

Exploring older adults' intergenerational friendships: from homophily to an all-age identity

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Declaration

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2019

Summary

Friendship is synonymous with equality; it is portrayed as a chosen, mutual and reciprocal relationship (Allan, 2010; Pahl, 2000). Changing demography - unprecedented numbers of older people living longer - has in principle increased opportunities for intergenerational interaction outside of the family, including friendship formation. Friendship is lauded in research and policy for promoting physical and mental well-being, and is often perceived as a panacea for social exclusion and loneliness.

Intergenerational friendship is a friendship between a chronologically old and a significantly younger adult (operationalised in this research as an age difference of 15 years or more). Quantitative evidence suggests that intergenerational friendships are prevalent (Dykstra and Fleischmann, 2016). However, dominated by the principle of homophily ('birds of a feather flock together'), research has primarily focused on friendships among older *or* younger adults. This approach reflects a social construction of older adults as unsuited to forming naturally occurring, equal, mutually enjoyable friendships with younger non-kin adults (Elliott O'Dare et al., 2017). By focusing solely on the 'older friend', this thesis aims to understand the role intergenerational friendships play in how older persons experience older age and friendship in later life.

This study took a qualitative approach to capture the *meaning* and *experience* of intergenerational friendship. Constructivist Grounded Theory was employed to generate theoretically informative data (Charmaz, 2014). Twenty-three people aged 65 and over were interviewed in Ireland to attain rich co-constructed talk data, and field notes were used to capture observational data - 'props' in participants' homes and environs.

Three key concepts emerged from the research. First, age homophily is challenged with a new conceptualisation of *homophily of doing-and-being*. Homophily of doing-and-

being has three components: being ‘friends in action’ (doing interests, hobbies and leisure pursuits, spending time together); being ‘not only old’ (sharing role identities beyond age); and ‘sharing ways of thinking and being’ (attitudes and approaches to friendship and to living life) These commonalities, when combined, constitute a homophily of doing-and-being that brings and binds the intergenerational friends together. Following on from this concept, a key finding is that in intergenerational friendship, homophily and difference elide, forming a unique part of the process of ‘doing’ intergenerational friendship. This unique aspect of intergenerational friendship appears to facilitate a particular way of relating to identity in older age.

Second, participants signalled a process of maintaining and deploying an *all-age identity* through intergenerational friendship. Age was presented as a fluid spectrum of performance. An all-age identity was portrayed by the participants as they signalled at times ‘feeling the same age inside’ as their younger friend, at other times feeling and acting older, while occasionally feeling and behaving in a childish manner. Sameness and difference were acknowledged and exchanged with the age-other, as being of a different generation brought unique insights and experiences.

Third, *continuity in belonging and connectedness* through intergenerational friendships was an essential part of embracing a good old age. In the everyday - in friendship - compliance with and resistance to social and cultural age stereotyping and ageism was enacted. The accounts of exclusion and inclusion, homophily of doing-and-being, celebrating difference and age difference, and holding an all-age identity all formed part of the participants’ lived experience of older age and intergenerational friendship. Being an older intergenerational friend was imbued with seeking joy, belonging and connectedness in everyday life.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and background

‘Friendships are strange and strange how they come about’ (Walter)

Introduction

The experience, value and benefits of friendship in individuals’ lives and to contemporary societies are lauded in research and policy. The philosopher Nehamas (2016), in his exploration of the nature of friendship, effusively states that friendship is considered ‘without question, one of life’s greatest gifts’ yet it is ‘surprisingly difficult to define’ (p. 4). Some sociologists had argued that society is changing as community networks decline, along with friendship opportunities. Individuals have become increasingly isolated, to the detriment of the individual and society (Putnam, 2000). Conversely, others have pointed to the power and pervasiveness of social networks. Individuals are linked and their health, actions and belief systems are influenced by friends and friends-of-friends, in a hyper-connected society (Christakis and Fowler, 2010).

The connection between having friends as a precursor to and predictor of individual happiness and wellbeing continues to occupy social scientists, for instance, Demir (2016) and co-authors examined the psychological association of friendship and happiness in a variety of contexts and contended that the association between friendship and happiness is a positive one. Chopik (2017) argued that friendships in later life are linked to increased happiness and health for the older individual, perhaps even more so

than family relationships. Friendship promotes inclusion and increases psychological and physical well-being (for example, see Blieszner, 2014; Allan, 2010). Friendship has been conceptualised as ‘social glue’, such is its value in promoting social inclusion and cohesion (Pahl, 2000). Adams and Taylor (2015) argued on completion of their comprehensive assessment of extant scholarship that ‘the literature clearly demonstrates that friendship and happiness are positively related’ (p. 160). Adams and Taylor (2015) went on to argue that friendships of older adults are more likely to be concerned with practical social support provision by friends as opposed to subjective happiness and well-being of the older individual.

The focus of this research is on the friendships of older people, specifically on intergenerational friendships. The term intergenerational friendship is used in this thesis to refer to friendships between adults where one party in the friendship is significantly older in chronological age (a fuller definition of these terms is provided later in the thesis). While not specifically identifying the types of friendships involved, extant research overwhelmingly indicates that older people in Ireland have thriving, robust social networks with friends and neighbours (Walsh et al., 2014; Gallagher, 2008; Fahey et al., 1994). In a recent report, over half of the respondents aged 55-69 (who were living in Ireland) had at least one intergenerational friend. The authors state that respondents over 70 years of age were 40% less likely to have an intergenerational friend (Gibney et al., 2018: p. 129).

Others argue that older age is not the time to form new friendships. For example, Gilleard (2018) argued that while some individuals may experience or seek to form new friendships (among other new directions) in old age, ‘they form the exception’, with older age more likely to be overshadowed by the endurance of suffering (p. 29). Other scholars dispute this suggestion and present evidence that older people seek out friendship in older

age, for instance, as purported by Jerrome and Wenger (1999). Given the conflicting accounts around friendship and friendship formation in older age, a review of extant literature and theory in Chapter 2 will provide an outline of current scholarship on the role of friendship in the lives of older people.

Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to understand how older individuals portray being an older friend and concomitantly how they experience being older in their everyday lives through intergenerational friendship. By focusing solely on the ‘older friend’, the thesis aims to understand the role intergenerational friendships play in how older persons feel and behave as older individuals and as older friends. Intergenerational friendship additionally illuminates how the participants interpret and portray old age and their own ageing through friendship with a younger adult. This thesis strives to explore both the positive and negative aspects of the friendship from the perspective of the older friend. Furthermore, research suggests that older persons tend towards cross-gender friendships (Jerrome and Wenger, 1999), this study explores if this is the case in relation to intergenerational friendships.

A fundamental task for contemporary sociologists is to understand and explore how old age is being reconstructed and how this connects to other areas of life (Phillipson, 1997). At a high level, the focus of this thesis is the micro-sociological situations in everyday life. I was inspired by the broadening width and depth of research by social and cultural gerontologists in seeking to apply a ‘widely expanded imaginary’ (Twigg and Martin, 2014) to the topic of ageing. Therefore, given the emphasis on family research and the relative lack of research on the micro-social world of friendship, this thesis

concentrates on non-kin friendships, that is, between people of different generations who are not related. This study sets out to consider how older people negotiate age and ageing at the micro-level, in their everyday lives through the exploration of intergenerational friendship. This is an important and novel way of framing an enquiry into being old-aged in contemporary societies.

Similar to the focus on care flagged below, research has explored intergenerational relationships within families, including grandparent-grandchild relationships (Arber and Timonen, 2012). As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, some relationships do cross the kinship, cohort and cultural boundaries as generational differences are negotiated. Matthews (1986) describes how participants in her research describe their age-discrepant friends in kin-like terms, for instance as a substitute daughter. However, as Hagestad (2008) identifies, the segregation of the generational ‘book-ends’, that is those at either end of the age spectrum namely children and older people face ‘multiple barriers to the creation and maintenance of relationships outside the family realm’ (p.32). Hagestad (2008) points to the age segregated institutional arrangements and the ways in which public space is organised as particular barriers to intergenerational interaction. Notwithstanding this, and the expanded opportunities, in principle, for intergenerational relationships in society, those relationships that are not based on kin or care obligations have remained almost completely unexplored. This is the area where my PhD research makes an original contribution to the literature and to our understanding of ageing in contemporary aged societies.

In focusing on intergenerational friendship, this study strives to look beyond age-related stereotypes by deliberately seeking out platforms where people share space and ‘sameness’ beyond age difference. Age/youth is a familiar dichotomy constructed by contemporary ageing societies (Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2006). While in most developed

countries people are living longer and healthier lives than in the past, Gubrium and Holstein (2003) argue that there are myriad ways older persons give meaning to, and experience, being old. However, they purport that stereotyping persists, with older age being construed as the opposite to younger or middle age, as a different stage of life with contrasting characteristics.

Chasteen and Cary (2015) argue that the pervasiveness and stigma of age stereotyping encourages older individuals to develop a ‘young’ subjective age identity, that is, the age that they ‘feel’ themselves to be inside (Bowling et al., 2005). Cuddy et al. (2005) point to the pervasiveness and consistency of age stereotyping and argue that the outcome is the social exclusion of older people. Intergenerational friendships defy this dichotomy as the friends are of different generations yet choose to engage in a close relationship with each other. However, as Chapter 2 outlines, a lacuna of research on intergenerational friendship is apparent. Given the absence of evidence, it is not understood in extant literature if, within this age-integrated voluntary relationship, dichotomies and stereotypes are disregarded and if age differences are ignored, are acknowledged but deemed unimportant, or are proved irrelevant. This thesis provides insight to and understanding of this previously unexplored topic.

Context: living in an ageing world

Friendship does not exist or evolve in a bubble. Adams and Allan (1998) argue that time and place matter in how friendships are formed and how they are constructed. Unprecedented demographic change, due to decreasing birth rates and increased longevity has resulted in growing numbers of people living longer and arguably healthier lives than before. Globally, the number of people aged 60 years and over is expected to

reach two billion by 2050 (C.A.R.D.I, 2011). By 2041, nearly one third of the population of Ireland will be aged 60 and over (CSO, 2016).

While in many Western countries older people often outnumber younger people, Ireland has a comparatively young society at present. A ‘problematization’, according to Foucault (1984), comprises a set of practices, grounded in ‘social, economic or political’ processes that transform a previously uncritically examined domain relating to peoples’ lives into a crisis of thought (p. 388). An increasingly older population is problematized as an ‘ageing crisis’ across social, economic and political domains, for example, by placing a burden on scarce resources particularly in relation to health and long-term care (Willetts, 2010). Others perceive population ageing as a demographic dividend, for example, as a ‘success story’ in which social policy has paid a significant part (Walker, 2002).

Critical gerontologists argue that social policies have *created* some of the challenges that the increasing numbers of older people face (and indeed how ageing is constructed, that is discussed further below), with Townsend (2006) reflecting on the structured dependency that pension and retirement policies created for older citizens. Estes (1979) argues that ‘the major problems faced by the elderly in the United States are in large measure ones that are socially constructed as a result of our conceptions of ageing and the aged...the major problems faced by the elderly are the ones we create for them’ (p. 1). Whatever the intention or unanticipated consequences, contemporary social policies have evolved, usually underpinned by the concept of ‘active’ ageing as a policy tool (Timonen, 2016; Boudiny, 2013; WHO, 2002), to play a part in attempting to address the challenges presented by increased numbers of older citizens.

‘Ageing-in-place’ is a widely used concept in current ageing policy. It is defined as ‘remaining living in the community, with some level of independence, rather than in

residential care’ (Davey et al., 2004: p. 133). Current policies, including policy related to dementia care, continue to be underpinned by a commitment, in principle, to support older people in Ireland to age-in-place (DOH, 2014; National Positive Ageing Strategy, 2013). This policy approach reflects a broader change as policymakers have sought to widen the policy remit beyond the preoccupation with older people and care provision. A broader focus emerged on not only health but additionally on ‘useful’ participation and security, for example, through volunteering or participation in lifelong education (National Positive Ageing Strategy, 2013). Additionally, a prevailing policy response to population ageing is extending working lives through the raising or elimination of a compulsory retirement age in many jurisdictions, including Ireland, allowing older people to participate or to remain active in the paid work force for longer (Ni Leime and Street, 2017; Maltby, 2011). Through these policies - as well as by the sheer force of demographic trends - older and younger citizens will be sharing ‘spaces’, i.e. in the workplace, in their communities and so on, in principle to a greater extent than previous generations.

Despite this focus on promoting the positive aspects of ageing, social scientists, economists, media and policymakers are concerned with the risks and challenges that an ageing population brings, at a societal and at the individual level. Concerns about the increasing social isolation of older people (Walsh, 2016), increased levels of loneliness among older people (Victor et al., 2001), the complexity of the experience of loneliness (Smith and Victor, 2018) and the related detrimental impact of loneliness on the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals of all ages (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015) are gaining increased attention. In the UK, a ministerial portfolio has been created to spearhead a strategy to challenge what is perceived to be a modern epidemic, the condition of loneliness and social isolation. Victor (2018) argues that loneliness, while once

conceptualised to be a social problem of older age, has evolved to being perceived as a public health hazard, thus generating a ‘moral panic’ around the public and health resources required to tackle loneliness in older age and its detrimental outcomes. Friendship was once considered to be on the periphery, with kinship centre stage in an older individual’s life. However, in a more individualised society (Giddens, 1992) with changing family structures (smaller ‘beanpole’ families), friendship could be perceived as a ‘remedy’, a panacea for the condition of loneliness in older age.

Recognition of the importance of friendship to the wellbeing of older people is evidenced by interventions that seek to encourage such relationships. Organisations promote intergenerational befriending programmes, for example, Friends of the Elderly, Alone and Age UK (a number of these schemes are scrutinised in Chapter 2), yet friendships that occur naturally through the mutual interests of both parties remain poorly understood in the research literature. Intergenerational friendships may provide a unique ‘site’ for exploration where older and younger people choose to spend time together as it is reasonable to assume (based on general friendship literature which I examine in Chapter 2) that both parties enjoy each other’s company and that the relationship is meaningful in many ways.

Generational interaction in contemporary society

Competition for scarce resources, such as housing, health care, employment opportunities and financial support and other social ‘problems’ are frequently conceptualised in generational terms, often as a generational conflict in the context of higher dependency ratios (White, 2013). Intergenerational solidarity is a topic of growing interest to researchers and policymakers given the changing demographics of contemporary societies. The intergenerational contract - the ‘give and take’ between generations -

enables a cohesive society to function and flourish. The existence and survival of the welfare state is predicated on the premise of intergenerational exchanges as each generation contributes to the maintenance and support of those who are either too young (future contributors) or too old (former contributors) (Ervik and Linden, 2013). Extensive research has been carried out seeking to identify intergenerational solidarity (or its deficit) by focusing on the family, for instance, Changing Generations (Scharf et al., 2013) a study conducted in Ireland which explored this topic and highlighted that the ‘give and take’ between familial generations is strong.

Outside of the family, ‘naturally’ occurring social interaction between differing generations is perceived as being limited as people of all ages are streamed by contemporary society into age homogenous ‘ghettos’ i.e. age-targeted groups such as retirement groups or youth groups, with little opportunity for age integration (Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2006; Uhlenberg and Gierveld, 2004). Researchers go on to argue that age integration has many benefits at an individual and societal level as it fosters the exchange of material and informational support, for example, technology use, along with shared experiences about ways of living or thinking or being (Uhlenberg and Gierveld, 2004). It also reduces ageist attitudes and discrimination (Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2005) and is vital in preventing marginalisation of older people (Butler, 1969). It would be practical also to surmise that if people of differing ages don’t meet, they cannot form meaningful intergenerational friendships. Concern for the lack of integration has perhaps inspired policy makers and advocacy groups to intervene and orchestrate intergenerational interaction, for instance, as Finn and Scharf (2012) advise, 56 such programmes, most of these being driven by NGO’s and the voluntary sector, exist in Ireland to bring the generations together.

An additional concern is the prevalence and embeddedness of ageism, which the World Health Organisation perceives as socially normalised yet rarely countered (WHO, 2018). Despite increased awareness of the problem, ageism continues to ‘infiltrate’ strategies and policies (Angus and Reeve, 2006) and older peoples’ experiences of everyday life (Gullette, 2011; Gullette, 2004). Recent research with those aged over 50 from Ireland purports that 45% of older people experienced age discrimination in the previous two years (McGarrigle et al., 2016). Research, as evidenced here, typically focuses on negative ageism, although as Palmore (1999) stated, ageism can additionally be positive, for example, assigning positive attributes such as wisdom to older people. A unique factor of ageism, as opposed to other forms of prejudice such as sexism or racism, as alluded to by Nelson (2002), is that younger people who practice this discrimination are discriminating against their future (older) selves. The existence and experience of ageism indicates that older age is being perceived and constructed as ‘less than’ younger age.

How ageing is constructed in a contemporary society influences how people of all ages interact with, and view each other and themselves. Jerrome (1992) offers a useful definition of the social construction of (old) age, stating it is how ‘age roles are defined, learned and sustained’ (p. 5). The existence of ‘age norms’ speaks to cultural and social expectations of how people of differing ages ‘should’ behave and forms part of the fabric of how older age is constructed. Age norms are defined as ‘expectations regarding age-appropriate behaviour and interaction, a network of expectations that is embedded throughout the cultural fabric of life’ (Neugarten et al., 1965: p. 711). Compelling older and younger people to conduct their behaviours in different ways through sociocultural expectations could therefore create an additional schism between generations and so constrain ‘everyday’ meaningful intergenerational interaction.

In the context of contemporary societies old age is reconstructed as older citizens are encouraged to age ‘successfully’ (Rowe and Kahn, 2015; Rowe and Kahn, 1997), to age productively, and to be active members of society. Older people are exhorted to, and are evidenced to be providing care for ageing parents, providing care for grandchildren, making financial transfers to children, volunteering and generally being useful and productive members of society (McGarrigle et al., 2016). Timonen (2016) argues that those in power in society, governments, policy makers and other actors ‘spell out how older adults should live their lives’ (p. 85). Co-existing alongside this construction of older age as potentially and ideally ‘useful’, is the construction of older people as dependent, frail and with complex and diverse care needs. Ageing, as described by Gilleard and Higgs (2000), has become ‘complex, differentiated and ill-defined’ (p. 1).

Research approach

Focusing on the ‘older’ friend in an intergenerational friendship

Taking the decision to focus my research on the older adult in the intergenerational friendship was informed by a number of carefully considered factors. First, a review and consideration of the ‘state of literature’ contributed to my decision. In the extant literature (as outlined in Chapter 2), studies generally included a sample of both young and old people, usually from either end of the adult age spectrum i.e. youngest adults (generally by recruiting students) and oldest adults. This dichotomous approach did not therefore examine the full spectrum of intergenerational friendships. Many analysed the differences/similarities in how both age groups comparatively rated or experienced the characteristics of the friendship with a view to drilling down to the crux of the friendship

and its component parts. Therefore, I thought that a study which focuses on the older friend only, and how they interpret, construe and construct the friendship and their own 'place' in it as the older friend, would be an interesting, unique and valuable contribution to ageing and older adult friendship research. Second, a pragmatic reason is apparent; this thesis is a PhD study with the limitations in time and resources that this entails. Therefore, focusing on a larger sample of older adults only, as opposed to recruiting smaller numbers of old and young friends enables a closer focus on the older persons' experiences, generates richer data and co-creates more theoretically informative data.

Method and methodology

Constructivist Grounded Theory was selected as best suited to generate theoretically informative data on this topic. Constructivist Grounded Theory aims to create a theory that is grounded in the data, generating 'contextually relevant, plausible accounts' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2010: p. 188). The type of theory constructed is a substantive theory (as opposed to a grand theory). A substantive theory is a theory which is 'bounded': it is developed to theorise a particular problem or to theorise about a particular area. In this research, the area is intergenerational friendship, and the 'problem' it seeks to theorise is understanding how the participants in the study portray, experience, and give meaning to being an intergenerational friend in later life. The aim of a substantive theory is not only to describe but additionally to explain (Charmaz, 2014). This research, therefore, describes *and* explains the processes related to 'being' and 'doing' intergenerational friendship.

Defining terms used in the research

The terms old, generation and friend, are contested concepts in social science literature. In this section I will define the terms as they are used in this thesis, commencing with 'old'. The age at which a person is considered old varies. 'Old' in the literature is used to refer to persons from the age of 40 upwards, but most commonly (in western societies) the demarcation is positioned at 65 years of age, in line with what is or was until recently the official retirement age. Three categories of age stratification within the category old are used in the research: participants are often referred to as younger-old (65-75), middle-old (75-85) and oldest-old (85 and over). This does not imbue research participants in each group with any particular age-related qualities or attributes. The categories are instead used as a device to highlight the intergenerational aspects of the categorisation of being old, with several generations existing within this chronological category.

The terms 'third' and 'fourth' age are used throughout the thesis. The concept of a third and fourth age in later life argues for distinct life stages with corresponding characteristics. Third age is conceptualised as 'positive', being a time of health, activity and engagement post-retirement. The fourth age characteristics in contrast include illness, frailty and dependency (Laslett, 1989). Laslett (1989) posited that the fourth age is not tied to chronology and may not be experienced by all, as opposed to later research which argued for the relevance of chronological age (Baltes and Smith, 2003). Gilleard and Higgs (2000) examine the contemporary cultural context of the third age, and follow with a later focus on theorising the fourth age (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015).

