their identities in later life (Ando, 2005; Mann, 2007) and that grandfatherhood is an important part of the everyday identities of middle aged and older men.

Traditional constructions of grandfathering assign essentialist conceptualisations to men that reflect rigid gendered boundaries. Men, for example, have been found to prefer to adopt roles in the family that are task orientated (Hagestad, 1985) as opposed to caring, resulting in expectations that they perform a 'minister of the state', or 'head of the family' role (Roberto et al, 2001). However, recent research suggests that being a grandfather is an identity through which men negotiate multiple and intersecting positions of social difference in their family relationships. Davidson et al. (2003: 178–9) suggest that:

> An important and potentially paradoxical new role for older men is that of grandfather. It is paradoxical because, on the one hand, men may be exhibiting a 'gentler', more nurturing relationship with a grandchild than they had with their own children but, on the other hand, may still be viewed, and view themselves, as having the traditional patriarchal role as 'sage' or 'wise man'.

The influence of generation as a social identity and intergenerational relationships with family members, on how men perform grandfather identities has also received limited attention and existing literature has largely ignored the implications of different societal contexts. In contemporary Britain, men are grandfathering in a social context where divorce and family fragmentation are increasingly prevalent and known to influence grandparent identities and grandparent-grandchild relationships (Uhlenberg and Kirby, 1998; Drew and Smith, 1999; King, 2003). Grandparents play a key role in informal child care in urban Britain as women's labour market participation has dramatically increased (Wheelock and Jones, 2002) and this is particularly the case in families affected by divorce (Ferguson et al, 2004).

Little is known about how these changes shape and influence grandfather involvement with their grandchildren and grandfather identities.

This chapter focuses on men who are grandfathering and includes the stories of men whose families have been affected and restructured by divorce, either their own divorce or the breakdown of their children's relationships. My analysis of the empirical data confirms that men do want to be involved in their grandchildren's lives and this is achieved through various practices. It further reveals that this form and functioning of grandfathering is regulated by the quality and character of intergenerational relationships (conceptualised by Katz and Lowenstein, 2010, through models of intergenerationality solidarity), which influences how men perform and construct their identities in a variety of ways. A 'new' identities approach (Fairhurst, 2003) is suggested to make sense of how the contemporary context shapes the familial and intergenerational relationships of men in middle- and old-age, and consequently constructs multiple grandfathering roles and experiences. The chapter therefore focuses on grandfathering, identity construction and masculinities, and the contradictions that some men face in resolving these.

Conceptual framework and method

Existing conceptualisations of grandfathers are limiting and this has prompted the development of an alternative conceptual framing. In seeking to understand how grandfathers construct their identities, this chapter applies a unique framework that includes Butler's (1990) theorisations of gender performance and performativity, and intergenerationality, as defined by Hopkins and Pain (2007). The everyday practices that the men engage in reflect how men perform their identities and how this in turn sustains or subverts constructions of masculinity. As Finch (2007: 76) argues, however, Butler's 'performativity has more to do with individual identity than with the nature of social interactions'.

Intergenerationality is a concept that is gaining increased interest in social geography and is influencing understandings of identity construction as relational. In geography, however, it has mainly been applied to children and young people and rarely to older generational identities and relationships (Vanderbeck, 2007; Tarrant 2010) despite the potential of its application. An intergenerationality approach views generation as a social identity, just as social relations such as gender and age are. It suggests that generational identities such as being a grandparent are based on similarity as well as difference (Hopkins and Pain, 2007). This means that being a grandparent is constructed in relation to significant others, typically from different generational groups. While this is important to studies of grandfather identities, intergenerationality also emphasises how these identities are constructed through intergenerational relations. This, I argue, provides the perspective that relationships with other generations influence what men do as grandfathers, and therefore how they construct and perform a variety of new identities (Fairhurst, 2003) and masculinities. Together the concepts of masculinities and intergenerationality constitute a more comprehensive framework for understanding the ways in which men negotiate gendered performativities in grandfatherhood in the context of their intergenerational relations. In order to explore how this is experienced by men, my research analyses how men construct their grandfather identities through discussions of their practices and performances of grandfathering, which construct their grandfather identities.