Generation and intergenerational terms and concepts

While there are many definitions and understandings of what constitutes a generation, a 'straightforward' and succinct view of the meanings that are commonly assigned to the term generation is presented by Hagestad (2008). The three categorisations are first, age

group or age category, that is, individuals who are in a given life phase; for example, childhood, youth, and old age. Second, as a position in a system of ranked descent within a family: here it is the generational structure of the family: child, parent, grandparent, and great-grandparent. Third, outside of the family context, a historical generation is a birth cohort that shares certain characteristics. This societal understanding of a generation refers to ‘a common location in the historical dimension of the social process’ (Mannheim 1952; cited in Timonen and Conlon 2015: p. 2), as ‘generational units’, sharing a ‘distinctive subcultural identity’ (Alwin, 2013: p. 142). The term intergenerational in this thesis refers to friendships between people who belong to different *societal* generations. To operationalise ‘intergenerational’ within this study, generational difference is roughly demarcated at an age difference of 15 years or more.

Intergenerational and generational terms, theories and concepts have been developed by social scientists to conceptualise the processes of intergenerational interaction. As briefly referenced above, intergenerational interactions (usually in the context of transfers), are generally referred to in a polarised way i.e. as solidaristic (Scharf et al., 2013) or conflictual (Willetts, 2010) and divisive (White, 2013), or occasionally as being ‘mixed’ i.e. ambivalent (Luescher and Pillemer, 1998). Biggs et al. (2011) propose the theoretical concept of generational intelligence which conceptualises how differing generations are aware of age, social and cultural norms, and put themselves in the shoes of the ‘age-other’. The term ‘age-other’ is useful as it links age and generation, denoting ‘someone who is constructed as being in a different group to oneself, based on age’ (Biggs and Lowenstein, 2011: p. xii). Biggs and Lowenstein (2011) go on to stress that being perceived as an age-other is influenced by ‘the interaction of these elements [lifecourse, family position and cohort identity] of generational identity’ (p. xii).

An additional concept, that of intergenerational observing, described how differing generations perceive the lives and commitments of the age-other and adjust their expectations (in relation to support) accordingly (Conlon et al., 2014; Timonen et al., 2013). Lastly, Erikson (1963) proposed the psychosocial developmental stage in older adulthood of generativity which is ‘primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation’ (p. 276). A tenet of this concept is generative concern, which is the inclination to demonstrate concern for those of other generations (Destaubin and McAdams, 1995). Before moving on from this brief overview of some generational terms, it is worthwhile to appraise critically the concept of generations and, to echo White (2013), ask ‘how far will people conform to the behaviour expected of them’ and ‘identify themselves and others as such [in generational terms]’(p. 242).

Defining friend and friendship: complexities and challenges to researchers

Clarifying the key terms in this thesis - friends and friendship - is a complex task. Defining who is a friend has caused ‘handwringing’ among sociologists as they grapple with the question (Blatterer, 2015). The elusiveness of friendship can present methodological and conceptual difficulties as researchers are perplexed and concerned about the general lack of consensus on who to include in the category ‘friend’ and in the degrees and boundaries of friendship (Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Adams et al., 2000; Adams and Blieszner, 1989; Adams, 1989). A review of the literature in relation to friendship reveals that some researchers speculate that one of the reasons social scientists are more hesitant to study friendship could be due to the problems in defining and conceptualising friendship. To deal with this complexity, researchers take three approaches, each of which has different considerations. They ignore the complexity by letting the research participants decide, bemoan it as they cannot compare like with like in their analysis, or they eliminate the

complexity, for example, by specifying to participants to use a particular definition of friendship (Adams et al., 2000; Adams and Blieszner, 1989; Matthews, 1983). Using one of these three approaches to overcome this barrier allows researchers to proceed and explore other differences in friendship, for example how older adults' friendships differ from friendships at other life stages and how they change over time. This leads Muraco (2012) to conclude that 'friendship is one of the most significant, yet socially ignored, relationships' (p. 15). This thesis therefore makes an important contribution to growing the body of research on friendship.

Given the possibility of ambiguity in defining friends and friendship, Chapter 2 presents a detailed overview of the literature to ensure an understanding of the themes and concepts involved in defining and understanding who is a friend and what friendship is. As a summary, friendship is understood customarily and in research as a relationship characterised by equality; it is chosen, mutual and reciprocal (Allan, 2010; Pahl, 2000). Adults tend to share normative expectations in relation to friendship (Felmlee and Muraco, 2009); the values of trust, respect and support are identified as central regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age or ethnicity (Galupo and Gonzalez, 2013). That these chosen good friends are of a different generation provides valuable insights into how people interpret and portray their own ageing and the context in which the process of ageing takes place.

The research question

A paucity of literature is evident on the topic of intergenerational friendship (as outlined in Chapter 2). Following on from this discovery, it can be construed that little is known about how older adults experience and portray intergenerational friendships and the

meaning, significance and role such friendships play in older peoples' lives. This research therefore poses the question:

Why do intergenerational friends and intergenerational friendships in close, mutual relationships happen and matter in ways that are distinctive in later life?

Quantitative evidence from Dykstra and Fleischmann (2016), which is examined in detail in Chapter 2, asserts that 40% of older people surveyed in Ireland reported that they had a cross-age friend. Gibney et al. (2018) purport that among older people aged 55-69, 60% had one or more friends under 30 years, falling to 38% of those aged over 70. This data indicates that a significant number of older people are socially embedded in intergenerational friend networks in Ireland, thus demonstrating that the phenomenon of interest represented a feasible research inquiry.

To contextualise this study, some information in relation to the older population in Ireland is now set out. I have previously alluded to a number of distinctive features of ageing in Ireland, such as the relatively strong bonds between generations and absence of overt generational conflict in the media. Most older adults living in Ireland live in owner-occupied housing, most live with their families, with a quarter living alone (CSO, 2016; McGarrigle et al., 2016; Barrett et al., 2011). Those who do live alone are more likely to be women (CSO, 2016). Furthermore, an increasing number of older people are being cared for in nursing homes than in the past (CSO, 2016). Older cohorts of women are less likely to have worked beyond the age at which they married and had children than in some other European countries (Barrett et al., 2011). Ten percent of those age 50 and over have never married (Barrett et al., 2011). Research conducted by the OECD (2014)

purports that ‘the economic situation of pensioners in Ireland is comparatively good’; pensions are comparatively low but pensioner poverty is also comparatively low at 6.9%. (p. 11). A majority of older people living in Ireland are Catholic; mass-going and religious observance in general is strongly age-related but has declined among older people (Barrett et al., 2011). In relation to health and well-being 44% of older adults reported that they enjoyed ‘excellent’ health (Barrett et al., 2011), with 81% ‘looking forward to each day’ and over 80% perceived later life as being ‘full of opportunities’ (Barrett et al., 2011: p. 18).

Reflecting on my place at the outset of this enquiry

The purpose of this brief section is to make clear my position as the instigator of, and researcher in, this study. I come to this enquiry as a mid-life, early career researcher, with an academic interest in the disciplines of sociology [with a particular interest in ageing], social policy and psychology. I consider myself to be, and look forward to developing my career as, a social scientist.

Friends and friendship play an import role in my life. I am, and I have intergenerational friends, both older and younger than I. I have observed older and younger family members, friends and work colleagues making, keeping and occasionally loosing friends of all ages, at different stages in their lives. The impetus for this study came from my review of the literature on non-kin carers of older adults as part of my scoping review of a PhD topic. What struck me forcibly while conducting the review was the sparse role non-kin intergenerational relationships were reported as playing in older people’s lives, being barely mentioned or only being mentioned in a narrow context. This lack of representation spurred my curiosity and led me to seek out theory and empirical

literature, specifically on intergenerational friendship. I sought to understand what meaning intergenerational friendship held for the older individual, and what role did intergenerational friendship play in their lives? And so my avid scholastic interest in exploring the intergenerational friendships of older adults began.

A brief overview of the thesis structure

This thesis comprises six chapters in total. In this chapter, I provide context for the research. I clarify the terms used in the study and I outline the background, aims, scope and significance of the research. I place myself in the context of the research.

In Chapter 2, I commence with a review of the broad theoretical literature in relation to how older people are situated in relation to societal structures and social networks. I then go on to provide a comprehensive and in-depth review and synthesis of literature pertaining to friendship, friendship in older age and lastly and most importantly, intergenerational friendship. I move on then to present a systematic review of the extant literature on the topic of intergenerational friendship. To conclude this chapter I interrogate why so little is known about intergenerational friendship. I examine how the topics of intergenerational friendship, older age and the social lives of older adults have been approached and framed in the literature to date and draw inferences as to what this means in a broader context of friendship and ageing.

Chapter 3 presents a complete overview of the research design. Justification is offered as to why a qualitative approach using Constructivist Grounded Theory was selected to explore the topic. The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study are presented. Who took part, how the research process was organised, how the data

were collected, coded and analysed, is explained. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the research design.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I present the findings of the research. Readers who might be more used to the convention of separating findings and discussion chapters should note that here, I intertwine the findings and discussion. Chapter 4 adheres more to the classic findings-style exposition, but the direction is increasingly towards discussion, conceptualisation and theorising as I move through Chapters 4, 5 and 6. This was done in the interest of readability, to maximise the scope for conceptualisation and theorising, and to avoid repetition. Chapter 4 is titled ‘Being an Intergenerational Friend’ and analyses the participants’ portrayals of intergenerational friendship. Accounts of the formation, maintenance and ‘doing’ intergenerational friendship are rendered and considered. Chapter 5 takes a more theoretical stance. Titled ‘Doing Ageing through Intergenerational Friendship’, this chapter explores and analyses the meaning and experiences of the older friends as they negotiate their own ageing through, and with, intergenerational friends and friendship.

In Chapter 6, I conclude the thesis with a concise, high-level synthesis of the research and its theoretical contributions.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review

Introduction

In this chapter I present a review of pertinent extant literature. How I approached the decision to conduct a literature review is discussed at the outset. I then proceed to provide perspective, context and to conceptualise some of the empirical themes relating to intergenerational friendship, with a broad overview of some theoretical literature in relation to well-being and social interaction in older age. A succinct overview of some of the main themes addressed in salient ‘general’ friendship and friendship in older age literatures is then outlined. Following on from this, a systematic review of research - with main focus on intergenerational friendship - is provided. Finally, a discussion and conclusion section will draw all of the literature together with the explicit purpose of addressing the question: why has so little research focused on the topic of intergenerational friendship? The chapter concludes with the argument that, as iterated by Elliott O’Dare et al., (2017), how we frame older people and ageing in contemporary societies, in academic literature and policy, has implications for intergenerational friendship formation. Lastly, the lacunae identified in the literature provide a strong justification for posing the research question I have articulated in Chapter 1.

The place of the literature review in this Grounded Theory study

Before commencing the literature review chapter, it is necessary to address briefly the place of the literature review in Grounded Theory methodology i.e. should the literature review take place before or after the data analysis and theory building stage of research. Bryant and Charmaz (2010) observe that '[e]ver since the publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, concerns have arisen regarding how students and researchers should approach and use the existing literature relevant to their research topic' (p. 19). This statement references one of the dictates of the method at the inception of the Grounded Theory methodology: researchers should delay the review of literature in the substantive area of the topic under investigation in order to avoid 'contamination' of the analysis by extant theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The debate on when to engage with literature is ongoing, some experts continuing to advocate for delay (for an example of this approach see Holton and Walsh, 2007), while others perceive value in conducting a review of literature prior to entering the field (see Strauss and Corbin, 1990 and Corbin and Strauss, 2008 for an example of this argument).

As a reflexive researcher, making the decision in the context of conducting *this* research was a straightforward one for two reasons. First, it is a moot point as it was necessary for me to provide some type of context and impetus for my own research as I engaged in necessary scholarly activity prior to entering the field, namely seeking and obtaining funding initially, and pursuing publication at a later stage. My situation and subsequent decision (i.e. to review literature before entering the field) is recognised as being somewhat inevitable in contemporary academia and is sanctioned by some experts in Grounded Theory: as academic honesty (Stern, 2007), as supporting the quality of the research (Dunne, 2011), and as pragmatic (Timonen et al., 2018). Second, therefore my engagement with literature was both at the outset and at the stage Charmaz (2014)

anticipates, as the following narrative indicates. While Charmaz (2004) advocates delaying the literature review ‘to encourage your own ideas’ (p. 165), she acknowledges the necessity of a review of literature and provides direction:

The trick is to use it [a literature review on the substantive area] without letting it stifle your creativity or strangle your theory. The literature review gives you an opportunity to set the stage for what you do in subsequent chapters. Analyze the most significant works in relation to what you addressed in your now developed grounded theory....Assess and critique the literature from this vantage point (Charmaz, 2014: p. 308).

Additional pertinent literature was reviewed on the basis of the analysis and findings of my research, and this literature is referenced in Chapter 6.

Providing context: social engagement in older age

Theories in relation to older adult social engagement and friendship

Theorising the relationship between ageing and society has resulted in some influential and contested theory development. Cumming and Henry (1961) proposed a theory of disengagement whereby - for the mutual benefit of the individual and society - older individuals naturally withdraw from social relationships and social activities to increase their psychological well-being. This theory was subsequently contested by proponents of Activity Theory (Havighurst, 1961). Havighurst (1961) advocated that older individuals overcome age-related losses (such as retirement or widowhood) by continuing to be

socially active and seeking new relationships, activities and roles to compensate for lost ones. Sometime later an additional micro-focused theory in the form of Continuity Theory (Atchley, 2000) emerged. The theory champions ‘more of the same’, arguing that as older individuals continue to engage in social activities and relationships as far as possible, their well-being is sustained into older age.

Post-modernist theories followed: a mask of ageing was proposed by Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) who purported that the outer visible ageing body concealed an inner authentic identity and self. Additionally, Gilleard and Higgs (2000) argued that identity in old age is culturally embedded, complex, diverse, individualised and entrenched in consumerism. Rowe and Kahn (1997) purported the theoretical paradigm of successful ageing, described by Katz and Calasanti (2015) as ‘one of gerontology’s most successful ideas, applied as a model, a concept, an approach, an experience, and an outcome’ (p. 26). Rowe and Kahn (1997) conceptualised successful ageing not only as ‘the absence of disability and disease’ but as ‘active engagement in society’ to counterbalance role losses.

More recently, the concept of ‘active ageing’ has underpinned policy in relation to older age, namely the active ageing framework. Active Ageing, as outlined by the World Health Organisation (2002), is a framework that promotes a positive, inclusive, life course approach under the three pillars of participation, health and security. Ireland, in common with other jurisdictions, adopted the WHO (2002) framework to inform its recent policy document ‘Positive Ageing Starts Now: The National Positive Ageing Strategy’ (2013). Walker (2008) advised that ‘active aging is established as the leading global policy strategy in response to population aging’, and went on to comment that the strategy has become a ‘shelter’ for a broad range of ancillary discourses and initiatives (p. 75). Walker (2008) underlined that although the active ageing framework has been

underpinned by a discourse of participation, health and well-being, the application of the active ageing strategy has emphasised and prioritised productivity, for example, in doing voluntary work.

Three key theories in the area of older adult friendships explore the notion of change and stability in social and friend networks. First, Kahn and Antonucci (1980) developed the 'convoy model' of social support. Convoys, in the form of family and friends, follow the ageing individual through the life course, influenced and shaped by social forces and life course events (Antonucci et al., 2014; Antonucci and Akiyama, 1987). Using the concept of a convoy allows for stability and change in an individual's personal network as a convoy member may be lost or new members may be recruited. The quality, structure and function of the convoys are influenced by factors such as gender and age, values, norms and role demands. Litwin (2010), in his quantitative comparative analysis of the social networks of 9,054 older people, agrees that social resources are convoys, yet draws attention to the influence of 'place' on the manifestation and contextualisation of social networks. Litwin (2010) concludes that the norms, expectations and conventions surrounding social networks differ across countries and regions.

Second, Carstensen (1992) proffered socioemotional selectivity theory. In this theory, the perception of time as finite plays an essential role in how people are motivated to select and pursue social goals. These goals take the form of: avoiding negative states (for example, isolation) and experiencing positive ones (for example, enjoyment), the desire to find meanings in life, to gain emotional intimacy, and to establish feelings of social embeddedness (Carstensen et al., 1999: p. 166). Therefore, in older age people focus and invest in small select networks and friendships, where they feel loved, valued and supported.

The importance of structural support is emphasised by much of the research on the friendships of older people. Two theorists took a comparative approach between friends and family, and proposed models in relation to social support. Litwak (1989) proposed a task-specific model and concluded that friends are vital sources of emotional support over family and neighbours, as they are chosen and share similar experiences and history. Cantor (1979) argued that there is a hierarchy of preference, with family at the top and older people choosing friends for a variety of tasks only when family were unavailable.

Lastly, Baltes and Baltes (1990) purported a social theory of ageing termed Selective Optimisation with Compensation Theory (SOC). This theory suggested that individuals successfully age by negotiating and managing change over their lives into older age by deploying three strategies, namely: selection (directing energy and focus to particular domains while discounting others), optimisation (maximising resources in the best way possible to achieve a particular goal), and finally, compensation (the older individual focuses on specific achievable outcomes to offset losses in other areas). In older age, therefore age-related biological or social losses can be mediated and gains can continue to be made.

In a broader context, as an overall approach to researching ageing, there has been a growing focus on cultural studies within gerontological scholarship. Culture is a contested concept but a crude overview identifies the most common understanding which may provide some insight. Anthropologists in the past have provided useful definitions, one of the most straightforward yet broad being that '[c]ulture is the man-made part of the environment' (Herskovits, 1948: p. 17). More recently Geertz (1973) has defined culture within a symbiotic paradigm as 'a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols'. Twigg and Martin (2015) acknowledged the difficulty that

theorists in sociology have long faced and supply a working definition as '[c]ultural is better understood here as a set of influences, containing contradictory definitions and theoretical approaches' the essential constituent of any understanding is the 'recognition of the way culture is constitutive of social relations and identities' (p. 354). Twigg and Martin (2015) concluded with the statement that 'the element that unites the field [of cultural studies] however is the concern with meaning, and the sense that the social world is constituted by such meanings' (p. 354).

The topics and theories addressed indicate the broad and ambitious span of 'cultural 'research, for instance, clothing, travel, new forms of consumption and wider social networks (Twigg and Martin, 2015). As Twigg and Martin (2015) went on to stress, '[s]uch work emphasizes the range and variety of older people's experiences and views, reiterating the point that people in later years, contrary to the stereotype, are more and not less diverse than the young'(p. 355). In contrast to the preoccupation of much of the gerontological literature with the demographic, biological, medical, 'problematism', economic and prescriptive 'solutions' to manage aspects of ageing, the cultural turn provides an additional insightful 'lens' to the meaning and experience of ageing and older age to individuals in contemporary society.

A review of literatures on 'general' adult friendship and friendship in older age

The topic of friendship has garnered significant interest from philosophers, sociologists and psychologists throughout history. In the fourth century BC, Aristotle wrote about friendship and his philosophy relating to '*philia*' (friendship) has endured and influenced contemporary social scientists. An exploration of the complex and detailed philosophical thought, though of interest, is beyond the remit of this thesis (see Crisp, 2014 or the

accessible (Nehamas, 2016). Aristotle proposed that friendship is ubiquitous and necessary for the well-being of human (and animal) kind. Three types of friendship are evident, according to Aristotle's account: for benefit, for pleasure, and lastly the most rare, precious and enduring are friendships based in virtue. Interestingly, while Aristotle distinguished between the friendships of the young and the friendships of the old, with the young forming fleeting friendships 'in pursuit of pleasure' and the old more inclined to form enduring friendship based on virtue, he argued that people form friendships with those who are similar to themselves (Crisp, 2014: p. 144). Understanding and conceptualising friendship and its characteristics continue to occupy social scientists to the present day.

At a broad level, sociologists have relatively recently conceptualised social networks as 'structures of opportunity' i.e. they provide access to a range of resources and benefits (Phillipson et al., 2004: p. 1). For instance, strong ties (friendships) and weak ties (acquaintances and other more casual relationships) impact on how an individual may gain access to beneficial information and opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). This way of thinking is also applied to research on friendship as social scientists focus on the benefits and outcomes of friendship at the social and personal level, aligning perhaps with Aristotle's first type of friendship (as briefly outlined above) that is purposeful in seeking beneficial consequences for the friends. As briefly referenced in Chapter 1, in older people, friendship promotes not only inclusion but additionally significantly increases psychological and physical well-being (Blieszner, 2014; Felmlee and Muraco, 2009). Happiness and life satisfaction are reported to be highest among those individuals who have friends (Demir, 2016).

O'Connor (1992) points to a benefit of friendship that is concerned with identity and change throughout the life course. She asserts that friendship offers 'a way of inventing and re-inventing the self in an authentic way throughout one's life' (p. 118). Having friends contributes to higher levels of morale, health and happiness among older adults than relationships with family members (Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Cohen, 1989). Yet, in academic research friendship has received considerably less attention than other social relations, such as the family or marriage. Some researchers speculate that this is likely to be due to the problems in defining and conceptualising friendship. However, policy makers, organisations, practitioners and volunteers seem unconstrained by this ambiguity in definition and focus instead on the beneficial outcomes to those involved in friendship.

Such is the perceived importance of friendship to the well-being of older people in contemporary society that organisations have emerged with the specific purpose of promoting friendship formation. For instance, Dutch policy makers initiated a 'friendship enrichment' programme, focused on educating and empowering older women in 'planning and realising goals related to friendship' (Stevens, 2001: p. 187). Befriending programmes are a common intervention, for example, as provided by Friends of the Elderly, Alone and Age UK. Recent estimates of the number befriending schemes in Ireland (the context where this research was conducted) identified 56 programmes, 32 of which organise one-to-one visits between older individuals and volunteers (Alone 2014; Scharf, 2012). The befriending scheme offered by Alone exists to 'provide companionship to isolated older people through a weekly visit to alleviate the effects of loneliness' (Alone, 2014: p. 4).

Generally, these programmes have been associated with reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness for the older person (Andrews et al., 2003) and with ‘life enhancing’ benefits for people in the early stages of dementia (Ward et al., 2012). In sounding a note of caution, Andrews et al. (2003) advised that ‘equal power’ and reciprocity are vital to build and sustain a friendship (p. 361). Some organisations explicitly state that their specific focus is to promote intergenerational friendship, for instance, Making Connections, a charity established in 2009 in Ireland concentrates on promoting intergenerational befriending to the benefit of all ages to ‘tackle stereotyping, isolation and loneliness (of community-dwelling older people) and inspire others to connect the generations’ (Making Connections, 2009). Interventions in friendship formation for older people, including intergenerational friendship, therefore, take many forms but share the core conviction of the significance of friendship for older people. Given the recognition of the importance of intergenerational friendship formation and maintenance in policy and practice (attested to by the formation of these programmes and many others), it is a conundrum that this is not reflected in the extant friendship research literature.

What is friendship? Conceptualising friendship in extant literature

Friendship is a voluntary, personal, informal relationship. It is not institutionalised or codified, is not governed by contracts, by governments or policy. As stated previously, the elusiveness and general lack of consensus on defining friendship and the concept of who is considered a friend is perplexing for social scientists. A lack of a structural and cultural definition of friendship can present methodological and conceptual difficulties in research (Adams and Taylor, 2015, Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Adams et al., 2000; Adams,

1989; Adams and Blieszner, 1989). Adams et al. (2000) conducted an analysis to examine definitions of friendship across age, gender and within cultures and confirmed that definitions of friendship did indeed vary across all groups. Adams and Taylor (2015) speculate that in older age ‘conceptions of friendship become more complex’, thus presenting a challenge for social scientists interested in researching friendship with older aged participants as they may struggle to define friendship in any straightforward way at the outset of the study (p. 158).

Researchers have made the examination of the different variations in defining friendship their empirical focus. In her research looking at friendship through the life course, Matthews (1983) found participants reported three ways of ‘doing friendship’, or friendship styles. The independents, who identified a small number of friends; the discerning, who identified a small number of close friends, and lastly, the acquisitive who had a large number of low-commitment friends. A more recent example of friend typologies is presented by Greif (2009) relating to male friendships. Greif (2009) purported that men have four types of friends which he characterised as: must (best-friend and confidant), trust (trusted but not as close), just (acquaintances), and rust (long standing friends who one meets occasionally).

Some researchers overcame the complexity of who qualifies as a friend by using an alternative label. For instance, Spencer and Pahl (2006) suggested a blurring of boundaries or suffusion between friends and family. They explained that in their research they have broadened the examination of friendship to include ‘friendlike’ ties with family members, such as siblings or grandparents. This suffusion led them to elect to use the term ‘personal communities’ to include a variety of friend-like relationships including fictive kin, colleagues and neighbours.

The characteristics of friendship

Despite these conceptual difficulties the characteristics or dimensions of friendship, as a chosen, mutual, reciprocal, enjoyable and equal personal relationship, are undisputed anecdotally and empirically (Adams et al., 2000). Hall (2012) measured the ideal expectations his participants had of friendship and advised six measures were cited: equal reciprocity, agency, enjoyment, similarity, instrumental aid and closeness. Demir et al. (2013) purported that friendship provides a sense of uniqueness for those involved and this is vital for happiness in friendship. Felmlee and Muraco (2009) demonstrated that adults across the age spectrum shared normative expectations in relation to friendship: norms of respect, loyalty, support, commitment and trust (p. 13). Values of trust, respect and support were shared across gender, sexual orientation and race in a study by Galupo and Gonzalez (2013) with people in the United States aged 18-80.

Moreover, Adams and Torr (1998) argued that friendships are not purely a result of personal choice but instead are affected by external forces such as norms and expectations. They caution that ‘friendship patterns are firmly embedded in contexts that exert influence over their form’ (p. 60). Other researchers focus on operationalising or ‘measuring’ friendship, for instance, Hall (2018) investigated how many contact hours are required to make a close friend. Hall (2018) advised that hours spent together and the closeness of the friendship were related. Additionally, spending hours of time together on leisure activities was significant in friends becoming close. Another facet commonly accepted in relation to friendship is the principle and norm of homophily, i.e. ‘birds of a feather flock together’, which is discussed in detail in a section below.

Proximity is considered a necessary component in friendship development (Fehr, 2008). The proximity effect is the tendency for individuals to form intimate relationships with those who are geographically close, and with whom therefore, they

have regular face-to-face interaction. For instance, neighbours, being proximate, were considered friends regardless of gender or age (Allan, 1989). Klein Ikkink and van Tilburg (1999) additionally identified that geographical distance was a factor in friendship termination in the friendships of older adults, if face-to-face contact was lessened due increased geographical distance and/or if the friends had to travel distances to meet each other, the likelihood of friendship cessation increased.

Status and structural influences on adult friendship

Jerrone (1992) observed that as their children had grown up and/or formal employment ceased, the women in her study had more time to cultivate friendships. In other words, status and structural changes enhanced the prospects of friendship formation in older age. Findings from the literature regarding the impact of marital status are somewhat contradictory, as the following examples illustrate. Wenger et al. (2000) purported that married women and single men who are not parents are more likely to have weaker social networks. Schnettler and Wohler (2015) argued that childless older adults cultivate a larger supportive network of friends compared to those who are parents. The situational, contextual and financial considerations of the participants in these studies could be a factor in the variances in findings, for example, Wenger's participants were in the oldest-old category and resident in rural Wales with few opportunities for social participation. Additional insight is provided by Dykstra and Keizer (2009) who found that childless men (aged 40-59) are less likely to become involved in community activities and that this can impact on their opportunities for friendship formation.

Gender and friendship

How men and women 'do' friendship differently is a feature in the literature that has attracted some research interest. Allan (1989) purported that culturally men's and women's friendships were perceived as different. He argued that women are 'naturally' more concerned with domestic matters, that men have a stronger inclination to form friendships, to be more socially active and consequently had larger friend networks. Allan (1989) went on to contend that men's friendships were more enduring as they were not tainted by 'petty squabbles or jealousies', implying that women's are (p. 65).

In more recent research, Gillespie et al. (2015) drew on a body of literature that examines gender differences and they provided a useful analogy as they described women's friendships as 'face to face' and men's friendships as 'side by side' (p. 711). Therefore women's friendships were conceptualised as emotional in nature, while men's friendships are less emotional and are more focused on activity. At the forefront of this research was a study by Fischer and Oliner (1983) who concluded that while among younger age groups, men had more friends than women, in older age groups this was the opposite as women had a natural inclination to seek and sustain friendships.

A more nuanced assessment was provided by Walker (1994) who pointed to the influence of culture and how gender is conceptualised and constructed in her study with professional and working class men and women. When participants were questioned on friendship in a general way, men alluded to shared activities and women to emotional exchanges. However, when discussing their own specific friends and friendships men spoke about the importance of sharing feelings and women eluded to attending sporting and other activities as an important aspect of their friendships. It was argued in research conducted 40 years ago that 'gender is arguably the most significant of all social factors in shaping friendship patterns' (Bell 1981 referenced in Allan, 1989: p. 65). Perhaps, given that in contemporary research (and society) gender is no longer perceived to be

‘binary’ i.e. male and female, but instead a continuum (Butler, 1990), such considerations seem somewhat narrow. Cultural influences on the understanding of how gender is constructed in a society and concomitantly how this impacts on how friendship is understood to be experienced, is evident from the ‘story’ this literature sketches.

A strand in the literature examined the possible function of friends as support and care providers (in lieu of adult children). This was iterated by Deindl and Brandt (2016), who posed the question: ‘on which support networks can a growing number of childless older people rely?’ (p. 1) Intergenerational friendships were mentioned in a cursory manner in this narrow context of being useful as sources of instrumental support and care, supporting the oldest old to remain in their own homes. For example, research undertaken by Keating et al. (2003) and LaPierre and Keating (2013) focused on the potential for friends and neighbours to form informal ‘care networks’. Their analysis indicated that 75% of carers were younger than the older adult they cared for, in particular neighbour carers tended to be significantly younger. Nocon and Pearson (2000) noted that younger friends (who were the main carer of a frail older person) cited an element of reciprocity for past support from the care recipient. The friends/carers stated that they got satisfaction from helping, although in most cases they also reported that the carer role often put a strain on their own lives. Jerrome and Wenger (1999) observed that their community-dwelling oldest-old (80 and over) participants demonstrated a tendency to broaden the definition and the characteristics of what constituted a ‘real friend’ by prioritising their need for instrumental support.

Change over time in older adult friendships

The common theme that emerged from older adult friendship literatures is that contrary to earlier academic assumptions, older people generally viewed friendship as an important

part of their lives, actively maintaining existing friendships and seeking to make new friends. For example, middle class older women, whose status was identified as non-partnered (single, divorced, widowed) viewed their friendships as being important in their lives and managed their friend networks to develop new friendships, strengthen existing friendships or reactivate latent ties while losing other friendships (Adams, 1987). Another common theme shared with general friendship literature is that individuals managed and approached friendship formation in different ways and had differing expectations of what constitutes friendship (Jerrome, 1992).

In a ground-breaking study of older adult friendship Jerrome and Wenger (1999) explored the change, stability, satisfaction and management of older 'real' friendships over a 16 year period from 1979 to 1995. This was a qualitative longitudinal study with 534 respondents aged 65 and over, culminating in interviewing 95 respondent survivors aged over 81. Findings in the study established that friendships and friend networks changed over time, with contraction, expansion and replacement arrangements observed. For example, friendships faded, with great friends at one time being barely or not mentioned at all later. This concurs with earlier research by Matthews (1983) who related a reclassification of friends by the contributors in her study, as particular friends alluded to frequently in previous interviews were no longer mentioned in later conversations. Friendships were lost as friends move away or die. Yet for many respondents in the research by Jerrome and Wenger (1999), new friendships were formed or existing casual friendships grew into more meaningful relationships. A large majority of the older individuals were willing, and seeking, to make new friends. Jerrome and Wenger (1999) additionally identified that older people invested emotionally in a small number of friendships, while choosing a number of less intimate and consequently less demanding friends. Socioemotional selectivity theory could be evoked as supporting this assertion.

This theory and others in relation to older adult friend networks and friendships are now reviewed.

Differences in older adult and younger adult friendships

Neugarten (1977) argued that chronological age was an ‘empty variable’ to an older age identity, and that more relevant variables were biological and social factors and how they were experienced. Moreover, data gathered by Antonucci and Akiyama (1987) illustrated that there were few comparative differences between younger and older individuals’ networks in terms of network size or types of social support given.

Studies concentrating on the oldest-old proffered evidence of some differences between friendships in different stages of the life course. Later life friendship is distinctive in its propensity for cross-gender friendships among the oldest-old (Jerrome and Wenger, 1999, Wright, 1989). Furthermore, oldest-old women choose cross-gender friends more than men (Stevens and Van Tilburg, 2011). Moreover, by placing emphasis on the importance and need for instrumental support the oldest-old demonstrated a more matter-of-fact approach to friendship, broadening the definition and the characteristics of what constituted a ‘real friend’. Therefore, neighbours often came to be considered friends regardless of gender or age (Jerrome and Wenger, 1999). Intergenerational friendships were briefly mentioned in the narrow context of being useful as providers of instrumental support and care.

The ‘darker side’ of friendship

That friendship is dominantly construed throughout empirical research as a ‘good thing’ in that it is beneficial in many ways to those involved, is undisputed. However, as Spencer

and Pahl (2006) pronounced in the introduction to their research, 'it is in the intimate private space of friendship that we find some of our greatest joys and greatest disappointments' (p. ix). Rook (1989) concurred and went on to advise that a balanced perspective on friendship requires seeking out both the positive and negative aspects of friendship. While few references are made to a 'darker side' of friendship some researchers briefly allude to this aspect, for instance, Spencer and Pahl (2006) categorised a low-commitment type friendship that they labelled 'heart sink' ties, which they described as 'friends you feel stuck with'(p. 42).

A small number of studies specifically centre on the negative side of friendship. In a study which focused exclusively on the down-side of older women's friendships, Moremen (2008) reported a 'rich tapestry of sources of strain in older women's friendships' (p. 185) when expectations regarding, for example, trust, honesty, maintaining balance in reciprocity or other areas were not met. These violations resulted in feelings of hurt, betrayal, jealousy and unhappiness which sometimes, but not always, lead to friendship cessation. The role of reciprocity as a cause of friendship termination is highlighted by Klein Ikkink and van Tilburg (1999) in their longitudinal research with 2,057 older adults, the authors purported that 'relationships where older adults are 'overbenefited' with instrumental support, i.e., receive more than they give, have a higher chance of being continued', however where the older adults overbenefited from emotional support the likelihood of friendship termination increased (p. 131). The researchers in the same study also identified that geographical distance and infrequent contact can lead to friendship strain and may lead to termination.

McFadden and McFadden (2011) and Harris (2012) argued that while dementia can place a strain on friendships, people with dementia and their friends can continue to share a supportive, mutually enjoyable, rewarding and enduring friendship. Strains or

conflict are unlikely to cause friend cessation in the friendships of older adults. Instead, friendships are more likely to fade away, often being resumed at a later time due to a renewed interest or opportunity (Rook, 1989; Matthews, 1986). Rook (1989), on completion of a review of literature which focused on strains in adult friendship, posited that older adults are less likely than other age groups to experience friendship strain.

Homophily

The norm of homophily, the idea that ‘birds of a feather flock together’ emphasises the tendency for individuals to have friends who share similarity across dimensions of ethnicity, religion, education, gender and age (Louch, 2000; Marsden, 1988). Block and Grund (2014) in their research on multidimensional homophily in friend networks referred to the principle of homophily as ‘one of the most persistent findings in social network analysis’ (p. 1). Spencer and Pahl (2006) pointed out that the principle of homophily is a central recurring theme in friendship literature. Spencer and Pahl (2006) then pondered if this understanding of the importance of homophily was too simplistic due to the influence of the *context* in which friendships are formed and the nature of the social worlds of individuals involved. McPherson et al. (2001) proposed that similarity breeds connection and hence close, durable friendships were more likely to be same-generation as they were likely to have been formed in childhood. They went on to point out, however, that research, for example, by Marsden in relation to kin relationships (1988) indicated that those aged over 60 were more likely than other age groups to have ‘younger confidants, especially their children’ (p. 425).

Overall, many researchers have concluded that age homophily is ubiquitous in friendship. Adams and Blieszner (1989) argued that ‘age peers are likely to share similar

problems, to experience similar losses, and to possess similar resources; they are compatible in status to one another' (p. 11). People choose friends who are similar to themselves (Spencer and Pahl, 2006), and doing so is prevalent and necessary in durable close friendships (Jerrome and Wenger, 1999). Research on homophily indicated that close friends are not only more likely to be the same-generation but additionally respondents comparatively perceived same-generation ties as more durable and personal (McPherson et al., 2001). According to Allan (1989), generational differences in the form of temporal perspectives and experiences made intergenerational friendship unlikely. Allan also referenced Blau (1973) who stated that 'apart from kinship itself, there is little to bring the generations together' (p. 97). O'Connor (1992) asserted that 'with marriage being less stable, and with the number of children falling, peer relationships potentially become increasingly important' (p. 118). Homophily is in obvious contradiction to the idea of intergenerational friendship, age being a major category of social differentiation.

Homophily in friend choice is linked to personal identity, 'with friends like you providing continuing confirmation of who you are' (Allan, 2010; p. 243). Bowling et al. (2005) asserted that older age identity had more to do with the age people feel they are, as opposed to the chronological age they actually are. In setting out to conduct this enquiry, I expected that exploring 'sameness' from the perspective of the older friend in intergenerational friendships could provide interesting insights into how individuals experience and feel about being older and their friendship choices.

Challenging the concept of status homophily, some evidence of intergenerational friend and neighbour support was presented in extant literature. Jerrome and Wenger (1999), in focusing on the oldest-old, found that many sought to make new friends among newly arrived younger neighbours. Jerrome and Wenger (1999) discovered that these new

relationships, however, demanded a compromise on the part of the older individual. While satisfied with the relationship overall, these younger friends (unlike their peer-aged friends), reminded partakers of their old age through ‘unwelcome solicitousness’. Briefly mentioned also was that in these intergenerational relationships, ‘while instrumental help may have flowed only to the older individual, emotional support flowed in both directions’ (Jerrome and Wenger, 1999: p. 670). Further evidence was observed in a study in the late 1970s in urban New York. A representative sample of older individuals reported that just over half of their friends, and half of their neighbours that they knew well, were younger than they were. In the study, evidence was offered of reciprocal instrumental and affective support, particularly in relation to help when ill and with tasks such as shopping (Cantor, 1979). In a study by Gabriel and Bowling (2004) on quality of life in old age, respondents spoke of an age mix among their neighbours as being concomitant with increased quality of life; however, respondents did not generally think of old age as a time to make new friends.

At a structural level, homophily was not just about individual choice but was imposed in contemporary societies as people of all ages were streamed and segregated into homogenous sites such as youth orchestras or active ageing societies with little opportunity for age integration (Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2006; Uhlenberg and Gierveld, 2004). An age/youth dichotomy was constructed as a result (Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2006). Researchers argued that age integration had many benefits at an individual and societal level as it fostered the exchange of material and informational support, for example, technology use, along with shared experiences about ways of living or thinking or being (Uhlenberg and Gierveld, 2004). Riley (2000) speculated that improved age integration would concomitantly improve ‘connectedness’ among all age groups (p. 270). Age integration also reduced ageist attitudes and discrimination (Hagestad and

Uhlenberg, 2005) and was vital in preventing marginalisation of older people (Butler, 1969). Therefore, it would be reasonable also to surmise that if people of differing ages don't meet then they cannot go on to form meaningful intergenerational friendships.

Williams and Nussbaum (2000) examined intergenerational communication across the life span and briefly discussed intergenerational friendship. In their view the expectation of age homophily in friendship was a strong social norm. They speculated that intergenerational friendships were 'implicitly and explicitly' discouraged as older people were expected to 'act their age' and to enjoy spending time with same-age friends. Therefore choosing an intergenerational friend resulted in both parties to the friendship being perceived as 'weird' by others (p. 221).

In summary, the extant research on older adult friendship emphasised the significance of homophily, particularly similarity in age, as the central feature of these friendships. Departing from the broad focus on the literature on friendship and ageing, I will now explore how the topic of intergenerational friendship has been approached in the very limited literature that can be found specifically to address the topic.

Intergenerational friendships: systematic literature review

Search strategy

A literature search was undertaken in September 2016, using the following databases and search engines: Google/Google Scholar, Web of Science, PsycINFO, Jstor, Wiley online library, Social Sciences Index, Social Services Abstracts, Scopus, Academic Search Complete and Directory of Open Access Journals. The search terms used were:

intergenerational adult friendship, cross-age friendship, older adult friendship and age discrepant friendship. In using the ‘advanced search’ option in the databases, a search was conducted using the combined terms ‘adult friendship’/ ‘friendship’/ ‘older adults’/ ‘seniors’/ ‘younger friend’.

The search also identified some monographs or edited books that appeared relevant to the topic. A manual search of the chapter titles was carried out for each selected publication for any reference to the search words used for the online search, i.e. intergenerational, cross-age, cross-generational and age-discrepant friendships.

Search exclusion and inclusion criteria

Prior to commencing the search, exclusion and inclusion criteria were defined. All original research, both qualitative and quantitative, relating to non-kin, face-to-face, adult intergenerational friendship was included. Family are never ‘just’ friends (being governed by elaborate laws, rules and norms in all cultures), therefore research on family members who perceive each other as friends was excluded. Similarly, under the same premise of not being ‘just’ friends, former romantic partners who remain friends or whose friendships evolve into romantic relationships, or literature on romantic relationships were not scrutinised. Research not in English was excluded. Literature reviews and systematic reviews, though of interest and referenced in other sections of this paper, were excluded from the review as they were not original research papers.

Retrieved research

Eight articles on adult intergenerational friendship were retrieved using the search strategy. In keeping with the exclusion criteria agreed *ex ante*, research on family-as-

friends i.e. Kemp (2005) on friendships between grandparents and grandchildren was not reviewed further. Research on virtual and superficial associations with little or no face-to-face contact, namely Kneidinger (2014) who used an online survey of Facebook 'friends', or contacts, as a 'pilot study' to reveal experiences of older and younger users of this social network site (inverted commas as in the original paper) was excluded. While a quality appraisal of retrieved literature is often carried out by researchers (Kable et al., 2012), in this review no quality assessment was undertaken and all the pertinent studies were included. This was considered necessary given that the available body of work which focuses solely on the topic of adult intergenerational friendships, also referred to in literature as cross-age, cross-generational and age discrepant, is meagre.

Of the remaining six sources, two studies adopted a quantitative approach (Dykstra and Fleischmann 2016; Holladay and Kerns, 1999). Bettini and Norton (1991) took a mixed methods approach. Three articles had adopted a qualitative approach. The qualitative studies (Roos 2004; Stanley 2002; Matthews 1986) used face-to-face interviews to gather data, Stanley (2002) using group interviews. Roos (2004) used observations and reports along with interviews. Bettini and Norton (1991) and Holladay and Kerns (1999) used questionnaires. In all articles, 'young' ranged in age from 15 to 30, and 'old' from 60 to 90. Dykstra and Fleishmann (2016), Roos (2004), Holladay and Kerns (1999) and Bettini and Norton (1991) sampled people from younger and older populations using a dichotomous approach, by taking samples from both ends of the adult age spectrum. Stanley (2002) used a 'young' sample only, and Matthews (1986) used an older sample only. Stanley (2002) concentrated on women (from within the lesbian community), while the other studies reviewed recruited men and women as respondents. These studies are now analysed in chronological order, commencing with the oldest study, to assess the framing of the topic, the methodological approaches employed and

key findings generated along with an assessment on how intergenerational friendship has been approached and conceptualised.