The fieldwork of the study was designed to gain an understanding of how men construct and give meaning to their identities as grandfathers, as well as to gain insight into the social structures within which men are performing their identities and how this shapes their role and involvement. I conducted 31 qualitative in-depth interviews with men living in the Lancaster District area of north-west England. The men were recruited using a variety of methods including direct contact targeted at social groups in the local area, snowballing and using local gatekeepers whom I also directly contacted. The interviews were predominantly conducted in the men's homes, not only so that they could feel more comfortable in their surroundings, but so I could gain richer information and insight into their identities as grandfathers, and their personal geographies (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Men's voices as grandfathers are rarely central in grandparent research and assumptions about grandfathers have been made based on the responses of grandmothers, usually as a gendered binary; a questionable practice considering that grandmothers are not a homogenous group about which generalisations can be made. While the men interviewed for this study were largely middle class, retired professionals, there is some variation in their demographic profiles and social characteristics, as Table 9.1 demonstrates:

[Table 9.1 here]

~~Table 9.1: Sample characteristics~~

As Table 9.1 shows, the majority of the men had retired from public sector and professional occupations and some were still employed. There was not great variation in ethnicity or ability (although Steve is Jamaican and Charles is visually impaired). There was a range of men of different ages and variation in familial circumstances relating to experiences of divorce and co-habitation, and number of grandchildren. The men's work and family histories, which were discussed during the interviews, were more variable and revealed greater diversity in their personal and familial circumstances than their social and demographic characteristics. Of the 31 participants, at the time of the interviews, 18 were in first marriages (referred to as 'still married'), six had re-married, five were divorced and living with a new partner (referred to as 'co-habiting') and two were widowed. Several of the men also had divorced children. Gerald was an interesting example of a recent grandfather who also had a young daughter in his second marriage of a similar age to his grandchildren, an increasingly likely scenario for men in contemporary societies (Mann et al, 2009).

The age range of the sample was from 51 to 88, reflecting how grandfathering is increasingly bridging middle age in the UK but is also differentiated by age. The interviews ranged from 30 to 150 minutes in length and each participant granted me permission to record the conversations. Due to the quantity of data generated, Atlas.Ti was used as a management tool and to code the data. The analysis process was reiterative in that I initially transcribed the interviews, and read and re-read the transcripts to gain familiarity with the data. Through this process, key themes were identified and then a coding framework was generated and applied.

The men's narratives, presented in the next section, are not intended to be representative of the experience of grandfathering as a whole; they provide empirical data that can be used to explore how trends in contemporary Britain, including the increased

prevalence of divorce, can influence men's sometimes contradictory performances of their grandfather identities. I assigned each of the men pseudonyms to protect their identities and have anonymised the names of their family members and any identifiable places.

Grandfathering and involvement with grandchildren

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most men's narratives reveal that they want to be involved in the lives of their grandchildren, hence supporting the findings of several recent qualitative studies (Roberto et al, 2001; Ross et al, 2005; Leeson and Harper, 2009). Regardless of familial and personal circumstances, across the sample, the men describe engaging in a range of different practices with their grandchildren that reflect their identities as men. These tend to be instrumental tasks such as taking grandchildren to appointments, taking them out and doing things with them, and educating:

> We do all sorts of things with them you know, I mean, I've done wood work with the kids, made them painting boards and sledges and things like that. (Charles, age 65, still married)

> Sometimes we go and stay at their house, and when we do that we find various things to do, sometimes we play games or I read them books and stories, I've always had the feeling that grandparents, one of the useful things is to do reading with their kids, with their grandchildren, we've always tried to encourage them. (Mervyn, age 72, still married)

> I take her to the dentists, the doctors, things like that you know. (Arthur, age 73, still married)

According to the participants, grandfathering is about engaging in various practices with grandchildren that reflect their identities as men and also adhere to various constructions of masculinity, including being active, playing sports and going out. Some men suggested that these practices reflect fundamental differences between grandfathering and grandfather identities, compared with grandmothering and grandmother identities:

> I'm the man figure, aren't I? [My wife is] more involved I suppose in the domestic side of things. She'll do ... mending for my daughter-in-law, she's got a particular gift, she'll do some cooking, if needed yeah, I'm much more [into] taking them and playing football with [grandson] or at the moment [granddaughter] likes being picked up and cuddled by me, which all little girls love you know (laughs). I'm aware we're partly setting role models for them. (Bill, age 70, still married)

It is important not to be essentialist about the differences between grandfathering and grandmothering, although gender underpinned the participants' responses with the men adopting clearly defined roles and practices that constructed their identities as grandfathers as different to their wives, partners and former wives. Regardless of their marital status, some of the men labelled their role in the family through specific masculine performativities, for example, one defining himself as "Mr Fix it!" of the family, another as a "cheeky, chappy, clown" and another as the fun "Butlin's redcoat". Each of these performances of masculinity reflects the informal, fun-seeking style grandfather that was predominant in the men's interviews and more prominent than the formal and distant style found by Neugarten and Weinstein (1964). However, as Davidson et al (2003) suggest, being

a grandfather is more complex than this and men actually negotiate contradictory identities that on the one hand reflect being masculine, such as being a 'sage', but on the other hand are more nurturing.