Matthews (1986) studied friendship in general, but intergenerational friendship was briefly discussed in a dedicated section on 'age-discrepant relationships' (p. 82). During biographical interviews, 63 respondents aged between 60 and 80 spoke about the meanings they attached to friendship, the process of friendships over their life course and how friendship styles had consequences for friendship formation in older age. Matthews (1986) purported that, beyond middle age, age-peer friends constitute the majority of friendships among older people. The participants met their age-discrepant friends, who were typically aged 30 and over, through shared membership of a religious congregation or through work, for example, a teacher and former student. Some participants had formed friendships with the children of deceased age-peer friends. In instances of cross-gender intergenerational friendship, it is notable that respondents avoided using the term close friend, instead employing kin terms such as 'substitute daughter'. Matthews suggested that using a family-like description 'desexualised' cross-gender intergenerational friendship, making it more socially acceptable (Matthews 1986: p. 91). Overall, Matthews (1986) portrayed cross-gender intergenerational friendship as unusual; they are configured as 'hidden' or 'disguised' relationships, cloaked in kin-like terms. I argue that it is reasonable to speculate that the people who took part in this study were reluctant to acknowledge these friendships as they do not conform to normative expectations as to what friends should be.

Bettini and Norton (1991) recruited 20 undergraduate students, and 20 older people who were resident in a retirement centre. Students completed a questionnaire and the older people were interviewed using a guide which corresponded with the questions listed on the student questionnaire. The results were analysed quantitatively and

qualitatively. The researchers did not specify any requirements as to what constituted a friend or any age parameters for identifying an intergenerational friend. Findings indicated that older adults had more intergenerational friends but that these friendships were largely considered less equal and more superficial. Younger adults reported that they found no great difference between same-age and age-discrepant friends. The researcher did specify, however, that the students reported very few intergenerational friendships where the older friend could be considered 'elderly' i.e. 60 or older. This might have been a consequence of the sampling frame used. Research conducted in the USA later in the 1990s by Holladay and Kerns (1999) reported similar findings in that a proportion of older participants viewed themselves as advisors or counsellors within their intergenerational friendships.

Holladay and Kerns (1999) triangulated questionnaire research data from 63 students and an unspecified number of community-dwelling older people (the omission of this number being a major limitation of this study). Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 76 year olds. A comparative analysis of three types of friendships (close, casual and 'age-discrepant' friendships) was conducted to identify similarities and differences in ten relational qualities between same-age close and same-age casual and age-discrepant close and age-discrepant casual friendships. A ten year age difference was specified by the researchers to qualify as an age discrepant friend. The respondents reported that most of their friends in any of the categories were same-gender, most age-discrepant friends were older than the respondents and lastly age-discrepant friends had a 50% probability of being listed as a close friend. The findings showed that in age-discrepant casual friendships, higher levels of admiration were found than in same-age casual friends. In all other categories, namely intimacy, satisfaction, nurturance, companionship and intensity, same-age close friendships scored higher than age-discrepant friends.

Stanley's (2002) study of intergenerational friendship with 16 women aged 15 to 25, who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), argued that intergenerational friendship is perceived as vital by many within this community as intergenerational friendships provide a historical perspective and foster a feeling of unity. The perception of intergenerational friendship as unusual may have influenced the methodology chosen by Stanley: this involved semi-structured group interviews where participants were requested to discuss hypothetical 'cross-generational' LGBT friendships. While the participants maintained that friendships with other LGBT women were important, half of the group were uninterested in forming intergenerational friendships. The uninterested group perceived the generation gap as insurmountable, considering that the friends would have little in common and the friendship would be unequal and hierarchical. However, others saw some value in such friendships through mentoring, and as role models. Intergenerational friendships overall were perceived as being different from same-age friendships. It is unlikely, then, that these participants would seek to form an intergenerational friendship as older people are seen to be too 'different' to be considered 'friend material'. An intriguing question arises: why did the study not seek to interview people who were engaged in intergenerational friendship? Perhaps it was assumed that intergenerational friendships were non-existent or rare, and speculation was therefore necessary.

Organised intervention overcame structural segregation and enabled intergenerational friendship in the study by Roos (2004), of a befriending programme involving retirement home residents and volunteer student visitors. Roos (2004) conducted qualitative research over a two-year period on the befriending programme involving older people (aged between 53 and 98) from two retirement homes that had been assigned 40 volunteer student visitors as part of the programme. The research

methods comprised qualitative interviews with the residents and students, students' self-reflective reports and observation diaries. The findings indicated that intergenerational friendships were formed over the half-hour visiting sessions resulting in positive emotional benefits for the friends, such as having fun, enjoying their time together and ultimately caring for each other. Some of the student volunteers used kin terms such as 'Uncle' when referring to their older friend. In common with respondents in Matthews (1986) research, the cloaking of intergenerational friendship in kin-terms seems intended to legitimise and normalise the close friendships formed. Roos (2004) argued that the participants viewed the friendship as meaningful and enjoyable, as participants recounted instances of additional visiting being organised outside of the programme constraints and of the older friend meeting with the younger friend's immediate family.

In contrast to the overall impression arising from the literature above, that intergenerational friendship is rare and 'organised' (through interventions, clubs and so on), the literature search identified a singular quantitative study that reveals that intergenerational relationships are in fact quite common and provides statistical evidence showing the prevalence of intergenerational friendships in societies across Europe. Dykstra and Fleischmann (2016a; 2016b) analysed data from the 2008 European Social Survey, with a sample from 25 European countries of 8,716 'young' respondents in the 18-30 age group and 6,512 'old' respondents in the 70-90 age group. A significant number of respondents reported to be engaged in two or more 'cross-age' friendships. In all countries, the proportion of people reporting cross-age friendships was higher among the older (30.6%) than among the younger people (18.1%). This was highest in Finland at 50%, followed by Ireland (43.5%), Sweden (46.2%), the UK (38.5%) and Germany (39.8%), and lowest in Lithuania at 4%. Younger people in Ireland reported the highest proportion of cross-age friendships at 36%. Dykstra and Fleischmann's (2016a) analysis

additionally suggested that the most common conduits to intergenerational friendship formation were ‘other-age’ family household members and monthly attendance at religious services. The researchers conjectured that a lack of additional integrative meeting sites is likely a result of ‘productive ageing’ rhetoric and policy adopted by society, with older individuals occupying ‘age-homogeneous ghettos’, such as active retirement groups, thus limiting interaction with younger individuals (p. 8). However, despite these perceived constraints, intergenerational friendships were formed.

Dykstra and Fleischmann (2016a; 2016b) had hypothesised that people with cross-age friendships would be less disposed to be ageist towards those belonging to a different age group. At the macro level, cross-age friendships gave old and young insight into each other’s lives thus preventing ageism (Dykstra and Fleischmann, 2016a). Both groups indicated few negative feelings toward their age-others. However, the older age group were slightly more ageist towards the young than the young were towards the old. Overall, the authors reported, as they had hypothesised on commencing their research, people with cross-age friendships were disposed to be less ageist. They also outlined other benefits of age integration such as fostering the exchange of material and informational support, for example, technology use, along with shared experiences about ways of living or thinking or being (see also Uhlenberg and Gierveld, 2004; Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2005). This is argued to be vital in preventing marginalisation of older people (Butler, 1969).

In this paragraph, I will review additional literature in the form of a quantitative research report by Gibney et al. (2018) titled *Positive Ageing in Age Friendly Cities and Counties Local Indicators for Ireland: Findings from the HaPAI Survey*. Published in June 2018, the report was not available for appraisal in my original review of literature. The report supported the Dykstra and Fleischmann (2015) assertion as to the prevalence

of intergenerational friendship in Ireland, while providing additional data as to geographical variances within Ireland, along with further insights. Gibney et al. (2018) stated that their research, consisting of 10,540 interviews with respondents age 55 years and older, had a key objective ‘to support and use research to better inform policy responses and services for people as they age in Ireland’ (p. 12). The survey was carried out at a local level (in 21 Local Authority areas i.e. both urban and rural districts throughout Ireland) ‘to provide evidence about the experiences and preferences of older people, and to identify the gaps and supports needed to allow them to age positively in their communities’(p. 12). Gibney et al. (2018) aligned their survey themes with the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* goals which are : participation, health and security, with cross-cutting objectives of ‘combating ageism’ and ‘improving information access’.

Gibney et al. (2018) reported that over 90% of men and women in Ireland in all age brackets i.e from aged 55 to aged 70 plus, socialise at least one a month., with over 40% participating in community activities (pp. 40-42). Under the heading of ‘Ageism, Respect and Social Inclusion’, Gibney et al. (2018) posed a question to the respondents: ‘how many friends, other than members of their family, they had who are younger than 30 years of age’ (p. 128). The researchers therefore operationalised an intergenerational friendship for the purposes of their study as a friendship between a younger adult under 30 years of age, with the older friend in the intergenerational friendship being aged 55 years or over. The researchers therefore are evidenced to be have taken a generational ‘bookends’ approach, that is, in focusing on friendships between individuals on either end of the age spectrum.

Similar to the variation reported by Dykstra and Fleischmann (2015, 2016) across the expanse of European countries, geographical variances were calculated across the 21 Local Authority areas in Ireland. Gibney et al. (2018) related that the highest proportion

of people in one area (Laois) with an intergenerational friend stood at 75.2%, in comparison just 30.4% of those resident in another area (Mayo) reported having an intergenerational friend (p. 129). Of those respondents aged 55-69: 52% had at least one friend aged 30 years or under, while 25% had between two and five friends, and finally, 60% had one or more friends under 30 years. Of those aged over 70 years of age: 4.0% had one friend aged less than 30 years. 14% had ten or more friends aged under 30 years of age and lastly, 38% had one or more friends under 30 years (p. 129). Gibney et al. (2018) purported that there were no significant differences between female and male respondents in responding to the question querying if they had an intergenerational friend. However, the researchers reported an 'education gradient' as those respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to have at least one friend aged 30 or less (p. 136). It is worth noting that those aged 70 or over were considerably less likely to have one or more intergenerational friends. In summary, intergenerational friendship is prevalent in Ireland with half of those aged 55-69 having one or more intergenerational friends.

That non-kin intergenerational friendships not only exist but are prevalent in societies across Europe, including Ireland, provided the impetus to pursue further knowledge of this neglected topic. Additionally, pursuing further knowledge about this topic is important as current literature indicates that older adult friendships and intergenerational interaction brings additional important benefits to the individual and to society.

Extant research indicated that older people who took part in research consider peer-friendship as longer-lasting, stronger (Holladay and Kerns, 1999) and more intimate than cross-age friendship (Bettini and Norton, 1991). What, therefore, do intergenerational friendships offer to the older friend? Following on from posing this

question and the dearth of research available to provide some answers and insight, it seems reasonable to query: why has the topic of intergeneration friendship attracted so little research attention?

Why the dearth of research on intergenerational friendship?

To conclude this chapter, the following section continues to draw on the co-authored article by Elliott O'Dare, Timonen and Conlon (2017). The article addressed the question posed in the previous section of why there is so little research on intergenerational friendship. This question is posed against the backdrop of a considerable body of research on friendship, including peer-age friendships in older age. Gathering some 'clues' from the research reviewed previously in this chapter, along with additional relevant scholarship will assist in pinning down some possible answers as to why the topic of intergenerational friendship has been somewhat neglected by researchers to date.

The first 'clue' to the lack of research on intergenerational friendship is found in what Wenger (2002) pronounced to be a 'negative self-image' (p. 276). Older people are viewed in a different way to other age groups. Wenger (2002) argued that researchers focus on conducting studies with older people that are centred on care needs and subsequent service supports. Elliott O'Dare et al. (2017) referred to this narrow research focus as a 'deficit framing'. In taking a 'problem orientation' in research on older people, research outputs may contribute to the stereotyping of older people as 'vulnerable, dependant and in ill health' (Wenger 2002: pp. 276-77).

Twigg and Martin (2014) in a similar vein pointed to the theme of frailty and dependence with the dominance of medical and social welfare perspectives dominating ageing research. Gubrium and Holstein (2003) argued that a binary conceptualisation of

youth/age persists. The stereotyping of older adults continues despite the fact that ageing can be experienced and enacted in numerous ways within the heterogeneous group that is 'older people'. These general observations on the framing of ageing and older age in society and in research provide some insights into the lack of empirical focus on the topic of intergenerational friendship (Elliott O'Dare et al., 2017).

A second clue emerged from a perception of difference in 'being' old or 'being' young and this is reflected in extant research that focuses on the topic of friendship. The principle of homophily garners much interest in this body of literature, as it is argued that given that individuals have a preference for 'someone like them', i.e. someone of their own age or part of their own generation it is unlikely that an intergenerational friendship would be formed. Intergenerational friendships challenge the salience of the principle of age homophily in friendship ties, as the friends choose to form a bond of friendship despite an age difference.

As a final clue Elliott O'Dare et al. (2017) alluded to the context within which research on intergenerational relationships is conducted. Intergenerational relationships are conceptually confined to relationships 'that are based on normatively or legally regulated transfers of time and money' (p. 13). Research on older adults is confined to topics such as care and support, for example as recipients of care services, or conversely as providing care to a spouse or grandchildren. Some friendship literature reviewed earlier in this chapter has framed friendship through a care provision perspective. However, the concept of older adults being parties to intergenerational relationships that are non-kin, chosen and based on mutual enjoyment alone, remains largely unexamined.

Discussion and conclusion

Elliott O'Dare et al. (2017) queried why there is a paucity of literature on intergenerational friendship. They queried if older adults are unwilling to make 'new' friends and pointed to the literature that demonstrated that older adults are forming new friendships. Dykstra and Fleishmann (2016) provided evidence and argued that intergenerational friendship is prevalent throughout European societies, despite a body of work that attested to intergenerational friendship being normatively (homophily), culturally (perception) and structurally (segregation) discouraged. Despite assertions that intergenerational friendship is somewhat difficult to study, a small selection of research exists. As a result of this overview, other factors were considered and presented to address the question of why researchers have overlooked this topic.

The notion of older people associating with younger people through friendship is a contradiction to how ageing and older people are generally viewed and framed in contemporary societies and research. The current state of knowledge (or want of knowledge) pertaining to intergenerational friendship perpetuates the ageist assumption that older people are not suited to, or capable of, intergenerational ties that are mutually enjoyable, equal and chosen, that is, a 'normal' friendship. (Elliott O'Dare et al., 2017).

Intergenerational friendship has received limited research focus because it is not regulated and framed in the same way the 'more studied' aspects of older adults' lives are. Older people are often portrayed as care recipients, or care givers to spouse, parents and grandparents. Such parameters and framing in turn not only reflects, but additionally promulgates ideas of what older adults are (or should be) like: 'useful for younger family/societal generations, or a drain on them', but seldom of interest and perceived as individuals, as normal human beings connecting with, and enjoying the company of much

younger non-kin adults, outside their ‘normative and legal framing as family members and recipients of care’ (Elliott O’Dare et al, 2017: p. 13).

To conclude, intergenerational friendship, while a personal relationship, is shaped by social forces in the form of expectations along with social and age norms relating to how older adults are viewed by themselves and by others. Additionally, the social segregation of older people from younger people and productive and/or active ageing policy and its influence in contemporary society has the potential to act as constraints to intergenerational friendship formation. Simply put, in order to go on to form intergenerational friendships, older and younger people need to meet and to view each other in such a way that friendship formation becomes, in principle, a possibility.

Exploring how these obstacles are circumvented or negotiated, and how intergenerational friendship ties are enabled in this research will provide, for the first time, conceptual insight into this topic. Investigations of the intergenerational friendships of older adults can help to broaden the remit of gerontological friendship and ‘general’ friendship scholarship. Giving voice to older adults to portray their experiences of intergenerational friendship in this thesis may, in turn, make a contribution to challenging the restricted images and models of ageing and older adults that this review shows to persist in much research and in societies.

How this inquiry is to be carried out is now outlined in the following chapter. Chapter 3 details the method and methodology identified as the most suitable to realise these goals.

Chapter 3

Research design: methodology and method

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I outlined the topic, the purpose of this research and the research question guiding this study. In Chapter 2 (following on from a critical analysis of literature in relation to intergenerational friendship and other pertinent scholarship), I provided additional justification for pursuing investigations of intergenerational friendship in older age. In this chapter, I will set out the ways in which the purpose of the research was achieved and the research question was addressed. The chapter commences with an explanation and justification of why a qualitative approach, using Constructivist Grounded Theory, was taken. The ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and the epistemological underpinnings of how the reality can be ‘known’ are illustrated (Denzin, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). This leads to a detailed description of the research methods: sampling, data analysis and data set. Finally, reflections on the method and methodology are provided. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the limitations of the methods and the methodology.

Taking a qualitative approach

As outlined in Chapter 2, Dykstra and Fleischmann (2016) have provided quantitative evidence which points to the widespread existence of intergenerational adult friendship. Taking a qualitative approach in this study allows for the exploration of the experience

and meaning of intergenerational adult friendship to the older adult respondents. Qualitative data is traditionally understood and simply designated as consisting of non-numerical, unstructured material which is used to seek explanation through analysis for meaning and complex processes in 'rich' data. In contrast, quantitative research uses numerical evidence and seeks explanation through identification of patterns and trends, which is usually statistically represented. Qualitative research is generally identified by researchers as the approach most suited to exploring the 'why' and the 'how' questions in relation to a phenomenon under exploration (Silverman, 2013). Flick et al. (2004) elucidated that qualitative research is less concerned with testing theories and more concerned with exploring and forming theories around and out of the everyday lives and interactions of the research respondents, using methods suited to the topic to be researched.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) offered a general scope of the qualitative approach outlining the specific dimensions of the qualitative data process. The researcher seeks to understand the meanings people bring to the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore qualitative inquiry is an interpretive process, situated in a natural setting i.e. out in the 'real' world. The researcher becomes part of the research process, and this 'locatedness' enables her to observe the lived experiences as an insider in the investigations, as opposed to a remote outsider removed from the data gathering process (p. 5). The methods that a qualitative researcher deploys to transform the investigated world into data are varied. For example, interviews, talk, photographs, images, videos, and observations and insights captured through field notes and memos (whereby the researcher captures her thoughts and her analytical progress) can be deployed. Their purpose is sense-making in terms of the meanings people bring to phenomena, and making the studied phenomena visible.

Denzin and Lincoln went on to explain that qualitative researchers are ‘hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand’ (p. 3) and that qualitative research ‘privileges no single methodological practice over another’ and ‘has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own’ (p. 6). Denzin and Lincoln (2017) described qualitative research as a window that ‘makes the world visible in different ways’ (p. 6). This description referred to an ontological disposition i.e. a relativist ontology which assumes multiple, subjective realities.

The approach driving this inquiry is best aligned with that of Denzin and Lincoln (2017) who stated an: ‘avowed humanistic and social justice commitment to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual’ (p. xvi). Qualitative research is a broad church and ontological perspectives on research will drive the researcher’s selection of methodology from among a range of approaches within the qualitative tradition. The methodology selected as most suited/aligned to addressing the research question posed in this thesis and with my ontological perspective as a researcher is Grounded Theory. The suitability of interviewing within the Grounded Theory method is discussed further in a later section.

What is the Grounded Theory (GT) method?

Grounded Theory (GT) is a method for studying processes i.e. how something has developed or come about such as actions, interactions or emotions, in response to conditions/context. Analysing action and processes, both social and social psychological, is at the core of GT. It is a flexible and systematic method with the intended goal of constructing theory from data. Various interpretations of GT methodology have been offered by social scientists since the inception of the original form of GT outlined by

Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their pioneering publication ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory’ (Timonen et al., 2018).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined GT at its inception as ‘the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained and analysed in social research’ (p. 1). They went on to emphasise that ‘the major strategy for furthering the discovery of Grounded Theory is a general method of comparative analysis’ (p. 2). Following this collaborative work Glaser and Strauss pursued their individual versions of GT, often referred to by social scientists as the ‘Glaserian’ (classic) or ‘Straussian’ approach (see for instance, Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Glaser (1998). A cursory search reveals other researchers aligned with particular perspectives adapting a GT approach in line with their ontological premises including feminist, critical thinking or constructivism (Mills et al., 2006). Denzin (2007) outlined seven variants of GT, namely ‘positivist, post positivist, constructivist, objectivist, postmodern, situational and computer assisted’ (p. 454). GT continues to evolve, for instance, a recent development is the emergence of Critical GT aligned with the critical realism perspective (Timonen et al., 2018: p. 3).

The variants are underpinned by differences in the epistemological and ontological understanding of their proponents. For example, in their advocacy of classical GT, Holton and Walsh (2007) stated that it is ‘essential’ to outline their philosophical stance as critical realists (p. xii). In common with the Glaser and Strauss (1967) version, the variant presented by Strauss and Corbin (1990) remained imbued with positivism and objectivist approaches but moved into post positivism more particularly in Corbin and Strauss (2008) as the voices of the research respondents are recognised and represented (Mills et al., 2006; Charmaz, 2000). A number of authors have examined the differences between Glaser’s approach and Strauss’s approach in great detail (for example, see Walker and Myrick, 2006) but this remains beyond the scope of this thesis.

The perspectives from which the method was employed additionally impacts on the procedural approaches, for example, delaying any literature review until the analysis is complete is advocated by Glaser to avoid contaminating the data analysis with preconceived notions or the subsequent elimination of the use of memoing by Strauss (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Whatever the variant, Holton and Walsh (2007) prompted that the ultimate purpose of GT is ‘discovering theories no matter what the researcher’s philosophical assumptions’ (p. 159). Morse (2016) emphasised the ‘mantra’ of Grounded Theory as being ‘a way of thinking about data-processes of conceptualisation, of theorizing from data, so that the end result is a theory that the scientist produces from data collected from interviewing and observing everyday life’ (p. 18).

The key principles of GT

Whichever version of GT is used, Hood (2007) clarified that the ‘troublesome trinity’ of ‘theoretical sampling, constant comparison of data to theoretical categories and theoretical saturation’ speak to the strength and the validity of GT methodology (p. 164). These key components of GT are now explained. First, theoretical sampling: this means that concepts and themes which emerge from ongoing data analysis will guide subsequent sampling directions for both participants *and*, more crucially, for concepts. Dey (2007) pronounced theoretical sampling as a ‘tool of theoretical exploration not confirmation’ (p. 186). This indicated that theoretical sampling is about variation, in seeking the multiple facets of the concern under investigation; if a category seems insubstantial or incomplete, the researcher returns to the field to seek additional pertinent data to ‘flesh out’ the dimensions of the category. Second, the constant comparison of data (interview transcripts, observational memos to each other etc.) and emergent theoretical categories (made possible by theoretical sampling) as an iterative process, allows the building of

theory which is grounded in the data. Lastly, the concept of theoretical saturation is clarified and operationalised by Dey (2007) as ‘stop when the ideas run out’ when ‘adding further data makes no difference’ and that categories are saturated when ‘no additional data are being found whereby the [analyst] can develop the *properties of the categories*’ (p. 185). Charmaz (2017) succinctly summed up the key characteristics of GT methodology as being an ‘inductive, comparative, iterative and interactive method’ (p. 347).

The distinctive characteristics which define GT are that the researcher, with no preconceived notions, is open to all theoretical understandings of the processes which are explicated through coding and categorising. The constant comparison of data with data and data with categories is the method which facilitates this process. These interpretive renderings are captured in analytical memos. Inductive (emergent from the data), deductive (how concepts grounded in the data relate to existing scholarship) and abductive analyses are deployed as the researcher explicitly seeks to refine and build theoretical categories to achieve a theory *specifically* grounded in the research data. (pp. 3-4). Abductive analysis is described by Timonen et al. (2018) as ‘detective work’ i.e. as searching for possible explanations, often utilising extant scholarship and ‘hunches’, to analyse what is going on in the data (p. 6). They go on to advise that in conducting an abductive analysis ‘GT researchers engage in a process of formulating explanations pertaining to what brings about the patterns observed in the data’ (Timonen et al., 2018: p. 6). To conclude, Charmaz (2014) quoted Bowen (2008) in advising that in GT sample size is less relevant than ‘sampling adequacy’ (p. 214). This indicated that the depth and richness of the data that allows the researcher to build a conceptually rich account to explain and theorise the process under investigation is therefore more imperative than a ‘headcount’ of respondents.

On a pragmatic level, GT's offering of the generation of theory from data, is attractive to me as an early career researcher as alleviating concerns about producing a solely descriptive study. Holton and Walsh (2007) advised that GT methodology may allow for the development of substantive or formal grounded theories; the intention of this thesis is to generate a substantive theory. This is important as the topic of intergenerational friendship is under-researched and therefore theoretical insights are essential. As outlined previously GT is a broad church and selecting a variant to deploy in this thesis was necessary. The constructivist approach to GT advocated initially by Charmaz is aligned with my epistemological and ontological 'standpoints and starting points' at the outset of the study (p. 240). These standpoints and starting points are made clear in the subsequent section where I will now set out the specific tenets of CGT.

Symbolic interactionism

Charmaz (2014) located CGT within the symbolic interactionism tradition (pp. 281-284). Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical and methodological paradigm that proposes that the social world can be understood, explained and explored from the 'bottom up' i.e., micro level, on the premise that individuals create the society they live in by repeated, meaningful action and interaction. Developed as a distinct sociological framework by Blumer (1969) who succinctly described symbolic interactionism as 'the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings' (p. 179). Blumer's (1969) methodology is rooted in the work of pragmatist philosopher Mead, who argued that the self and society are created through action and interaction and therefore these acts are open to scientific study. Denzin (1992) established how pragmatism as a theory of 'knowing, truth, science and meaning' form the base from which interactionism evolved (pp. 4-7).

Interactionist research on the everyday lives of individuals formed an influential body of work, for example, Goffman's (1959) theoretical account of social behaviour and impression management, as dramaturgy, (which is discussed further in the next section) and additionally his work on how individuals internalise and act on social norms through the concept of stigmatisation (Goffman, 1963). Also, Hochschild's (1983) study of the commercialisation of constructed emotion, of 'emotional labour' (Hochschild and Machung, 1989) and on the lives of older widows living in a low-income housing project (Hochschild, 1978). Becker's (1953) work on deviance revealed how the perceived behavioural effects of marijuana are socially constructed with others (socialised). These classic, influential studies, among others, demonstrated the socially constructed, interactionist nature of a broad range of everyday topics. Reflecting on these studies led me to acknowledge that they were influential in my own interest in the sociology of everyday life, of the nature of knowledge and knowing, of 'society', and the empirical study of it. Having outlined what is meant by symbolic interactionism, its relationship to Constructivist Grounded Theory is further clarified. This clarification is essential, as while the influence of the researcher is recognised in classical GT - for example, Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated 'the root source of all significant theorizing is the sensitive insights of the observer himself' (p. 251) - and in other variants, the emphasis on the role of the researcher and her co-construction of data is at the core of the Constructivist Grounded Theory variant.

Selecting/employing Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)

The Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) variant is proposed and championed by Charmaz and incorporates a symbolic interactionist theoretical paradigm married with

constructivist methods (Charmaz, 2014, 2008, 2004, 2000). The constructivist model adopts relativist ontology (multiple realities) along with a subjectivist epistemology (the knower and what is known are inseparable) resulting in the co-creation of an interpretative understanding of the subject's meaning. The model rejects the notion of positivist 'truth' and assumes there are multiple realities, with multiple understandings and creations of knowledge by the viewer (researcher) and the viewed (participant) (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The CGT methodology rejects any positivist or objectivist underpinnings outlined in previous versions, embracing the constructivist rejection of the understanding of data and data analysis as neutral. The researcher constructs the categories and theories and their interpretation or rendering of the data, thus recognising the symbolic interactionist element as that not only the participant, but the researcher creates meaning. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) provided a succinct summary, stating that CGT 'emphasizes how data, analysis, and *methodological strategies* [italicised in original] become constructed, and also takes into account the 'research contexts and researchers' positions, perspectives, priorities, and interactions' (p. 10). The constructivist element of CGT acknowledges the researcher as an influential component of knowledge generation. Theories are not in existence waiting to be discovered by a researcher but are instead co-constructed - the researcher and the respondents are involved in the mutual construction of meaning during the interview process - in conjunction with her participants and being in the field (Charmaz, 2014). A theory generated using this paradigm is understood as interpretive, as Charmaz explained '[i]nterpretive theories aim to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them' (Charmaz, 2014: p. 231). Thus, a portrayal of the studied phenomenon is explicitly presented with no claims to exact representations, as reality and subjectivity as multiple is recognised. Constructivists therefore ask how and why

participants construct meaning and action in particular circumstances (Charmaz et al., 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). The decision to use the CGT methodology permeates every step of the research journey in this thesis, from the inception of the topic, the research design, ethical considerations, participant recruitment, data gathering, analysis and writing up.

Generating data for CGT inquiry

Qualitative interviews generate rich data, allowing the researcher access and insight into the respondents' self-expressed past experiences, expectations, interpretations, opinions and feelings (Conlon et al., 2013; Silverman, 2013). As the aim of this thesis is to garner an understanding of the meaning and experience of intergenerational friendship to the participants, qualitative interviews were deemed an appropriate data gathering tool. Charmaz (2002), and Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) advised that in-depth qualitative interviewing is an eminently suitable and much used data gathering tool for a constructivist grounded theorist. Recognising that qualitative interviewing is a complex enterprise which presents both technical and epistemological challenges (Gubrium et al., 2012) close attention was paid to the literature on CGT interviewing.

Charmaz (2014, 2002) and Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) counselled how interviewing using a constructivist paradigm shares the fundamental GT aim i.e. to define and study processes with the explicit purpose of answering the elementary grounded theorist quest driving the entire research process: what is happening here? Interview questions are therefore fashioned to 'get at' key events, and to study the processes and their contexts that shape these events. However, the constructivist interview differs from

interviewing in general qualitative methodology or in other GT variants; the essential difference is an epistemological one.

Objectivist grounded theorists use the interview and interview questions as a tool to gather ‘facts’. In contrast, the constructivist interviewer views the interview as a co-construction with emergent views and meanings shaped by context with the questions framed by the symbolic interactionist intention to elicit the respondents’ understanding of the problem, their views, experiences and actions in relation to it. Context is key to the constructivist interviewer as data is located in context: the context of the particular interview, the context of the participants’ lives, the historical, societal, cultural context in which the problem and the research are situated. The researcher’s status, world views, values and beliefs are carried into the interview and are entwined with the participants’ and together the researcher and her participants shape and create meaning in a process of co-construction.

Reflexivity in CGT

Assuming a ‘reflexive stance’ is imperative and explicit in CGT, and ‘informs how the researcher conducts his or her research, relates to the research participants, and represents them in written reports’ (Charmaz, 2014: p. 344). Dean (2017) referred to doing reflexivity in a research project: as a researcher addressing the question ‘why did you do what you did?’ (p. 111). Dean (2017) went on to stress that at the very core of the reflexive process is a researcher ‘putting their limitations on display’ (p. 150). The decisions taken in relation to all aspects of this research project are made transparent. Reflexive memos were the tool used throughout the thesis to capture the process.

An additional form of reflexivity is outlined by Finlay (2012) who discussed ethical reflexivity as one of the five lenses for the reflexive interviewer. Finlay (2012) described how unexpected emotional intensity can emerge during the interactive research interview, revealing the ‘muddiness’ of the research process in relation to ethical challenges. The ethical implications of the interview process were recognised and steps were taken to mitigate any adverse effects of the data gathering process, these steps are made clear below in discussion of how CGT was put to work in this study of intergenerational friendship.

Research design for intergenerational friendship study

In the next sections I move on from detailing the ontology, epistemology and methodology that underpins the entire research process and delve into outlining the methods and techniques used in the study.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was sought in writing from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin. Approval was granted in September 2015. Underpinning the entire research process was the adherence to the moral principles outlined in the *Trinity College Dublin Policy on Good Research Practice* (2009): to cause no harm, to be of benefit and to respect and protect the rights of participants. These principles guided each decision made throughout the research process. Careful consideration was given to ethical principles and steps were taken to ensure the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and sensitivity were observed

and incorporated into the research design. This approach recognised informed consent as the linchpin of ethical principles (Bulmer, 2008).

Sampling

Participant recruitment

The mainstay of this research is the participants: their iterations, understandings and constructions form ‘the ground’ that is the basis for the explications that emerged. Criteria for participation were defined prior to recruitment. Suitable participants were identified as ‘ordinary’ community-dwelling older men and women aged 65 or over. There is no consensus on when an individual is ‘old’. Sociologically, age is recognised as being socially constructed i.e. what and who is understood as ‘old’ is a social creation as individuals interact and create its meaning (Katz, 2018). Notwithstanding this ambiguity and in the interest of clarity, in this thesis the term is used to describe persons age 65 and over. This is based on the premise that being of ‘retirement age’ is a common social signifier of old age in many western societies (Timonen, 2008). The term ‘older’ is frequently used in this thesis. The term is used pragmatically to denote chronological age for sampling purposes and does not imply a homogeneous group or connotations to any stereotypical constructs.

Initial inclusion criteria

The main inclusion criteria for this study was that participants would at the time of interview (or in the recent past), have (had) at least one good non-kin friend, for a duration of three years or more, who is at least 15 years their junior. An intergenerational friendship for the purposes of this study was understood as a friendship between an older

individual of 65 years or more and a younger (by 15 years or more) non-kin individual. All ideas of old(er) and young(er), let alone the idea of societal generations, are to a large extent socially constructed and as such, the decision to opt for minimum 15 year age gap is not founded on any 'objective' ground pertaining to definite distinctions in the human life course, or between generations. It simply reflects a pragmatic choice to opt for an age/ putative generational difference that would strike most people as potentially significant. Therefore, an age-gap of 15 years or more between the friends was required for this study and this was specified in the information guide.

It was recognised from the outset that in using these criteria both friends may adhere to a societal definition of being older, for example, an 80 year old with a 65 year old younger friend and this proved to be the case for many of the participants. This is not problematic and recognises that distinctions based solely on chronological age may be arbitrary, as both parties, despite having significant age differences and being part of different generations, may commonly be labelled and grouped together as 'old'. Additionally, recognising that the intergenerational friendship is no less valuable or worthy of attention simply because both parties may be labelled 'old', defies an ageist approach.

A second feature specified for the friendship was that it was of significant or meaningful duration, considered here as having lasted more than three years. At three years, the friendship is considered durable and the participant is likely to have a lot of shared experiences on which to reflect. The decision to insert the word 'good' into the information leaflet was to orientate the inquiry to friendships that were meaningful in the participants' everyday lives. While some accounts of difficulties in friendships did emerge (as I outline later in this thesis), this is not a study of failed friendships. An orientation to failed/problematic friendships would have required a different research

approach, in particular the kinds of close attention to participant wellbeing that were not possible within the scope of this research. What makes for a ‘good’ friend in a non-kin friendship was left for the participant to decide. No measurement of characteristics or criteria was required to be provided by the participant as proof of the status ‘good friend’; the subjective judgement of the participant sufficed. This approach was consistent with the approach of the research which was grounded in participants’ meanings and experiences.

In keeping with the spirit of the method, participants’ talk was captured in response to the questions posed in each semi-structured interview as to what they thought made ‘a good friend’, and this talk was mined to generate a grounded construction of the phenomenon from the data (see Chapter 4). The initial inclusion criteria outlined here were communicated to the prospective participants in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A). The workability and sense of the sampling criteria were proven in the course of doing the research: (potential) participants understood the criteria and responded to it, and a coherent sample was recruited with the help of these criteria.

Generating the sample

Purposeful sampling - defining the necessary characteristics of the targeted population *prior* to seeking out these individuals or groups to participate in research - is an essential component of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In grounded theory research, purposeful sampling at the outset allows for the generation of data, the commencement of the iterative data analysis process and the progression to the deployment of theoretical sampling. In this study, purposeful sampling commenced through one resource, namely access to the database of a study recently completed by a

team involving the candidate's supervisors entitled *Changing Generations* (CG).

Changing Generations is a team-based study that explored intergenerational solidarity in Ireland using the CGT method. The research focus is on how intergenerational solidarity is constructed across generations. The study, conducted between 2011 and 2013, comprised a dataset of 100 qualitative in-depth face-to-face interviews with 52 women and 48 men who were, at the time of the interview, living in their own community. The participants ranged in age from 18 and 102. The CG team commenced data generation through purposive sampling in six locations across Ireland, both urban and rural, with sampling from across the socio-economic spectrum so as to allow data to be contextualised in its situational and social contexts (Scharf et al., 2013; Conlon et al., 2013). Publications, both national and international from the study include Scharf et al. (2013); Timonen et al. (2013) and Conlon et al. (2014).

The rationale for the use of the CG database for purposeful sampling for this intergenerational friendship study is twofold. First, as detailed above, the *a priori* selection criteria for this intergenerational friendship study was that suitable participants were identified as community-dwelling older men and women aged 65 or over who were resident in Ireland. Therefore, as community dwelling older adults aged 65 and over dwelling in Ireland formed a part of the CG sampling criteria, access to the CG database allowed for an expedient route to target this population for recruitment. Second, the extensive scope of the sampling conducted by the CG team for CG database (outlined above) would be unattainable for a lone researcher with limited resources. In summary, the CG database was a useful 'launch pad' from which to begin the iterative GT process of data gathering, coding, memoing, analysis, and thereafter, theoretical sampling.

The CG research team had secured explicit consent from respondents to be contacted again for further research. The CG sample included 26 people aged 65 and over. Two of these participants were identified by a member of the CG interview team as being unavailable for further contact due to illness or death. The remaining 24 participants who were 65 and over were sent the Invitation to Take Part in Research Notice (Appendix B). This communication invited the participants to take part in this study. Once the participant made contact to express an interest in the study, I made a follow-up phone call to ascertain if they fitted the research criteria. If they did, full and clear information was supplied to them by post or email; a more detailed description of this information is outlined in the following section. To give individuals time to reflect on the information provided a time period of a week was allowed before I made a follow-up phone call to ascertain if they were interested in taking part. Eleven people indicated a willingness to take part but advised that they had no intergenerational friendships which fit the criteria, which was noted as being worthy of investigation in a separate, future research project. There was no response from three people and a further three were lost to death or ill health. Seven people who fitted the recruitment criteria came forward for interview.

Snowball sampling (whereby a participant recruits another participant who is known to them), was also used as a form of recruitment, expanding outward from the CG database. One CG participant recruited a participant from her women's group who fulfilled the recruitment criteria and the theoretical sampling requirement. It is recognised in this thesis that the disadvantage of snowball sampling is that the persons recruited may share many similarities with those who reached out to them. Additionally, it is recognised that a limitation of using the CG database for purposeful sampling may be that the CG participants who volunteered again are proactive and socially engaged persons who enjoyed the experience (and are familiar with the process) of participating in research

previously; this therefore presented a further justification to pursue other sampling channels to generate a diverse sample.

Progressing to theoretical sampling

A key component of GT/CGT is theoretical sampling. Thus, it was necessary to seek out participants with particular characteristics or who were in particular circumstances. For example, early data collection and analysis had identified the nascent concept of ‘being friends in action’. In order to theoretically saturate the concept of ‘being friends in action’ I sought sites where people gathered to spend time together engaging in interests and leisure activities, to explore the processes of friendship formation. Therefore, additional (theoretical) sampling took place through multiple routes: these routes took various forms throughout the data gathering stage: a blog posted on the website of an age-friendly university; posters distributed in recreational and meeting halls and in public areas such as pharmacies and local community notice boards and to groups such as women’s groups, Men’s Sheds organisations and older age fitness groups, Active Retirement associations, and amateur dramatic societies.

Another strategy was to target key organisations. Gatekeepers were approached and interviewed in two societies which encouraged friendship and intergenerational friendship to gain insight into intergenerational friendship formation strategies. Other gatekeepers who were in positions of management in an age friendly university and an active retirement group, were additionally approached to ascertain if they would have suitable participants in their groups. Inductive analysis revealed that sharing interests, hobbies and leisure pursuits or simply spending time together with a like-minded individual brings and binds the friends together, thus chronological age is rendered insignificant. I recognised that the process of ‘forging and maintaining’ intergenerational

friendships emerged to be multidimensional and complex. Abductive analysis revealed, for example, that experiencing status transitions in the form of ‘official’ retirement from work proved to be a conduit for intergenerational friendship formation for many of the participants. Seeking insight as to why this was so, I then sought to sample participants who were still engaged in employed in an ‘informal’ capacity. This approach proved fruitful, as participants signalled a process of being ‘not only old’, that is, sharing role identities with the age-other (outlined in detail in Chapter 5).

In another example, following my analysis of Angela’s interview (where she spoke of her hope of retaining her friendships after her move to older-age community living), I sought to sample people who lived in community-based age-specific housing in order to gain knowledge about experiences in forging/maintaining intergenerational friendships within this context. I was following a lead to theoretically define the process ‘transitioning as an intergenerational friend’. I therefore approached gatekeepers who were in positions of management in community older age villages to recruit participants in their community who may be interested in participating in the study. Four participants were interviewed as a result to define the dimensions of the category. A further two participants were sampled for variation: these participants attended a community older age village on a part-time basis and added further variation and meaning to the concept of ‘transitioning as an intergenerational friend’. Data analysis of the participants’ narratives and the observational memos revealed a process whereby the older friends who had transitioned to living or attending in the older age community village sought continued ‘connectedness’ and belonging through forming and maintaining their intergenerational friendships.

The approach outlined above orientated enquiry to maximise the potential to conceptualise and theorise the subject of intergenerational friendship fully in accordance

with the concepts which emerged from the constant comparison and analysis of data previously collected. It was kept in mind at all times that recruitment of participants was not simply a case of amassing a high number of random participants to swell the sample size as the number of interviews conducted is less important for the CGT method than the analytical quality and significance of the data gathered. Constant comparison through inductive, deductive and abductive analysis, and theoretical sampling drove the data gathering process. As stated previously, grounded theorists seek to saturate their key categories that emerge from the data, for example as illustrated above, in seeking to flesh out the dimensions of the category ‘being friends in action’ until no new insights were obtained. Theoretical saturation can only be achieved through theoretical sampling as the end goal is to generate *theory* grounded in data (as opposed to seeking an array of themes or a variation of codes) (Charmaz, 2014b). Sampling and participant recruitment therefore ceased when theoretical saturation in the key theoretical concepts: *the homophily of doing-and-being, all-age identity, and continuity in belonging and connectedness*, was reached.

Recruitment process

Both those identified from the *Changing Generations* database and new participants recruited through theoretical sampling were given clear written information about the study and what participation entailed. Participants were assured that there was no obligation to participate. A contact telephone number and e-mail address for the researcher and her supervisors were provided should the potential participant have had any queries or concerns which they wished to discuss prior to making a decision.