As well as defending traditional masculine behaviours through their grandfathering practices some of the men also discussed their involvement in more nurturing and caring tasks. In Bill's case this relates to the genders of his grandchildren. In the context of his intergenerational interaction with his granddaughter he performs more nurturing tasks by cuddling her, although he explains how he does this in a masculine way by also picking her up. With his grandson, however, his performance of care is about playing football and being a male role model. Some of the men were also conducting more intimate child care practices such as nappy changing, reflecting how the men are performing an 'alternative discourse of masculinity' in grandfatherhood (see Mann, 2007). This reflects transformations to their male identities in that they are adopting what has been constructed as 'women's work' (Aitken, 2000). For divorced and re-married grandfather James, this adoption of a new identity is a result of his wife's lifecourse experiences, and for Arnold it is a result of his intergenerational interactions with his son and son-in-law:

> My wife, she's on a learning curve because she's never had any children, and she's adapting to it, I must say, incredibly well, she does exceedingly well ... She performs some of the functions and I do the others, so for instance, [my wife] won't change nappies (laughs) so that immediately becomes my job but yes, yeah we do different things and I'll keep [granddaughter] occupied while [my wife] goes and does things and she'll keep [granddaughter] occupied while I go and do things. (James, age 62, re-married)

> It was put to me ... I think that it was a generational thing ... I was hopeless, as a father in terms of babies, absolutely hopeless. I didn't avoid it, it was just kind of, not my, area of expertise and, I watched our son and our son-in-law, the way they just got stuck in, and was amazed ... They never gave it a thought ... but in my day, we had our children in our early 20s and had finished our family by our mid-20s and I just had no idea. My wife was a star and didn't seem to have any expectations that I would help except of course, I had to feed them and take them out in push chairs ... Now you have strollers; push chairs and prams in those days ... but when our grandchildren were babies, I had far more to do with them, far more to do with them, and I was the one who would be saying "look you all go out, I will deal with them". [Wife said] "You can't change a nappy", "Oh well...just let me try, I can do it". So it felt, I suppose I'd become kind of modernised a bit, by watching the way, younger people today behave. (Arnold, age 65, married)

These examples highlight the differences between the men's reasoning for conducting more nurturing tasks. James's remarriage to a woman who did not have her own children means that he has become involved in intimate practices of child care such as nappy changing, challenging traditional constructions of men as uninvolved in the more intimate elements of family life. What is particularly interesting about James's narrative is that despite being divorced, he still takes regular care of his granddaughter. His re-marriage to a woman who does not have children of her own actually influences his ability to adopt these nurturing practices and encourages them. For Arnold, intergenerational interactions with his

children are important for facilitating the performance of these new identities because it is through this interaction that he responds to generational differences in parenting. For Arnold, this reflects a transition in his identity as he situates this change in relation to his lifecourse experiences as a father. This suggests that grandfather involvement not only leads to the construction of new identities and masculinities, but is a result of the men's personal and familial circumstances. These circumstances are a product of the men's individual and familial lifecourse experiences, and the positive quality and character of their intergenerational relations.

The maintenance of these positive intergenerational relationships between the men and their children results from the men's adherence to paradoxical norms that reflect a desire to support but not to interfere with their children's wishes for their grandchildren; 'being there' but 'not interfering' (see Chapter 7 in this volume). This was particularly true of the grandfathers who were not divorced, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> I think when you're a father you're probably closer, aren't you?, to your own father? ... But when you're a grandfather you've got to remember that [the grandchild] has a father as well, so we've been very careful that we don't overrule anything that his dad wants to do. We'll discuss it, but we don't overrule, so I think that that's where the difference is ... I think when you're grandparents as well, you've got to pull towards helping them anyway but you've got to stand off a bit sometimes you know, because I know some grandparents can be very frustrating ... and domineering in some ways so we've always tried to step back and have a look. Now, if [grandson] wants to ask us something we've got to think about this. What's his dad been saying you know, because we're close to his dad as well, so he tells us what's going on, same as my daughter obviously, and I've got the same relationship with my daughter, so it's pretty fantastic. (William, age 88, still married)

This adherence to the paradoxical norms of involvement and non-interference is predominantly characteristic of the men who are either still married, have children who remain married, or have managed to maintain positive relationships with their adult children despite the grandfathers being divorced. William highlights that he wants to be involved with his grandson but that he also considers it important to remember that his son-in-law has a role in fathering that he must negotiate in order to maintain positive relationships. These findings are not representative of the diversities across the sample, however. There are differences across the sample concerning men's attitudes to involvement with grandchildren. Some of the men explain that in the absence of their son-in-law they feel it necessary to adopt a male role for their grandchildren, as a direct consequence of more conflicting intergenerational relations in the middle generation. This is particularly evident in families affected by divorce as the following section explores.

Divorce and its effect on family structures and intergenerational relations

The quality and character of the men's intergenerational relationships were not always positive and this is related not only to the men's personal circumstances, but also to the situations of their children. While James's divorce and subsequent re-marriage led him to engage in nappy changing practices and to perform new masculinities, he also has positive

relationships with his daughter and son-in-law that facilitate this involvement and performance of new masculinities. The majority of the men discussed being able to sustain practices of masculinity by taking their grandchildren out to do various activities, particularly when their grandchildren visited their homes. However, Steve's divorce had had a negative impact on his relationship with his daughter, and Steve could only see his grandchildren at his daughter's home:

> I play with [grandchildren] in their house ... the odd thing with me and my daughter is that you know, there's this sort of, you just don't feel like you can say sort of say "Oh can I take them to the zoo for the day?" I'd love to, but you just don't get that vibe where you think, you just don't feel like you can ask. (Steve, age 52, re-married)

Steve's daughter and the quality of their relationship influence the spaces in which he can perform his grandfathering identity. Earlier in his narrative, Steve attributes the quality of his relationship with his daughter to the displeasure he expressed when she first revealed she was pregnant at a young age, and also to his divorce from her mother in the past which resulted in conflict in their relationship. While many of the men in the sample emphasised taking grandchildren out and frequenting outdoor spaces, reflecting how fathers in particular re-establish their male identities in a spatial way once their identities become divorced from work (Brandth and Kvande, 1998), Steve's daughter restricts him from doing this. George, another divorced grandfather, also explains how his divorce has resulted in differences in his parenting practices, and those of his daughter, consequently influencing the quality and character of his relationship with his daughter, and also the frequency of face-to-face contact with his grandsons:

> [Being a grandad] it's nice, it's nice yeah, yeah, no I like, I now understand why my parents didn't want to look after my kids though (laughs) and I was always sort of, I could do with a bit of time off you know ... They [George's parents] were happy to see them but they were happy to see them off as well and, well partly it has to do with, I mean, I wouldn't, I didn't bring up my kids the way my daughter is bringing up hers, and I certainly don't want to get into arguments about how you bring up your kids obviously. I mean they should get on with their life ... but I find it is a little strained to be honest; she lets them do anything, so you know instead of teaching them the word 'no', she never says the word 'no', so they start screaming instead, and then, so what she does is divert their attention, it drives me crazy ... It's also actually quite difficult time wise, you know staying in touch is difficult given that you know, I don't want to disturb them when she's with the kids, when it's too late, I don't want to wake them up or, wake her up. (George, age 63, has a partner)

Divorce influences the quality and character of intergenerational relations, or the affectual solidarity (Katz and Lowenstein, 2010) between grandfathers and their children and grandchildren, which is central to whether or not men can actually be involved in the lives of their grandchildren, and who controls this. The fact that George and Steve do not wish to impose their involvement with their grandchildren, by trying to engage in the practices they deem non-interfering, complicates matters but also corroborates the argument that grandparents try to maintain positive relations with their children and grandchildren by not interfering with the parenting practices of their children (Ross et al,

2005; Chapter 7 in this volume). As King (2003) argues, divorce also tends to result in greater geographical distance and weaker bonds with adult children, as is the case for George whose daughter lives in Glasgow. In each of these cases, the quality and character of intergenerational relations are a result of divorce of the grandparents, but are also influenced by gendered and generational differences between the men and their daughters.

Gender is important for structuring men's involvement with grandchildren and this is particularly evident when considering the narratives of paternal grandfathers. For the men whose sons have divorced, the effect of this divorce on their relationships with the parents of their grandchildren has more significant impacts. Some paternal grandfathers found that when their sons divorced, their lack of rights of access to their grandchildren and the breakdown of relationships meant they were restricted from seeing them altogether:

Going through the divorce was very difficult and [son's] ex has decided that she's going to be vindictive and, part of that is her behaviour with the children. He [son] did have access to them, but she would pepper the children with all sorts of discreditable details about his behaviour before they went to see him. So they went to see him in the wrong frame of mind which caused him endless problems, so currently they're not actually seeing their father, because it makes things ... well it just creates too many rows and too many difficulties. So we are actually currently, debating, we do relate after a fashion, we're not terribly fond of his ex wife but, the way she's behaving, but we can relate to her and, we were debating actually whether in the last few days, whether we ought to contact her, and go, arrange to go and see them direct, without my son being involved, and then at least we can report back to my son and say well you know "we've seen them, they're OK, they're doing this, they're doing that"... We're trying to find a way around by possibly seeing them in her company ... which will maintain contact of sorts but, not the sort we want. (Peter, age 65, re-married)

As Peter's narrative reveals, the divorce of his son has resulted not only in the decline of his son's and ex-daughter-in-law's relationship, but has also resulted in a restriction on the contact he can have with his grandchildren. Rather than implicating him in extra child care as previous literature has suggested (Wheelock and Jones, 2002; Ferguson et al, 2004), this has resulted in an intergenerational relationship characterised by conflict that has filtered through the generations. An important point to note in this narrative is that Peter is considering making direct contact with his former daughter-in-law. This resonates with Timonen and Doyle's discussion on grandparental agency in Chapter 8 in this volume.