Prior to taking part in the research, prospective participants received a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) and a Consent Document for Participation in Research

(Appendix C). These documents were posted to prospective participants after they had made initial contact and expressed their interest in participating, so the participant could reflect and make an informed decision on whether they wished to participate in the research. A Participant Information Sheet outlined the purpose of the study providing detailed information in straightforward language. This sheet informed the participant that their interview would be recorded and transcribed. Additionally, the consent form provided made clear that participation in the research was voluntary and the participant could decide to withdraw at any time, without justification or explanation being required. Anonymity and confidentiality in relation to all interaction, audio and written records, including storage and research dissemination, was assured and this was stated on the consent form. Lastly, a Participant Demographic Information form (Appendix D) was used to capture demographic information. The data gathered in the Participant Demographic Information is presented in table format in a following section.

Recognising and safeguarding the wellbeing of the participants

Qualitative interviewing had been selected as the data gathering tool and I took steps to ensure that the wellbeing of the participant was prioritised at each interview. Prior to the commencement of each interview I offered to read out the Participant Information Sheet and /or Consent Document for Participation in Research for the convenience of the participant, and two respondents availed of this offer. The Consent Document for Participation in Research was then reviewed, discussed and clarified before being signed by both the participant and me. I reiterated to the participant that I would record the interview, placed the recorder in view and advised the participant when it was activated. I reassured the participant at the commencement of the interview that they could choose to pause or stop the interview at any time with no repercussions or explanations required.

Before the commencement of the interview I provided the participant with a contact list for counselling services and helplines. This information was supplied in recognition of the risk that while they were reflecting on, and discussing their friendships, some of the participants' friendships may have ceased for a variety of reasons. A loss of friendship may have led to feelings of abandonment, disappointment or sadness and the participants may have had a need to talk about this beyond the research interview. In the interviews, some participants reflected anew on life-events which were intertwined in their experiences of intergenerational friendship such as the loss of a spouse and the impact of widowhood, and three participants spoke of the loss of a child. The participants did not exhibit undue distress while discussing these life-events; they spoke in a sad, thoughtful and reflective way. However, I reflected that providing the sheet of counselling services and contact numbers which may be referred to by the participant in the hours or days after interview, strove to minimise any maleficence and promoted beneficence. This approach additionally sought to off-set an undesirable and unethical 'smash and grab' approach to data collection (Dey, 1999: p. 119), whereby the researcher simply perceives the interview as a means to gathering data, ignoring the implications of the process on the respondents.

As a further consideration, I posted a thank-you note within three days of the interview to each individual participant to the address provided on the Participant Information Sheet. In the hand-written note I expressed my sincere thanks for their taking the time to speak with me and for sharing their insights about their intergenerational friendships. The purpose of the thank-you card was to express appreciation and respect for the participants as experts in the area of intergenerational friendship and to acknowledge their valuable contribution to the research.

Dataset

Participant characteristics

A total of 23 older friends participated in this study. Participants ranged in chronological age from 66 to 95 years of age, seven being men and 16 women. Recognising a general difficulty in recruiting older men into studies, I had intentionally targeted mixed gender sites (leisure and interest groups, an age-friendly university, etc.) also I specifically approached organisations which were aimed at recruiting men, such as the Men's Shed organisation. Despite my efforts, a gender imbalance remained.

Just under half of the people who took part in this study had attained a second level education, with seven having attended third level and the remaining four completing their education at primary level. The last/current occupation is listed in the Table below. Ten lived alone and 11 lived with their spouse or partner, one lived with an adult child only, and one participant lived in a three-person household with a spouse and an adult child. Eleven were married and 10 were widowed, one was re-partnered and one never married. Two of the participants had a family member of another generation domiciled with them i.e. a son or a daughter. Three of the participants were not parents, the remainder were. The sample is diverse, taken from across the socioeconomic spectrum. The participants' characteristics are provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Participant characteristics

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Household</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Last/ current Occupation</i>
Brendan	72	Male	Married	3	2: Self & spouse	Third level	Teacher
Hugo	92	Male	Widowed	4	1: Self	Third level	Finance
Eileen	79	Female	Married	4	2: Self & spouse	Second Level	Civil Servant
Iris	91	Female	Married	3	2:Self & spouse	Third Level	Nurse
Lorna	84	Female	Widowed	3	1: Self	Second level	Civil Servant
Darina	88	Female	Widowed	6	1: Self	Second level	Civil Servant
Angela	95	Female	Widowed	0	1:Self	Second level	Admin clerk
Tommy	76	Male	Married	4	3:Self,spouse,child	Second level	Labourer/ Supervisor
May	75	Female	Married	1	2: Self & spouse	Second level/adult ed	Home Help
Valerie	67	Female	Widowed	1	1:Self	Second level	Child minder
Simon	69	Male	Re-Partnered	0	2: Self and partner	Third level	Community Services
Maria	85	Female	Never-married	0	1: Self	Third level	Religious
Anne	66	Female	Married	1	2: Self & spouse	Second level	Social Care
Breda	82	Female	Married	4	2: Self & spouse	Second level	Homemaker
Bill	85	Male	Married	4	2: Self and spouse	Second level	Farmer
Sheila	79	Female	Widowed	2	1:Self	Primary level	Farmer
Jennifer	81	Female	Married	6	2: Self & spouse	Primary level	Cleaner
Jack	83	Male	Married	6	2: Self & spouse	Primary level	Caretaker
Kathryn	94	Female	Widowed	1	1: Self	Primary level	Secretary
Lydia	67	Female	Married	4	2: Self & spouse	Third Level	Nurse
Lucia	89	Female	Widowed	4	1:Self	Second Level	Teacher
Janis	78	Female	Widowed	2	1:Self	Third level	Artist/mentor
Walter	91	Male	Widowed	4	2:Self & adult child	Second level	Civil Servant

Interviewing participants

Directed by Charmaz (2014) who advised that ‘questions must explore the interview topic and fit the participants’ experience’ (p. 65), I prepared an interview guide (Appendix E) which contained open-ended, clear and concise questions and prioritised learning about the participants’ actions, views and experiences. The interview guide was simply a guide for the initial interviews and a general frame for subsequent interviews, as theoretical sampling and emerging concepts identified by the ongoing analysis directed the interview questions as the study progressed. Additionally, my confidence in my ability to conduct insightful interviews grew as I developed my interview skills throughout the research process and therefore my reliance on an extensive, written interview guide diminished.

The interviews lasted from 55 minutes to 95 minutes. The participants’ wishes as to where and when they chose to be interviewed were accommodated. One participant chose to be interviewed in my office at the university campus; one participant chose to be interviewed with her intergenerational friend in her friend’s own home. The remainder of the interviews took place in the participants’ own homes at their request. Conducting interviews with the older participants in their own homes led to many unanticipated consequences along with the more mundane and anticipated preparations and outcomes. An additional data gathering tool in the form of observations gleaned while visiting participants’ homes in particular emerged during the research process. These consequences constitute original insights on the CGT methodology and its application as to the nature of what constitutes data. This is discussed in detail in the following section on interviewing older people in their own homes.

Interviewing older people

Wenger (2002) provided advice and insights to the social researcher who seeks to interview older people. The insights are included in a section which ascribes the status of ‘distinctive respondents’ to older aged respondents. Mobility and physical challenges may be present, for example, the older participant may take longer to make their way to answer their own front door, or they may exhibit hearing difficulties which requires patience and accommodation from the interviewer. Older people may additionally be more likely than other age groups to be vulnerable to status issues such as widowhood or bereavement, reduced incomes or negative self-image.

While this advice provided by Wenger proved to be pertinent to many of my interviews in the field, the advice I heeded from Wenger and applied to *all* of my interviews was the understanding that older people were just like any other people, except that they had been alive longer. The interview therefore was not ‘an encounter with old age’ (Wenger, 2002: p. 276) but instead I approached each interview as an interview with an individual, with no connotations to old or any other chronological age; the participants were simply the older friend in their particular intergenerational friendship. The older participants in turn seemed to embrace and to enjoy the opportunity to discuss and to reflect on their experiences of intergenerational friendship and being an older friend. The richness of the data that formed the ‘ground’ for the research findings (outlined in Chapter’s 4 and 5) is testament to the participants’ engagement with the researcher and the research topic.

Wenger (2002) additionally noted that ‘material clues’ in the form of photographs or other materials (p. 271) may be observed when interviewing older participants in their own homes and give insight into their ‘earlier lives’ and these can be used to stimulate conversation during the interview. The ‘earlier lives’ specification prompts the question:

why not their present lives? This would seem to indicate that most interviews with older people seek to focus on the past and their reflections on their past experiences.

In my research, the materials observed and the role they played in the interview and research process became significant in two ways: as ‘prompts’ and/or as ‘props’. These props and prompts gave insight into the participants’ *current* and past lives and intergenerational friendships. The props and prompts are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Observational memos (these were separate from the additional memos taken, for example, analytical memos pertaining to interview content) were used specifically to capture these observations. The memos varied in length from a paragraph to three pages and were handwritten immediately after leaving the participants’ homes.

Interviewing older people in their own homes

As previously outlined, the majority of the interviews took place, at the participants’ request, in their own homes. Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) emphasised that CGT makes the assumption that the researcher on entering the participants’ world is affected by it. Being explicit and reflexive on how this shaped the data gathering and analytic process in this thesis is essential. Reflecting on my analysis of the data by keeping reflexive memos (subsequently along with observational memos), I recognised that when the interview took place in the participants’ own home, it had a recurring and robust influence on my interpretation and analysis of the data. Staying close to the data is imperative in CGT, as any theories or concepts which emerge must be fully ‘grounded’ in the data. Yet in this instance the reification of the ‘captured’ spoken word was recognised i.e. what was said by the participant in the recorded interviews.

I considered the disclosure and incorporation of the observed (what I saw in the participants' homes and the items and people in them) and also the 'uncaptured' i.e. unrecorded and therefore not transcribed data vital in this thesis. As Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014) stated, 'it is not uncommon that the really interesting information comes after the interview is finished and the microphone is switched off' (p. 12). Keeping in mind the counsel offered by Denzin and Lincoln (2017) that 'our discourses are the vehicles for sharing our observations with those who are not in the field with us' (p. 17), I revised and added an additional gathering tool to my methods by outlining how being in the participants' own homes had afforded me an additional insight, along with the interview, and that these observations constituted data, in the form of observational memos.

Recognising how items on display in participants' homes during the interview encounter influenced my meaning-making processes in this inquiry, I contend that in the interest of transparency a discussion on the contribution of observation to both generation and interpretation of data should accompany discussion of contribution of the transcribed interview data. My observations of the setting, along with transcription of generated talk, constitute the data that was created out of the large majority of interview encounters within this study. Both featured as key resources to the process of interpretation and meaning-making that I engaged in within this inquiry.

The concept of 'framing' and framing analysis was proposed by Goffman (1986) who posited that individuals interpret what is going on around them through frameworks which then influence how we process and subsequently 'frame' how we communicate data. In an attempt to be transparent in how the analysis and the memoing was influenced and framed, I asked 'When, where, how I am' (Trinh, 1992: p. 157) in the field. A deeper understanding of the meaning the participants ascribed to their intergenerational friendships, their interests and the place it held in their lives and their identity was further

illuminated through observations in their own homes. These observations were not ‘proof’ or ‘evidence’ but an exploration, a deeper insight and ‘thick’ understanding of the meaning the participants attached to intergenerational friendship, older age and identity in their everyday lives. These observations and the material drawn from the observational memos to capture them were subsequently intertwined in my data analysis.

‘Prompts and props’ as methods for elicitation

At the outset of this study the potential for ‘prompts’ (stimuli to aid the participant during the interview process, described in more detail below) in the qualitative in-depth interview was considered worth exploring. Initially, I envisaged a study design wherein semi-structured interviews would be augmented by photo-elicitation also known as the Participatory Photo Interview (Kong et al., 2015; Kolb, 2008). Participants would be asked prior to interview to select and bring to the interview photographs which they considered meaningful in representing their intergenerational friendships. The use of this method is said to elicit thoughtful responses, promote reflection, act as a memory aid and provide insight into the participants’ beliefs, perspectives and decisions. It is claimed to encourage conversation and rapport building and produce unanticipated information, new knowledge and insights into the chosen topic as the participant introduces what they perceive as important for inclusion (Shaw, 2013; Bergold and Thomas, 2012; Alerby and Hörnqvist, 2005; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 2002; Banks, 2001; Collier and Collier, 1986). In summary, using this method held the promise of ‘rich’ data and a more collaborative partnership than is experienced in conventional semi-structured interviews alone. However, this transpired not to be the case for this research project. Only one of the participants produced some photographs of their intergenerational friends, the other

participants explained that while they had numerous family photographs they had few of their friends. Instead, more ‘naturally occurring’ prompts emerged.

The value of naturally-occurring ‘prompts’

During my research fieldwork I discovered that all of the benefits outlined in the paragraph above on the Participatory Photo Interview were realised, not through pre-selected photographs but instead through the numerous items and people that surrounded the participant in their own home. This insight leads me to argue then that ‘naturally occurring prompts’ are the most productive. For example, Eileen’s pile of shopping bags in the sitting room where our interview took place prompted her (when she observed them during our interview) to recall numerous shopping trips with her intergenerational friend and insights in relation to ageing. Sheila’s intergenerational friend rang her during our interview and Sheila took the call to reassure her friend that she was well and would return her call later. This occurrence prompted Sheila to share her views on reciprocity in her intergenerational friendship. The analytical outcomes of these ‘prompts’ and many more are interspersed throughout the later findings chapters.

Researchers such as Finch (2011) have identified and conceptualised the use of material objects to convey meanings to an audience. In Finch’s research, photographs of happy and successful family lives displayed in the homes of research participants constituted research data in the form of exhibited family photographs. While this ‘display’ of doing family life was evident in many participants’ homes i.e. they had photographs of happy family occasions such as a child’s graduation or wedding dotted on surfaces or walls in their homes, this was not the case with friendship. Only one participant had a photograph depicting some friends as players on a football team. The photograph was,

however, more akin to a 'prop' to support his own individual identity and role as a sports coach and mentor. He referred to it in this context during our interview.

The social construction of identity was proposed by Butler (1990). Butler purported that an identity is constructed through discourse and repetition as the individual performs or behaves in socially constructed gendered ways i.e. in Butler's research as a male or female. Finch (2011) advised that Butler's 'performativity' is concerned with individual identity as opposed to social interaction. In this research, dramaturgy, which aligns well with the symbolic interactionist paradigm and the CGT method presented as a productive way to conceptualise emerging data constituted by both interview talk and observed 'props and prompts'.

Dramaturgical analysis and the observation of 'props'

Charmaz (2014) referred to dramaturgical analysis as the 'conceptual cousin' of symbolic interactionism (p. 284). As briefly mentioned in a previous section, Goffman (1959) developed and outlined the conceptual framework of dramaturgical analysis in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Using the analogy of theatre and drama, Goffman used a theatrical lens and terminology to illustrate how the social actor creates and manages, - both consciously and unconsciously - the interactions with and the impressions her 'audience' have of her. The individual uses 'stagecraft', stage management, scripts, prompts, props, front stage, backstage (a more private domain) to support the performance of self (Goffman, 1990). Action and meaning are observed, created and emerge for the performer and the audience in a particular setting.

The use of props to support the identity of the participant as an intergenerational friend, and as a photographer, artist, shopper, friend etc. and as an active, engaged, socially integrated individual was observable in one form or another in every interview

in the homes of the participants. These ‘props’ were placed by the individual in the space where they could most be themselves i.e. in their own homes and supported how they perceived themselves (their identity) and how they wanted others to perceive them (social identity). Examples of some of the props observed and captured in my observational memos were; a pile of financial publications and financial sections of newspapers with detailed annotations attached, in Hugo’s home; a metal arm with magnifying glass attached to the PC in Maria’s home; and a large screen and projector in Walter’s sitting room in his home.

The lack of ‘props’ in Angela’s home proved to be equally illuminating as ‘an empty stage’ (her house was emptied of wall decorations and very sparsely furnished, with packing boxes evident). Angela was moving to a community-living home in another village and was packed to leave. This situation not only provided insights but additionally prompted me to theoretically sample for variation in intergenerational friendship maintenance. A further, more detailed exploration of props and their use by the participants as well as the emergent concepts they promoted are explicated in the analysis and their influence is evident in the findings presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Interviewing older people individually or in pairs

While the intention at the outset of the research was to conduct one-to-one interviews only, four participants who came forward separately at the commencement of the recruiting process expressed a preference to be interviewed together with their spouse and two additional participants requested to be interviewed with their friend. Breda and Bill are a married couple who share 17 intergenerational friends, Jennifer and Jack are a married couple who share some friends but also have separate intergenerational friendships. Lydia and Lucia share an intergenerational friendship but additionally have

other intergenerational friends. The interviews took place in the homes of the participants, at their request. In the case of Lydia and Lucia, Lydia's home was the chosen site for the interview.

The rationale to agreeing to conduct dual interviews, which did not form part of my original research plan, was twofold. First, Charmaz (2002) advised that, in GT the 'comfort [of the participant] should be of higher priority for the interviewer than obtaining juicy data' (p. 679). Therefore if the participants felt more comfortable being interviewed with a companion that was acceptable. Secondly, as an early career social scientist I was interested in taking this unexpected opportunity to explore additional data gathering formats. A review of literature pertaining to dual interviewing convinced me that they could be a worthwhile addition to my data gathering toolkit in seeking rich data.

Arksey (1996) provided a straightforward definition of joint or dual interviewing as 'joint interviewing involves one researcher talking to two people together, for the purposes of collecting information about how the pair perceives the same event' (p. 2). A review of research in relation to dual or joint interviewing revealed many advantages to carrying out dual interviews, such as Taylor and de Vocht (2011) who advocated for combining one-to-one and dual interviews in the research design, going on to advise that dual interviews may offer 'additional insights' not attainable in an individual interview. Interviewees are anticipated, for instance, to encourage or prompt each other during the interview. Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014) concurred and outlined how, in their experience, this type of interview not only provides 'good enough data' but may also encourage men to take part as part of a couple where they might otherwise be reluctant. Allan (1980) offered a cautionary note, in advising that it is impossible - in advance of interviewing spouses together - to foretell whether the outcome will be beneficial or detrimental to illuminating the topic under exploration.

In actuality, the dual interview format resulted in both beneficial and detrimental outcomes for these three particular interviews. While Breda and Bill prompted and supported each other in the interview which possibly resulted in a richer interview in terms of content, a separate segment of the interview with Breda alone, at the conclusion of the dual interview resulted in Breda speaking of being lonely and of wishing to spend more time with her intergenerational friends (she did not wish to worry Bill so did not mention it in the dual interview). In Jennifer's and Jack's joint interview, their interaction was dynamic and positive with lots of prompting and encouragement of frank exchanges between the participants, which resulted in rich data being gathered which otherwise might not have happened. Lydia and Lucia's exchanges were more formal and constrained, while some prompting did take place, one of the participants spoke less than the other and seemed to defer to her despite my concerted effort in prompting and encouragement. Overall then, the dual interviewing format proved useful in some interviews but not in others.

Data analysis

Data handling

Interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' expressed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The recorded interviews are stored on a password protected computer. The transcribed data and the observational memos (along with the participants' signed consent forms) are stored in a secure, locked cabinet at the university. The participants were assigned a pseudonym (see Table 1 above for pseudonym listing) and this was used throughout the research process and in writing up of the research. The

names of the participants' intergenerational friends, any place names and other 'identifying' data mentioned by the participants in their interview is anonymised.

Coding and analysing the data

The postulates of Charmaz (Charmaz et al., 2017; Charmaz, 2014) guided the coding and analysis of data which happened in tandem with generating data throughout the research process. The interviews and observational memos were coded and analysed one-by-one as they were conducted, prior to interviewing the next participant. Charmaz (2000) advocates line-by-line-coding and coding with gerunds. These 'action codes' are thus 'giving us insight into what people are doing' in their talk and 'what is happening' in the setting (p. 515). The transcripts were printed and coded by hand. The observational memos were hand written at the outset, these were also subsequently coded by hand. Coding by hand in lieu of using data analysis software, was selected with the intention of remaining as close to the data as possible. Both observational and interview data were then subject to open and focused coding. Each line of the transcripts and the observational memos was initially coded (labelled) with simple action word(s) which reflected what the participant was doing or feeling or portraying, for example, 'confiding' or 'seeking positivity' or 'being an educator'.

Consistently throughout the coding stage I asked the key GT question of the data 'what is going on here?' (Morse, 2016; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This was to prevent my preconceived understandings influencing the coding and to avoid forcing the data into preconceived labels, therefore remaining open to understanding the participants' world i.e. their points of view, experiences, actions, beliefs and situations and so on. Remaining open is the key technique of CGT, working in pursuit of validity and reliability and against bias.

Through constant comparison (with other data and codes) these initial codes led to developing more focused codes, as patterns and threads in the data emerged. In-vivo or telling codes illuminated actions and processes. An in-vivo code is an exact term or phrase used by a participant in the interview which is so remarkable that the term or phrase constitutes a code in the analysis (Charmaz, 2014). For example Janis, in her interview, ‘portrays’ a process of recognising her intergenerational friendships as ‘being friends in action’. In Janis’s home, portraits painted of Janis by her intergenerational friend were alluded to and observed after the recorded interview had ceased and this data was captured in my observational memo (this is discussed further in Chapter Four). The characteristics of these focused and telling codes were therefore fleshed out with constant comparison to the observational data, codes, reflexive memos and theoretical memos.