Peter's familial circumstances were not an isolated incidence in the study sample. Arthur, a dedicated paternal grandfather who was very involved with his local grandchildren, described a similar situation when his son divorced his wife:

Before [eldest son] emigrated to Australia ... he had a daughter, just his son was born in Australia. He used to bring his daughter and his daughter used to stay with us at weekends and that and, she used to like that you know, because there was a strained relationship between my eldest son and his wife. I won't say what we call her but anyway, they're divorced now (laughs), and then that granddaughter is in Australia, she's now 24 I think, ... but ... no relationship with them really. It's hard to say. His mother probably told him [Arthur's grandson] a lot of 'porky pies' [lies] about our

family; I know she did, and so he had a defence mechanism against us. (Arthur, age 73, married)

What these narratives reveal is that divorce in the middle generation can significantly influence the quality of intergenerational relationships that men have with their grandchildren as well as the frequency of face-to-face contact with their grandchildren. As such, family fragmentation in the middle generation is also significant in relation to whether or not involvement with grandchildren is facilitated. A common theme in each of these narratives is how the men's daughters and daughters-in-law act as key gate-keepers to grandchildren and exercise power over the men's relationships with their grandchildren. Thus gender, intergenerational relations, the social context and the men's personal and familial circumstances all intersect and have multiple and complex outcomes that can either facilitate or restrict men's performance of new identities and masculinities when grandfathering.

The variations in the men's practices of grandfathering are significantly influenced by intergenerational relations to the extent that some of the men are evidently engaging in nappy changing practices, construed as 'women's work' (Aitken, 2000), while others adhere to more masculine practices. The narratives further reveal that as a result of divorce, paternal grandfathers in particular must negotiate the contradictions of their identities because both their gender and generational identities, and also the generational structures of their families, position them in a way that has the potential to restrict their access to their grandchildren and consequently their practices and performances of identity. While they may want to be involved and to conduct nurturing practices, this is contingent on the quality of multiple intergenerational relationships.

Clearly, the quality and character of the men's intergenerational relations with their children influence men's access to their grandchildren and structure their ability to perform grandfathering. Another participant, previously mentioned, illustrates a scenario that Mann et al (2009) argue is increasingly likely to occur in the British context, namely that fathers who leave their first family as a result of divorce (Kay, 2006) become fathers to children in a second family later in life, while also becoming grandfathers when children in their original family become a parent. Thus, they simultaneously have to balance being a father to young children, a grandfather and in many cases also being in employment. The implications of this are yet to be explored in the literature, but maternal grandfather Gerald, whose personal circumstances match this pattern, explained how this made him feel about his new identity as a grandfather:

When my middle daughter became pregnant, I just didn't feel as though I was ready to be a grandfather, because I had [youngest daughter, age seven] and because of some of what we went through to have [youngest daughter] ... I've always been the main carer for [youngest daughter], because [second wife] works, almost full time ... I'm self-employed, so I've always been the one who's been here and been the main carer for [youngest daughter], so that made me really very much a dad, you know; very active and involved dad. So when I realised that [grown-up daughter] was going to have a baby, I just didn't feel ready to be a grandad, like when she said "so what do you want him, [grandson] to call you?"... "I don't know, Gerald, I want him to call me Gerald",

[She said] "He's not going to call you Gerald, it'll have to be something to do with you being his grandad, that's what you're going to be" and it did take me a few months to get used to it. I was quite resistant, and it was to do with being so much involved with [youngest daughter], as a dad. (Gerald, age 63, re-married)

Interestingly, while being a grandfather may represent a new identity for many men and allow them to adopt more nurturing, softer masculine identities, having multiple generational identities can be the cause of some resistance and conflict for men. Gerald in particular highlights the added complication of still being a father to a seven-year-old daughter from his second marriage and having an older daughter of 32 who has her own children. Generational positions in the family and the signifiers of father and grandfather are evidently associated with expectations of how these should be practiced and clearly influence how men construct their identities.

Technology and new grandfathering geographies

In the examples discussed in the previous section, there is an assumption that the men's children always have complete control over whether or not men can be involved in their grandchildren's lives. However, there are examples in the men's narratives that suggest that while divorce can result in reduced frequency of face-to-face contact with grandchildren, the increased use of communication technologies can create new geographies of contact between grandfathers and their grandchildren that bypass the middle generation, as maternal grandfather Ray suggests:

Int: With your older grandchildren then you said that they contact you every now and again...

Ray: [Eldest granddaughter] does, the boys don't, but [eldest granddaughter] does yeah.

Int: Is that by phone or E-Mail?

Ray: (Shows phone sign) "I'm alright grandad, I'm living with my boyfriend now, are you OK?". "Yes love, what you doing?". "Well, I've got the manager's job". "Oh right yeah OK" that type of stuff ... because like I say they went through a very difficult time (Ray, age 69, re-married)

The thing where I could ... influence him [grandson] or, communicate with him, I think I could communicate with him on an intellectual level, but now he's moved house he's not, I just got to writing emails to him, but I don't know if he's got the same email address, I'd rather not ask (laughs). (Duncan, age 70, re-married)

While Quadrello et al (2005) suggest communication technologies are complementary, as opposed to compensatory in situations of divorce, geographical distance between grandfathers and their grandchildren can increase. The introduction of new technologies can reduce this impact, providing new spaces that facilitate interaction and relationships with grandchildren, and performances of grandfathering. This is reflected in the finding that family members develop alternative expressions of support (Katz and Lowenstein, 2010).

Ray, for example, feels that it is important to maintain contact with his grandchildren because they went through a difficult time when their parents divorced. As a grandfather he is therefore involved in practices of intergenerational support that are emotional and nurturing in the context of his daughter's divorce (Hoff, 2007). While he does not see them face-to-face he is in telephone contact with them, overcoming issues of negative intergenerational relations and geographical distance. Interestingly, however, both gender and age are important here because he only speaks to his granddaughter; she is older and has access to the telephone, he speaks to her and learns about her life. With younger grandchildren, using technologies may be more difficult. For Duncan, his own divorce and that of his daughter means his grandson has had to move further away so he tries to contact him via email. However, his involvement is restricted by lack of knowledge about his grandson's email address and a lack of willingness to find out what it is. While Duncan understands that he should still be involved, this is restricted by his performance of masculinity, represented by his lack of contact.

Discussion and conclusions

This chapter has examined contemporary grandfathering in the North West of England, and explored the potential for men to perform new identities in a dynamic social context that is creating multiple and varied personal and familial circumstances for men. Overall the sample reflects that men negotiate their complex and often contradictory gendered and generational identities in the context of variable intergenerational relations, shaped by specific personal and familial circumstances. The married men in the sample in particular construct their identities as grandfathers through a norm of involvement with grandchildren. Their practices reveal that they construct and perform new grandfather identities reflecting 'softer', more nurturing masculinities as Davidson et al (2003) suggest. Nappy changing practices in particular highlight the potential for men to adopt more nurturing and caring tasks in grandfatherhood, thereby challenging existing constructions of masculinities as distant and uninvolved (Cunningham-Burley, 2001) and suggesting that grandfathering may allow men to subvert traditional expectations of male identities (Butler, 1990).

The multi-faceted and diverse nature of grandfathering practices revealed in this study suggest that instead of conventional grandfatherhood defined by essentialist conceptions of grandfathering, men are adopting new identities and masculinities. However, these cannot be fully explained without understanding the context of family and intergenerational relations. Intergenerationality, according to Hopkins and Pains (2007) is significant because it is multi-functional in its definition. It defines generation as a social identity (that grandfathers perform in gendered and aged ways) but unlike past conceptualisations, suggests that this is also made sense of through interactions and relations with other generational groups. The interconnectedness of generational identities and intergenerational relations is evident in the men's narratives. For example, Arnold explains that his involvement in nappy changing is a result of observing his son's fathering roles. Consequently, his grandfathering and his performance of new masculinities are constructed based on certain gendered possibilities presented by other generations, suggesting that intergenerational relations can have a transformative influence on masculine behaviours. This highlights the interdependent nature of grandfather identities (Holdsworth, 2007) in that gender positions which are normally assumed to be transmitted

down from fathers (Brannen and Nilson, 2006) are also transmitted from younger to older generations.

This process, however, is only facilitated when relationships with children are positive and cohesive. Family relationships are changing and this has implications for the intergenerational relations men engage in, in their everyday lives. The increased prevalence of divorce has significant effects on the intergenerational dynamics between grandfathers, their children and grandchildren which in turn influences how men perform new identities and masculinities when grandfathering in this context. The data goes beyond this finding, showing that there is also variation depending on which generation divorce affects. In situations where divorce and family fragmentation occur in the middle generation, relationships characterised by conflict, particularly with (former) daughters-in-law, are more likely and can disrupt how men perform grandfathering, if they are allowed to at all. There is further evidence to suggest that paternal grandfathers in particular may be restricted in their grandfathering because they lack rights and daughters-in-law control access to grandchildren (e.g. Arthur and Peter). While this is not a new finding, it is evident that this impacts on how masculinities and male identities are performed in grandfatherhood.