Theoretical sensitivity is the ‘ability to understand and define phenomena in abstract terms and to demonstrate abstract relationships between studied phenomena’ (Charmaz, 2014b: p. 161). This approach was practised to raise and often subsume these focused codes into analytical categories (broader groups) and then raised into even more abstract concepts. To illustrate, the emergent and continuous comparison process discovered focused codes, for example, ‘sharing ways of thinking’ or ‘stereotyping’ which were analysed, refined and merged with other focused codes to form categories. These categories in turn emerged to have abstract relationships with other categories to form abstract concepts including ‘homophily of doing-and-being’ and ‘doing ageing’ (discussed in Chapter Five). In this way the analysis progressed until theoretical saturation was reached and data gathering concluded.

Reflecting on the research design

I had entered the field armed with what I had considered to be a meticulously researched and designed research plan. However, the participants influenced this research in unanticipated ways. The participants' co-construction of the research process in the form of inspiring the development of additional data gathering tools was unanticipated at the outset of the thesis. Their preference for being interviewed at home shaped the data gathering and analysis phases, broadening 'the ground' as an additional layer of observational data was added to the spoken word (recorded interviews). Using the dramaturgical analysis concept, with its alignment to the symbolic interactionist paradigm which underpins the CGT methodology provided a suitable framework to incorporate the observational data. My own intuitive recognition of the significance of material artefacts also extended my understanding of what constituted fieldwork and data and led me to engage with this other literature as I strove to capture and explicate observations as data. The participants' request for co-interviewing with a spouse or a friend introduced me, as a researcher, to an additional variation of a data gathering instrument and gave me hands-on experience using it. While the outcome in terms of the 'richness' of the data compared to individual interviewing gathered proved ambiguous, the opportunity to hone my interviewing skills and evaluate the outcomes was invaluable.

The CGT approach allowed me the freedom to pursue the twists and turns that unfurled throughout the field research. The CGT stated premise of capturing the world of the research participants allowed me to expand my data analysis to explore and explicate the lived experiences of my participants. The freedom and confidence to pursue these unexpected avenues were made possible by this emergent method as well as my own commitment to interrogating how meaning gets made and what constitutes data 'in the

field’ when conducting interview research. The experience, while challenging, was invaluable in learning the craft of research.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study are those which are usually associated with conducting PhD research. Twenty-three participants were interviewed only once, and one observational memo was produced in relation to each interview. I acknowledge that capturing the participants’ portrayals of their intergenerational friendships at a later point in time, through a follow-up interview, would likely be fruitful. Charting the friendship path as both parties grow older would allow further insight into the process of friendship maintenance or cessation over time. Exploring changes with a comparison to this original data would be a fascinating addition to the thesis. However, a lack of resources and time constraints have limited the scope of the study.

The constraint in resources additionally informed the decision to focus exclusively on the ‘older friend’. As a sole researcher, this decision allowed me to channel my resources into sampling for variance and context and to saturate categories. This raises the analysis of the data to an interpretive, abstract level to pursue a substantive theory ‘grounded’ in rich data. The alternative option, i.e. gathering data from both the ‘younger’ and ‘older’ friend would have resulted in some data from both groups but not to the same depth that focusing on one of the groups allows. I argue that focusing on the older party to the friendship is a strength of this study. It aligns with my interest in ageing and older age, thus engaging in an exploration of these topics and providing context for the central concept of intergenerational friendship.

Twenty-three interviews and 23 observations with community-dwelling, ‘ordinary’ people aged 65 and over living in Ireland form the basis of this study. No claims are made that the findings are representative of the entire older population living in Ireland who are engaged in intergenerational friendship. In order to make claims to representability at population level, a quantitative methodology would have been a prerequisite to generate a statistically representative sample.

As outlined in Chapter 1, a qualitative approach was selected to best address the aim of this thesis which is to capture the *meaning* and *experience* of intergenerational friendship in the context of being older in contemporary society. Morse (2015) explained ‘qualitative studies always include information far beyond the numbers of participants that are listed in the demographic tables’ (p. 1215). Credibility and dependability are not reliant on ‘big numbers’. In a Grounded Theory study these criteria are facilitated, along with other strategies, through theoretical sampling to saturate data (Morse, 2015).

A limitation in relation to using a single data gathering tool, i.e. in-depth interviews was overcome as an additional source of data emerged organically during the research process. As described in Chapter 3, at the outset of the study I entered the field with what I considered to be a suitable and complete research plan. The identification and the application of the value of using observational memoing as a data capturing tool evolved from being in the field and developed to form a vital part of the research design of this study. Charmaz (2008) advised that strategies in Grounded Theory have ‘substantial flexibility’ and researchers ‘may adapt them to fit their emerging study’ (p. 168). Adapting the use of observational memoing in this thesis not only added ‘thicker’ data but additionally overcame a possible limitation, in expanding the data set/ the ground and therefore providing additional insight to the meanings and actions of the participants, in relation to validity and reliability. Denzin (1989) details that ‘thick descriptions are

deep, dense, detailed accounts’, while, ‘thin descriptions, by contrast, lack detail, and simply report facts’ (p. 83).

Triangulation is frequently alluded to by social scientists as an additional tool to support reliability and dependability and to eliminate researcher bias. Triangulation is defined to be ‘a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study’ (Creswell & Miller, 2000: p. 126). Guba and Lincoln (1989) conceptualise triangulation as ‘overlapping methods’ (p. 317). This is consonant with the use of observational memoing as an additional data gathering tool, and is best aligned with the constructivist paradigm central to this study as the researcher’s observations, and the participants’ interviews took place at the same time and in the same setting and as such they overlap. Triangulation here is recognised as allowing deeper insight into how the participants constructed their reality, and meaning through interaction and performance with materials (props) in their own setting i.e. their homes.

Conclusion

This chapter commenced with the aim of demonstrating that the approach, methodology and methods selected, presented the best ‘fit’ with the research purpose and the research question (Chapter 1) and the concluding remarks section of the literature review (Chapter 2). The characteristics of a qualitative approach, the selection of GT and specifically CGT along with their epistemological and ontological underpinnings were then discussed. How the study was conducted and who participated was then outlined. Insights into data collection, coding, memoing and analysis were provided, demonstrating a reflexive and innovative researcher. These efforts culminated in empirical findings divided up into two

chapters which are now presented. The next chapter, Chapter 4 will present findings grounded in accounts from the participants on their experiences of ‘doing’ intergenerational friendship.

Chapter 4

Being an intergenerational ‘older’ friend

‘It was obvious we were friends, because we were friends in action’

(Janis)

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the methods and methodology, that is, the approach taken to conducting this research. The outcomes (in the form of data gathered and analysed) of the approach taken are now addressed. In this chapter, an analysis and discussion of the participants’ portrayals of their intergenerational friendships is outlined, that is, the processes involved in the formation and flourishing, along with the characteristics of intergenerational friendship, as described by the participants. It is important to outline and analyse these areas as so little is known about intergenerational friendship.

Seeking and meeting intergenerational friends

Conduits or gateways to intergenerational friendship commence this analysis. First, I explore an ‘attitudinal’ conduit that emerged from the data as the oldest-old participants’ spoke of seeking to form intergenerational friendships. Second, I focus on the entire participant group and I outline the array of processes that bring the older and younger individuals together thus facilitating intergenerational friendships.

Seeking intergenerational friendship in oldest-old age

Some of the oldest-old people who took part in this study (those aged 85 years and over) alluded to a life course related impetus for seeking intergenerational friendships. The impulse for this process is observed to relate to losses experienced by those who are longer lived than others in their friendship network. The participants' reflections offer the opportunity for a conceptual insight into what experiencing peer-age friendship is in contrast to intergenerational friendship. As Darina disclosed:

I had lots [friendships] of my own age group. Now they are lessening, people become ill, and they go into care. I have still one friend from secondary school who is now confined to a bed in hospital. She can't walk, she has such bad legs, and others have died. My contemporaries have died a lot of them quite young. I lost a lot of my friends when we were all about 40. (Darina)

Darina explained that she has lost contact with many of her peer-age friends, as they are removed from their communities into care facilities. For Darina, however, a loss of peer-age friends through death commenced in middle-age and has continued in older age. Iris expressed a similar attitude while providing further elaboration on the consequences and lived experience of losing peer-age friends while she lives on to an older age:

Well, if you have a friend the same age they are as old as you so they know how you feel and that's a very good friendship too. But unfortunately when you come to a great age, as we are all arriving now, all the friends and relations of your age you're one of the few that's left. So there's [a] certain loneliness in that too. But that's life and you can't sort of go around moaning about it. ...It's very sad when

you feel that there's nobody of your same age left and that's the sadness of living to a long age. (Iris)

Iris indicated that the 'bounty' of living longer brings some challenges, in the form of feeling lonely and sad as she misses the company of her peer-age friends. She signalled an acceptance of the 'downside' of being long-lived. Additional insights were offered by Kathryn. Having friends of the same age offers a unique characteristic in a friendship, in the form of sharing cultural experiences. Kathryn expressed strong sentiments in relation to the loss of her peer-age friends and illustrated how a shared past provided a unique context for friendship maintenance:

But you do miss your contemporaries. I had one friend for 68 years. We were like sisters, and she'd come down and stay with me for a few days and I'd go up and stay with her. But then her husband died after mine died and she'd come down and stay with me and I'd go up to her. But they [Kathryn's peer-age friends and her husband] are all gone. So that is tough. Then of course I had a terrible lot of old friends. The trouble is all my contemporaries are gone now and that is tragic, you do miss your contemporaries. Oh I do, I miss them all. Maybe something happens they would know all about and you get a shock when you discover you have nobody to talk to about it you know. (Kathryn)

The loss of peer-age friends may be gradual over the life course; yet, Kathryn signalled that the realisation is unexpected, *a shock*, on realising that her cohort of friends is no longer available to her. The sadness that Kathryn felt at the loss of these peer-age friends

was palpable. This signalled how much their friendship had meant to Kathryn over the life course.

Kathryn went on to speak of her intergenerational friends and the similar (to those lost peer-age friendships) enjoyment and benefits she accrues from these friendships that moderate her unhappiness, loss, and loneliness or isolation:

I love company and it does me good to get out if you are feeling a bit down in yourself. I am very lucky with the younger ones [intergenerational friends]. I would be just [as] at home in the company of [intergenerational] friends and that as I would in [the company of] older people. (Kathryn)

The loss of her lifelong friends is accepted and tempered, not by dwelling on the past or remaining isolated, but in doing what makes her happiest, that is, in seeking company and the friendship of those like-minded individuals who are available. A feature of intergenerational friendship for Kathryn is that it mitigates the loss of peer-age friends. Experiencing an intergeneration friendship was as enjoyable to Kathryn as her peer-age friendships were.

Recognising difference does not signal that one form of friendship is preferable to another. Another oldest-old participant, Jack, also spoke of missing peer-age friends who would have shared experiences with him. For Jack, his younger friends cannot fill the same friendship role; Jack evoked a strong generational tie:

That's the way, ya know. A lot of the old local people that was with me is dead and gone. Well, when you think of them you say a prayer for them. It's just something, that's just it. Then you're thankful in another way that I'm still in the land of the living (laugh). Even in [previous work place] now, most of the people

I worked with is gone. Yeah, you would meet [younger friends] but it's a different era. The things that I'd be talking about the younger people wouldn't know or wouldn't remember. (Jack)

Jack is signalling an acceptance of the loss of friends in later life. The participants acknowledged not only the loss of, but additionally a unique characteristic of, peer-age friends. Some people who took part in this study outlined how intergenerational friends are different in that they do not fulfil a particular need, which is sharing the same life course (past events). Therefore, the participants framed their friendships as not only peer-age but as generational, in that it is the shared social and cultural experiences from their past and stances on these experiences that they share with their deceased or removed (in care facilities) peer-age friends. Longevity, therefore, is not perceived as being universally positive but instead brings its own sadness in the form of the loss of valuable friends as one outlives them. However, the older friends are indicating the value that they place on friendship ties by choosing not to withdraw from socialising. Instead, they are seeking to engage with and form friendships with similarly minded younger adults. Having experienced friendship throughout their lives, they are not willing to forgo the enjoyment and bounty that friendship has brought them. I will now discuss how the people who took part in this study went about seeking and forming intergenerational friendships.

Seeking and forming intergenerational friendship

An analysis of how the intergenerational friends met and what facilitated their friendship formation can be categorised into four main settings: leisure pursuits and interests, work and professions, peer-age friends and family members, and lastly through social

interaction in their community. I begin by exploring leisure pursuits and interests as these are frequently an initial bonding tie between the friends. However, the process of forging friendships initially and of deepening the friendships is multidimensional and varied. Leisure pursuits and interests along with work and professions were the sites which acted as conduits for many of the older friends. The friends met as they joined football clubs (as players, trainers or as spectators), golf clubs, camera clubs, amateur dramatic societies, musical societies, or historical societies. For example, Simon, who had a passion for music, met many of his intergenerational friends through joining societies:

If I'm rehearsing shows a lot of the people in it, the majority of them will be younger than myself. When you're putting on a musical or there's a drama, or something being rehearsed, then there's a wide range of ages involved, and they all have a common purpose to achieve, something, the product. And we all just behave as adults of whatever age it is, it [age] doesn't really matter, it's just we behave as adults. (Simon)

Age has little significance in this setting; a shared common goal to create is what is important. Similarly, professional societies for those interested in business allowed Hugo to initially meet his friends as they shared similar professional interests. However, age had some significance here as retirement is the demarcation for membership of the club. Within the group, a broad age spectrum spanning possibly two generations meet solely to discuss finance and business topics. The group adopts a business-like format, indicative of its reason for coming together. Hugo explained:

[The club] is for retired members over 65 and we meet once a week in the [venue] and we have the usual discussion chats among ourselves. There's about 34

members and they're all retired managers like or senior positions in various companies policemen, doctors, lawyers and the rest and we all have to make research doing the presentation. Somebody gives a presentation for about 30 to 40 minutes duration. And then after the presentation there is a discussion and questions and answers and then the chairperson concludes the meeting with a short summary of what happened during that particular session. It [the presentation] is queried, it's discussed. (Hugo)

Former professions played a part in friendship initiation for Brendan, Janis, and Lucia as they went on to form friendships with former students of theirs. Lucia remembers how she first met her intergenerational friend, Lydia:

I met Lydia when she was a little girl in the dancing class and I was training with the dancing class. I met her and her Mum. My husband would have known Lydia's Dad through the rugby. My husband often brought Lydia's Dad home. Then Lydia would have known my daughter, Mia. She would be the same age as my daughter Mia. We lost touch then for a number of years, but then we reconnected when I moved back here. We are friends now for 26 years. (Lucia)

For Lucia, her first encounter with Lydia was through her profession as a dancing instructor; however, multiple family ties were subsequently discovered. Janis met two of her intergenerational friends as younger adults when she mentored them as artists; she explained how she encountered one of her intergenerational friends, Amy, and illustrated how mentoring her as her teacher was a conduit to friendship in this instance:

So Amy [intergenerational friend] would be a little bit more than 20 years younger than me. I met Amy because I used to run art classes and children's art classes. So Amy was one of my students, and then I moved on and her mother came and asked would I be kind enough to help Amy to get into art college, because she seemed to be a bit adrift, and she really needed, well the only thing she was really interested in was art, and could I help her, because she absolutely had no confidence. So I took Amy under my wing, and Amy went on to college. So, I didn't think any more about it, and then she turned up on my door again, shortly afterwards after she qualified. (Janis)

Work as a conduit was important for Anne and Darina for intergenerational friendship formation; they met their friends in the workplace prior to their retirement. Darina charts the multiple and diverse processes that maintain the friendship with Eoin in a succinct way:

... it turned out that this individual who is now about 53, came into my office and worked in my section [on Darina transferring to a new office], and we became closer friends then and I got to know him, Eoin, very well. Eventually he got married and his wife as it happened was the daughter of a friend of my husbands, whom I had actually met in my youth. Anyway, they are very happily married with two children now, and I was with them through the mother's illness, the father's illness. I have been at their wedding, their christenings, First Holy Communion. Eoin calls me; he sends me postcards from his holidays. [He] just checks how I am. (Darina)

Mentoring is a key process at work here for these participants and those discussed previously. Mentoring facilitated an intergenerational connection through participation in formal employment. The time spent together initially in these shared sites with shared interests allowed the friendship flourish.

If this is the case, what does it mean for those who might never have had the life-chance to acquire a skill/profession which would allow for mentoring or a shared profession? In the past, for instance, many women were confined to the home due to policy which mandated that they retire from paid work on their marriage, or lower income women who would have been less likely to have had the resources needed to get involved in leisure pursuits e.g. art. Jennifer described how she and her intergenerational friend, Eve, enjoyed chatting and laughing about their favourite soap operas on TV, often watching episodes together when the Eve called in the evenings. Iris recounted that she and her friend Molly went on to discover they shared an interest in knitting and crochet and so the friendship grew and flourished after their initial meeting and shared interest. Iris explained how her initial meeting with her intergenerational friend, Molly, was through family. Iris described how she met Molly, her intergenerational friends through her grandchildren as Molly had children the same age as her grandchildren. The children formed friendships and this paved the way for friendship formation between Iris and Molly. It was their shared interest in childrearing through being parents and, in Iris's case, a grandparent that forged their initial bond:

She [Molly] has children that are the same age as my grandchildren and my grandchildren got friendly with her children. Then every summer we spend two months down there [at the seaside] and the grandchildren would visit me and they would go up and down to play and I got friendly with this friend ... and we keep in close touch. We share a lot in common in the ordinary things in life such as

knitting and creative things and things like that so she, Molly, keeps me jogged along and I find her great you know. I see her intensely for two months every year probably every day and then I might see her at Christmas and I might see her at Easter. (Iris)

For Iris being interested and spending time with very young family members was the tie that led to her intergenerational friendship formation, and other interests ‘in ordinary things in life’ strengthened the friendship. Being ‘jogged along’ by Molly seems to be an important process in this friendship. Molly is active in craft making and brings new ideas and encouragement to Iris to continue to engage in these pursuits. Iris admires Molly and appreciates this aspect of their friendship.

Friends and family were links that facilitated intergenerational friendship formation and maintenance for many of the people who took part in this study. Both Lydia and Eileen met their intergenerational friends through a peer-age friend, in both instances their prospective younger friend was their older friend’s daughter. Lorna and Jennifer both narrated how they met their intergenerational friends as children or young adults as they were friends of their daughters. Similarly, Kathryn met one of her intergenerational friends through her son as they were teenage friends. The relationships grew into friendships as the intergenerational friends discovered shared interests and other characteristics which are discussed in detail in further sections of this chapter.

Lastly, four friends described how they initially met their intergenerational friend through being out and about in their local community in different ways. Jack met his intergenerational friends in his local pub, May through working as a volunteer at a fund raising drive in her local community hall. Valerie met her intergenerational friends as the

friends had moved into her community and they met out and about. Hugo mentioned becoming friends with his younger neighbours. A chance event led to the meeting of Sheila and her intergenerational friend. The prospective intergenerational friends both went to park in the same parking space in their local supermarket resulting in their cars tipping off each other with no damage being done. They were both shaken and went for a cup of tea to calm down and they 'just took to each other', and from this beginning their friendship grew.

While the friends met in a myriad of ways, the gateways to intergenerational friendship shared two elements. First, an age integrated, intergenerational shared space or place provided the opportunity for the friends to meet. Leisure pursuits, interest groups or societies, former workplaces, families (their own and their friends' families) or simply through *ad-hoc* social interaction in a community, all were shared spaces by adults of all ages and stages of the life course. In contemporary society, many opportunities are made available to older people to socialise with those of their own age. The people in this study sought out or grasped serendipitous encounters with like-minded people of other ages. Many had maintained their intergenerational friendships which were formed at mid-life and endured to older or oldest age.

Hugo provided a variation on the opportunities, as his group were age segregated within a defined older age band. The members of his group were retired professionals aged 65 and over. However, the reason the group existed was not because they were 'old'. The common denominator was that they were professional business people who continued to perform in that capacity through this group. Therefore, the *raison d'être* of the group was a shared interest and not a shared age. Hugo performed as a professional within the group, exhibiting and sharing his skills and expertise with like-minded individuals. Additionally, Hugo, aged 92, counted the friends he made there as his

intergenerational friends, he explained that they were part of a different generation than he. The group members are countering the losses experienced through formal retirement by recreating a professional platform, agenda and multi-generational ‘colleagues’ in an informal way.

The second element the gateways to friendship share is that the friends encounter each other through going about their ‘normal’ lives, pursuing their own agendas with the people, within the places and the spaces where they live their everyday lives. None of the older friends initially met their younger friends through a virtual medium, for example, through online interest groups or societies. Propinquity played a part in the initial meeting, and subsequently as the friendship grew, as the friends met those who were close by or in reasonable proximity to where they lived or worked. Therefore easily accessible, convenient opportunities provided for the initial and facilitated further get-togethers. Later, as discussed in another section of this thesis, as the friendship becomes stronger and a close affinity is developed, propinquity becomes less important to some of the older friends’ friendships. The friends overcome being physically distant by *making* opportunities to meet (as opposed to *taking* serendipitous opportunities to meet), often sustaining and deepening the friendship through frequent telephone conversations between meetings. Confiding, listening and offering emotional support, along with more light-hearted exchanges form the content of the telephone conversations. Whatever the medium used, what emerges as important in deepening the friendship is the essential elusive ‘ingredient’ that underpins the entire process of friendship formation.