Acknowledging the diversity of grandfather identities is also useful because being a paternal grandfather does not always mean that divorce results in losing involvement with grandchildren. The maternal (and divorced) grandfather Steve also finds that his practices are restricted and he is unable to take his grandchildren to activities outside their home because he does not feel that his daughter would let him. James, however, who has divorced in the past but has managed to maintain a positive relationship with his daughter, has re-married a woman without children of her own. This set of circumstances has resulted in his involvement in more nurturing performances of child care. This highlights that the generation in which divorce occurs and the effect this has on intergenerational relations, can have differential and diverse outcomes for the identities that grandfathers perform.

These empirical examples suggest that generational structures and relationships that are gendered can act to marginalise men who are grandfathers, reduce their power and restrict them from performing new identities in family life. This is not a straightforward process and has diverse outcomes for men dependent on their personal and familial circumstances. The use of new technologies, however, suggests that there may be potential for men to overcome these structures, leading to the argument that there are new social geographies of grandfathering that can allow men to facilitate involvement with grandchildren. As Duncan's example shows however, this is dependent on the age of grandchildren and whether or not men choose to subvert traditional masculine behaviours. The men's personal geographies and access to resources do provide opportunities to perform an involved grandfatherhood, but this may also require agency (see Chapter 8 in this volume), something that is gaining increased interest in grandparent research more generally.

The findings from the empirical data more generally reveal variations in what men do with their grandchildren, and show that their engagement with grandchildren in influenced by whether intergenerational relations are either conflicting or cohesive. The character of relationships between grandfathers and their children and grandchildren is also influenced by divorce. This highlights that a diverse range of grandfather identities exists

and that there is room for negotiation and redefinition of the grandfather identity, made evident through the performance of multiple ageing masculinities. These findings have much broader implications for the ways in which grandfather identities are theorised and conceptualised. Theorising about grandfathers is currently inadequate (Hagestad, 1985; Roberto et al, 2001), so the theoretical framework incorporating intergenerationality (Hopkins and Pain, 2007) and performativity (Butler, 1990) was conceived. Application of this framework has led to a better understanding of the intersection of gender and intergenerational relations, and how grandfathers' personal and familial circumstances shape their masculinities and grandfather identities. Further work is required to understand diversity in grandfather identities. This chapter has suggested a conceptual framework for future research on men's experiences of family relationships and their influence on identity construction.

Acknowledgements

References

Aitken, S. C. (2000) 'Fathering and faltering: "Sorry, but you don't have the necessary accoutrements"', *Environment and Planning A,* vol 32, no 4, pp 581 – 598.

Ando, K. (2005) 'Grandparenthood: Crossroads between gender and aging', *International Journal of Japanese Sociology,* vol 14, no 1, pp 32 – 51.

Bates, J. (2009) 'Generative grandfathering: A conceptual framework for nurturing grandchildren', *Marriage and Family Review,* vol 45, no 4, pp 331 – 352.

Brandth, B. and Kvande, E. (1998) 'Masculinity and child care: The reconstruction of fathering', *Sociological Review,* vol 46, no 2, pp 293–313.

Brannen, J. and Nilsen, A. (2006) 'From fatherhood to fathering: transmission and change among British fathers in four-generation families', *Sociology,* vol 40, no 2, pp 335 – 352.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, London: Routledge.

Clarke, L. and Roberts, C. (2002) 'Policy and rhetoric: the growing interest in fathers and grandparents in Britain', in A. Carling, S. Duncan and R. Edwards (eds) *Analysing families: Morality and rationality in policy and practice,* London: Routledge.

Cunningham-Burley, S. (1986) 'Becoming a grandparent', *Ageing and Society,* vol 6, no 4, pp 453 – 471.

Cunningham-Burley, S. (2001) 'The experience of grandfatherhood', in A. J., Walker, M. Manoogian-O'Dell, L. A. McGraw, and D. L. G. White, (eds) *Families in later life: Connections and transitions,* California: Thousand Oaks, pp 92 – 96.

Davidson, K., Daly, T. and Arber, S. (2003) 'Exploring the social worlds of older men', in S. Arber, K. Davidson, and J. Ginn (eds) *Gender and ageing: Changing roles and relationships*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp 168 – 185.

Dench, G. and Ogg, J. (2002) *Grandparenting in Britain: A baseline study,* London: Institute of Community Studies.

Drew, L. A. and Smith, P. K. (1999) 'The impact of parental separation/divorce on grandparent-grandchild relationships', *International Journal of Aging and Human Development,* vol 48, no 3, pp 191 – 216.

Elwood, S. and Martin, D. (2000) '"Placing" interviews: Location and scales of power in qualitative research', *The Professional Geographer,* vol 52, no 4, pp 649 – 657.

Fairhurst, E. (2003) 'New identities in ageing: Perspectives on age, gender and life after work', in S. Arber, K. Davidson, and J. Ginn (eds) *Gender and ageing: Changing roles and relationships,* Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp 31 – 46.

Ferguson, N., Douglas, G., Lowe, N., Murch, M. and Robinson, M. (eds) (2004) *Grandparenting in divorced families,* Bristol: Policy Press.

Finch, J. (2007) 'Displaying families', *Sociology,* vol 41 no 1, pp 65-81.

Hagestad, G. O. (1985) 'Continuity and connectedness', in V. L. Bengtson and J. F. Robertson (eds) *Grandparenthood,* London; Sage, pp 31 – 48.

Harper, S. (2005) 'Understanding grandparenthood', in V. L. Bengtson and M. L. Johnson (eds) *Cambridge handbook of age and ageing,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hoff, A. (2007) 'Patterns of intergenerational support in grandparent-grandchild and parent-child relationships in Germany', *Ageing and Society,* vol 27, no 5, pp 643 – 665.

Holdsworth, C. (2007) 'Intergenerational inter-dependencies: Mothers and daughters in comparative perspective', *Women's Studies International Forum,* vol 30, no 1, pp 59 – 69.

Hopkins, P. and Pain, R. (2007) 'Geographies of age: thinking relationally', *Area,* vol 39, no 3, pp 287-294.

Katz, R. and Lowenstein, A. (2010) 'Theoretical perspectives on intergenerational solidarity, conflict and ambivalence', in M. Izuhara (ed) *Ageing and intergenerational relations: Family reciprocity from a global perspective,* Bristol: Policy Press, pp 29 – 56.

Kay, T. (2006) 'Where's Dad? Fatherhood in leisure studies', *Leisure Studies,* vol 25, no 2, pp 133 – 152.

King, V. (2003) 'The legacy of a grandparent's divorce: Consequences for ties between grandparents and grandchildren', *Journal of Marriage and Family,* vol 65, no 1, pp 170 – 183.

Leeson, G. W., and Harper, S. (2009) *Oxford Institute highlights increasing role of grandfathers in caring for grandchildren* http://www.ageing.ox.ac.uk/news [30.03.10]

Mann, R. (2007) 'Out of the shadows? Grandfatherhood, age and masculinities', *Journal of Aging Studies,* vol 24, no 1, pp 271 – 281.

Mann, R., Khan, H. T. A., Leeson, G. W. (2009) *Age and gender differences in grandchildren's relations with their maternal grandfathers and grandmothers,* Working Paper 209: Oxford Institute of Ageing.

Neugarten, B. L., and Weinstein, K. K. (1964) 'The changing American grandparent', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol 26, no 2, pp 199–204.

Quadrello, T., Hurme, H., Menzinger, J., Smith, P., K., Veisson, M., Vidal, S. and Westerback, S. (2005) 'Grandparents' use of new communication technologies in a European perspective', *European Journal of Ageing,* vol 2, no 3, pp 200 – 207.

Reitzes, D.C. and Mutran, E. J. (2004) 'Grandparent identity, intergenerational family identity, and well-being', *The Journal of Gerontology*, vol 59B, no 4, pp 213 – 219.

Roberto, K. A., Allen, K. R., and Blieszner, R. (2001) 'Grandfathers' perceptions and expectations of relationships with their adult grandchildren', *Journal of Family Issues,* vol 22, no 4, pp 407 – 426.

Ross, N., Hill, M., Sweeting, H. And Cunningham-Burley, S. (2005) *Grandparents and teen grandchildren: Exploring intergenerational relationships*, Glasgow: Centre for Research on Families.

Tarrant, A. (2010) 'Constructing a social geography of grandparenthood: a new focus for intergenerationality', *Area,* vol 42, no 2, pp 190–197.

Uhlenberg, P., and Kirby, J. B., (1998) 'Grandparenthood over time: Historical and demographic trends', in M. E. Szinovacz (ed) *Handbook on grandparenthood,* Westport, CT: Greenwood, pp 23-39.

Wheelock, J. and Jones, K. (2002) ''Grandparents are the next best thing': Informal childcare for working parents in urban Britain', *Journal of Social Policy,* vol 31, no 3, pp 441 – 463.