Deepening friendship: from fostering to flourishing

The elusive conduit: 'people you take to and they take to you'

The elusive nature of friendship cautions against any 'formulaic' understanding of becoming and being friends. For instance, Janis stated:

I don't like to give advice, but if I had an attitude to pass on to people who are going into their older years. ... if they were feeling lonely and all of that, to keep their antenna up for opportunities to make friends...keep the antennas up for opportunities that will come your way and have the courage to say yes. You know potential friends, because they can start out by mentoring, like actually these two, Amy and Grace [her intergenerational friendships] did, but it can develop into friendship. Now you might mentor 20 people and get one friend out of it. But it doesn't matter but what I mean is to keep an open attitude. (Janis)

Janis acknowledged that she was open to making new friends in older age. She was mindful of opportunities and possibilities and counsels others who are interested to in making friends to do the same. However, she cautioned that despite a willingness to make friends and having shared interests with 'possible' friendship candidates, an elusive element is necessary for a friendship to grow. Comments made by Walter illustrate how the process of becoming friends can be ambiguous and present difficulties in outlining definitive or prescribed paths to friendship formation:

...strange about friendship, like, there is some people and plenty of people you wouldn't be bothered having them as a friend. ...Friendships are strange and strange how they come about. (Walter)

The approaches and attitudes that the friends share or find interesting in each other can be what attracts them to each other initially in that they ‘take to’ each other and therefore go on to develop a friendship.

To frame this elusive element conceptually as, ‘ways of thinking and being’ allows for an exploration of this essential intangible characteristic of friendship. ‘Ways of thinking and being’ are affective actions, which form part of the fabric that supports intergenerational friendship to develop, be maintained and to deepen. This is explored further in the next sections as an element of being ‘friends in action’. ‘Friends in action’ is what constitutes the relationship as a friendship, according to these participants’ understanding of what or who a friend/friendship is and does. What is meant by ‘being friends in action’ is now examined in detail.

Being friends ‘in action’: fostering, growing and sustaining intergenerational friendship

The processes that assisted in bringing the generations together to form an intergenerational friendship were significant in building the relationship from acquaintance to friendship. While circumstances brought people together across generations, for friendship to develop more is needed in developing shared interests and additionally in growing affective bonds. Janis, in her interview, speaks of recognising this process and labels it accordingly: ‘it was obvious we were friends, because we were friends in action’. This insightful statement ‘friends in action’ indicates that the formation of an initial intergenerational relationship took time and ‘action’ in the form of ‘doing’ friendship, to progress into being recognised and experienced as a (intergenerational) friendship. The ‘actions’ formed a basis of commonality and sharing. The term commonality is used in this thesis and is understood as the shared interests, experiences, ways of being or doing or thinking i.e. the ties that bind the friends in friendship, which

enriched the relationship and facilitated intergenerational friendship growth and increasing closeness.

Having discussed in the previous section how older and younger individuals are brought together through a variety of gateways, these commonalities acted as stepping stones to other 'doings' that in turn deepened the friendship further. Shared leisure pursuits, hobbies and interests were the most prevalent. In time, the friends discovered further shared interests and commonalities. Relating his friendship experiences, Tommy spoke of a lifelong passion for football, which he shares with his intergenerational friends:

I have you know [intergenerational friends], and most of them would be 15 years, from 15 years down, younger than me. You know, so I would meet these lads on a regular basis, and it's mostly football you are talking about. Then in the [football] club you would meet them for a drink after, and you would often go on weekends away and things like that. You know, I would be the old man of the party (laugh). I would be speaking to Martin (intergenerational friend) every day, you know, every day. (Laugh). Yeh, (laugh) mostly about football (laugh). (Tommy)

Tommy's passion for football had reached beyond the environs of the football club where he met his friends, as they progressed to going for drinks after the club meetings. Following on from this, weekends away were then arranged to matches or sometimes just as holidays to relax and enjoy themselves. Less formal or organised interests were also performed as stepping stones as the friends got to know and appreciate each other's particular attributes.

Eileen originally met Joanne, her intergenerational friend, when Joanne was a child, as she is a daughter of a peer-age friend. Eileen described how sharing a passion for clothes and shopping also led to her spending even more time with Joanne who was looking to purchase a more serious investment. Eileen and Joanne spent every Saturday together for a full year viewing houses. Joanne sought Eileen's opinion as she intended to purchase a house. The friends also grasped the opportunity provided by the serious business of house-viewing for enjoying 'the day out' and sharing more light-hearted pursuits:

It was a full year it took, looking and looking and looking [viewing houses together]. Well, of course, out, coffee, lunches, a meal out now and then, but we always did that. During the viewing we always had coffee out and our tea out in the evening. There was no coming back once we left in the morning; there was no return (laugh) till night-time. And maybe an odd bit of looking at the shops, we fitted that in too....in between, and Joanne loves shopping, she's very stylish, and I love shopping, that's my number one pastime now. I love clothes and I have spent all my life shopping and buying clothes (laugh). (Eileen)

It seems their common interest in fashion is extending from shopping for clothes to viewing suitable houses as Joanne sought to buy her first home. Building on this tie, the bond of friendship is strengthened as Joanne now sees Eileen as a trusted confidante in the onerous task of viewing houses. The passion that they share in 'style' is the tie that is binding them in friendship and it is evolving from clothes to house hunting. Eileen also confided that she had some experience in investing in property; she sketched a narrative whereby she was able to negotiate with the estate agent when she and Joanne found a house that they both liked. Eileen drew on the skills she had honed in her own business

dealings in the past to assist Joanne in closing the purchase. House-hunting signalled a shift in the friendship demonstrating the trust Joanne placed in her friend to guide her in this major purchase, thus deepening the friendship. Eileen expressed pride in herself that her informally acquired ‘professional’ skills were useful in assisting her friend. For some of the older friends in this study, professional roles were the sustenance of their friendships, however for others professional roles were simply the launch pad to growing the friendship, as the next section illustrates.

Continuity and expansion of professional roles: retaining the professional self

Many friends met initially through their place of employment. For some, the workplace or professions were simply the ‘meeting site’ for friendship formation. For instance, Anne spoke of how she met her intergenerational friend through her work. However, it was their shared interest in sea-swimming that progressed the friendship on to sharing other friendship activities: having dinner parties and nights out, chatting, confiding and having fun. For Anne and for others, taking her intergenerational friendship out of the professional setting allowed it to develop differently after her retirement. The constraints of a professional relationship become loosened after the retirement of the older friend and this allows the friends to enter into a more colourful and relaxed friendship stage (a contrasting experience is related by Lydia and is outlined in Chapter 6). A life stage process thus emerges. For others, however, their role as a professional continued and is inextricably tied to their identity and to being an intergenerational friend.

Some of the participants continued to perform in professional roles in retirement from formal work (Brendan, Hugo, Maria) often in an informal capacity, for their own pleasure and possibly to retain the status that these professions endow. Maria, 85 years old, was retired from paid work as an educator for pre-school children. Yet, her

intergenerational friendships were formed and maintained by continued involvement in a group of similarly interested parents, international interest groups and professionals involved in promoting a particular approach to pre-school education. During our interview in Maria's home, Maria pointed out the large metal arm with a magnifying glass attached to her PC. Maria explained how her eyesight had deteriorated significantly in her 80s so the magnifying glass was critical for her continuing to work in the area of education. It was essential as it allowed Maria to read and send emails and information to other educational experts online. Maria's commitment to overcoming the age-related deterioration in her eyesight is evident through seeking aids to assist her to continue to work and to continue being deeply involved in the role of *being* an educator. Her passion for her profession continued as she performed in her professional role.

Hugo also continued to perform in his profession, though in a more informal and unpaid way. His intergenerational friends (who are in their 60s and above) were retired professional people with an interest in current affairs, politics and the arts:

... They're [intergenerational friends] all very well, you could classify them as rather cultured people, well-educated and very good conversationalists and they make presentations. We have a meeting every two weeks up in the hall and somebody makes a presentation on some various subjects for about 30 to 40 minutes duration. And then, after the presentation, there is a discussion and questions and answers and then the chairperson concludes the meeting with a short summary of what happened during that particular session. (Hugo)

Hugo additionally participated in another group specifically for retired professionals with expertise in specific business areas:

.. It's [a presentation made by the retired professional] queried, it's discussed and we have outings maybe once a month like to some historic place and every twice a year there is a four day holiday optional. It's very nice so, it's very interesting.

(Hugo)

The groups described by Hugo played an essential part in maintaining his intergenerational friendships. The shared identity of being a professional was at the core of Hugo's friendships: retirement from 'formal' work over 25 years earlier did not seem to alter this identity as a 'professional'. The friendship group here is part of the process of emulating professional roles and identities beyond retirement. Transitioning from one status to another (employed to retired) was challenging for these older friends. The members in Hugo's group, his intergenerational friends sought a way to remain embedded in a professional role by seeking out a platform and site where they could continue to perform this facet of their identities. Brendan, in a similar way, explained how he continued to provide career guidance to his intergenerational friends' children as he once guided those friends when they were his students:

I taught a few of them [intergenerational friends]. It's lovely to rekindle the relationship at a different level. People have observed to me like it is great to have that relationship you know and friendship over such a long time. You would have the game of golf and they [former student's now intergenerational friends] would sort of bring you up to date on their own lives. One of them, Bobby, has come back to me and his daughter was doing the Central Applications Office [for third level education applicants] and the whole decisions have been made around that, and I had a lot of contact with Bobby and with his daughter you know, and that has been very interesting. (Brendan)

Brendan continued to use his skills from his profession as a career guidance teacher before his retirement to assist Bobby's daughter. Additionally, illustrated in this narrative, is the process of how sharing leisure pursuits in the form of playing golf together with his former student allowed them to move on from the more practical assistance he provided in the form of career guidance to a more personal exchange, in chatting and sharing information about their lives.

In addition to what was outlined in the previous section in relation to work and professions, this is also evident in friendships which are formed through an initial introduction through the older friends' children. While their children were the connections that facilitated the friends to meet, as discussed in the opening sections of this chapter, the initial relationships transitioned to a friendship between like-minded adults. The friendships developed and deepened through further 'actions', for example, Lorna and her daughter's friend, Megan, shared a passion for golf and arranged to play together. Lunches, visits to each other's homes, days out together and frequent holidays were shared by Lorna and Megan, as the friendship grew and flourished.

For another participant, Jennifer, her intergenerational friend Eve called in each evening 'to check the windows'. Jennifer had mobility constraints and Jennifer's daughter had performed this daily check on her mother before she had moved to another town a considerable distance from Jennifer. Her daughter's friend, Eve, offered to perform the task by popping in for a few minutes most days to Jennifer's home and so the relationship grew into friendship, enduring now for over ten years. They enjoyed 'a great chat' about their families and the happenings in their local community and often watched TV together. For these participants, while their children were the conduits to enduring intergenerational friendships, the friendships evolved and flourished through 'everyday'

shared interests, spending more time together and through simply enjoying each other's company.

A further benefit was experienced by Kathryn who met her intergenerational friend, Joyce, through her son. In Kathryn's relationship, recognition of a shared appreciation of music and theatre led to excursions to the theatre and other events, with Joyce collecting Kathryn in her car as many of these productions took place in the city some distance away, as well as more local events. Enjoying each other's company on the journey and at the events, the friends began to speak with each other on the telephone a few times a week. The friends then made the commitment to meet every week for Sunday lunch and to go for a drive afterwards. Kathryn explained how mobility problems meant she was constrained in walking any distance from her home and that she no longer drove any great distances. These outings in her friend's company held particular value for her as they allowed her to visit places and events that she could no longer access with ease since her mid-80s when she had stopped driving beyond her immediate locality. An independent individual, it seemed that Kathryn could receive this 'bounty' only through friendship as she understood Joyce enjoyed the outings as much as she did. Kathryn's friendship supported her to continue to take part in interests that she enjoyed. Continuing to take part in interests and passions is further examined in the next section, with an additional function being fulfilled through a 'take home' approach as the friendships are deepening.

The emergence of a 'take-home' dimension

Continuing to take part in the interests and passions which he enjoyed and shared with his intergenerational friends was essential to Walter, and he took what seemed to be an inventive approach to ensure this. Walter had a large screen mounted on the wall of his

sitting room, with a projector permanently set up and linked to his PC. These items were essential to him as an active photographer who wished to share, showcase and review his work. Now in his 90s, Walter no longer drove his car and the camera club he had attended for over 35 years was a distance away. His intergenerational friends frequently collected Walter and drove him to the club. Having this equipment installed, Walter frequently hosted get-togethers in his own home with his intergenerational friends, who were fellow camera club members. The photographers could show and critique each other's work, along with working on preparing exhibitions and competition entries. This additionally led to the necessity for the friends to make frequent excursions to sites to take photographs for these projects.

It could be observed that hosting these get-togethers eliminated the necessity to travel to the club if the weather was bad or if Walter was feeling particularly tired. However, more importantly to Walter, it increased the frequency and time spent with his friends on a passion that they shared as long evenings were passed in his home, often many times within a week, working with different people on different photography projects. Essentially, it could be perceived that Walter had devised a 'take home' strategy; Walter brought the camera club to his own home.

Another participant who planned a 'take home' involving her intergenerational friends was Angela. On being invited into Angela's home for our interview, the sparse furnishings (two chairs and a coffee table) and bare walls seemed unusual. In a prominent position, the only wall decoration in the entrance hall was a plaque with the words 'friends welcome and family by appointment' printed on it. This sole remaining decoration signalled the importance of friendship in Angela's life and she advised she would hang it in a prominent position in her new home. Angela apologised for the lack of furniture and decoration in her home and revealed that the reason the household items were sold or

packed away was because she was moving to community older-age living in a nearby village the following week. She spoke then of her hopes and aspirations and the significant changes this move would bring and how older age (she was 94) and a status transitioning from married to widowhood had influenced her decision to move from her family home. She expressed her hopes in relation to the continuation of her intergenerational friendships. She was confident that her younger friends would continue to visit her, that their excursions would continue, and that their friendships would not be lessened in any way by her moving. Angela then envisaged that this age-related transition (in moving to community integrated old age housing) will be allayed by continuing to cultivate her friendships; the ties to her friends will not be severed through this change.

For Angela, any concerns she felt about loneliness that may ensue as she leaves her community and her friends is mitigated as she trusted in continuing friendship ties. The ‘take-home’ element is part of the process to negotiate a significant age-related transition. Her friends, being of a younger age than she remain in their community and therefore additionally provide a link for Angela to her former community as they remain embedded in its practices. The next section moves on to consider how other people who took part in this study provided accounts of change, in the form of new interests, which they perceived as providing opportunities for participation and friendship formation.

New interests: being saved from ageing oblivion

The meaning of his intergenerational friendships is emphasised by Walter in very strong terms and he particularly alluded to the role interests and leisure activities played as being his ‘salvation’. I enquired from Walter what he meant by ‘salvation’ and he explained:

The camera club was the salvation. Well like when you do be at home you feel kind of bored and you would be going the same places day after day, Sunday after Sunday. You wouldn't have any variety in things and then the camera club changed and different people and different outings and things and we all [his wife and son] used to go. (Walter)

Walter suggested here that in contrast to a view of ageing that presents the older person as static, he actively sought out new interests in older years and found these in the intergenerational setting of the camera club.

Illumination of this intent was demonstrated by another participant. On completion of our interview and after the recorder had been turned off and as I got ready to leave Valerie's home, an alarm sounded. Valerie explained that it was the daily reminder set on her tablet to continue her lessons through language software. She exclaimed that she had forgotten (and had originally intended) in our interview to explain that she was learning the Irish language, as her intergenerational friend had encouraged her and placed software on her tablet to assist her, showing her how to use it to progress her proficiency in the Irish language. Valerie went on to explain that emboldened by her new knowledge, she intended to join a local language class and was hopeful of making new friends of all ages through this new interest. Through expanding her interests, Valerie was seeking to expand her friendship network.

Additionally for some other participants, interests and roles were expanded now that (in retirement) they had more time to pursue these interests. For Simon, transitioning from his 'day job' to his 'night job', he described how he had worked during the day in a management capacity and at night in amateur theatre productions. Simon's lifelong

passion for music allowed him to change his profession after retirement and to ‘keep being busy’. Simon worked in the music industry in an informal capacity and became involved in several groups:

I’ve said it several times since I’ve retired, I’m not sure how I got time to do the job I was in! Because I was so busy, and I just keep being busy, so, and there’s no limit to that. There’s no limit to me playing music or directing the music of shows or anything like that. (Simon)

Later in the interview, it became clear just how significant this new role was as friendships were formed, grew and flourished. Simon was cognisant of this and had come to an understanding of why he had made so many good friends now, as he explained:

It [friendship] was because we were all involved with music, which is ageless... and I’ve rehearsed shows in schools, and it’s all young people obviously, secondary type schools, and while you’re involved in the music it sort of removes any age barriers, it’s almost like language barriers. (Simon)

The function of shared commonalities is evident in Simon’s narrative. He believed that the age barrier can be transcended through shared commonalities which are ‘ageless’. Simon went on to describe outings and holidays away with his friends, and the evolution of like-minded acquaintances to like-minded good friends was apparent in these stories. Music, for him, was the common language which rises above any generational differences. What is additionally interesting is that Simon identified the existence of age barriers which required a common language (in this instance in the form of music) to be broken down. Therefore, for some of the friends, while their intergenerational friends

were initially made through their work or professions, expanded and new roles based on a shared passion overcame any perceived age barriers. This commonality, a love of music, not only strengthened or deepened the friendship, but belied an age segregated existence for Simon.

Thus far this section has considered the process of maintaining, growing and deepening friendships over time as the intergenerational friends were discovering and developing further interests in common, spending more time together socialising or in each other's homes, with increased regular, often daily, contact. The amorphous nature of friendship evolution and maintenance is discernible in all of the friendship narratives. The process involved in moving from acquaintance to friend could be understood as friendship 'maps', with each friend describing their personal road map to becoming friends in action, often negotiating and overcoming perceived age barriers, segregation or stagnation on the way. The friendships branched out in many directions as new bonds were discovered that reinforced the bond. Yet another significant milestone or aspect to being friends in action emerged from the data as the friends reported not only sharing more of their lives with each other but additionally developing an affective bonding which they viewed as quintessential to being an intergenerational friend. These affective, intangible 'actions' are examined in the next section.

Intangible 'doings' of being 'friends in action'

As previously stated in Chapter 2, friendship is a contested concept in that who is considered a friend and what friendship entails varies. A conceptual rendering of the notion and characteristic of friendship emerged from the data, in some cases directed by theoretical sampling within each interview as the older friend reflected on what they considered made a friend and friendship. In many cases, this proved unnecessary as the

friends themselves provided the insight naturally as the older friends in this study spoke of what they understood their intergenerational friendships (and indeed, friendship in general) to be. Confiding, trusting, being loyal, being supportive and caring, along with being enjoyable company and fun to be with and, lastly, sharing ways of thinking and being were understood to be the essential characteristics found in their friends and their friendships. These characteristics of intergenerational friendship can be conceptualised as intangible, emotional elements of being ‘friends in action’. I use the term ‘intangible doings’ as an umbrella term to encompass the emotional states and ‘doings’ that the friends portrayed. In the paragraphs that follow I explore the portrayals of these intangible ‘doings’, commencing with narratives in relation to support, followed by trust and loyalty. These were often portrayed in tandem, as illustrated by the following insights:

Well it [intergenerational friendship] is loyalty and it’s being able to confide in somebody, knowing that it is not going to go any further... To talk over problems or whatever and just having fun, really. (Anne)

Iris’s description provides an example of the importance of trust in her intergenerational friendship:

Well, you know, it’s good to offload to someone you can trust and your anxieties and your worries.... I’d have friends down the end of the road but they’d be acquaintances you know. What I mean so, friendship I suppose is somebody you can really trust and when you’re throwing trust about, what’s fifteen years? (Iris)

The age difference between friends is trivial where trust is present. Trust is an inherent part of friendship for Iris. More casual relationships are lacking in this characteristic: a

demarcation is evident between casual friends who are neighbours and a trusted confidante who is a close friend. Lessening the burden of carrying concerns and anxieties is possible within deep intergenerational friendship ties. As each participant reflected on their intergenerational friendship the characteristics of confiding and loyalty along with trust emerged, as these examples illustrate, both men and women spoke about the importance of these characteristics. Walter stated:

You mightn't see them [intergenerational friends] for six months and have the same thing [trust] going on. And you would know they would oblige you and that you could confide in them you know. (Walter)

Perhaps the very essence of the intangible 'actions' in intergenerational friendship was sketched by Janis as she quietly reflected on her recent outing with Grace, her intergenerational friend:

We [Janis and Grace] are talking, we are also being silent in companionship, so that is a lovely part of friendship. You don't always have to be entertaining each other here or swapping our stories, so I think in friendship there is an element of companionship. In the summer sometime, we [Grace and Janis] just go off and we bring art pads you know, sketching equipment and a chair and we go off up the mountains or wherever it is. We spend the day and bring a little picnic, and spend the day and turning the chairs around and doing a sketch of everything we see and that kind of thing, and that I find is great for me. I think when I think about personal friends there is an element of it [sharing a companionable silence], not just with friends that are much younger than me, but with male friends or friends my own age, the [silent] companionship is something that attracts me. (Janis)

The ‘action’ sketched out by Janis is a unique and valued foundational characteristic of a close friendship i.e. being comfortable enough in another’s company to share a silence. Alongside the more animated doings of friendship, an intangible ‘not doing’ is equally valued. For Janis, this attribute is observed to be a common denominator across gender, peer-age and intergenerational friendships.

In the following paragraphs the breadth and depth of ‘intangible doings’ in relation to being friends in action are illustrated. I will commence this analysis by exploring how they are enacted in the context of family. Given the emphasis on the family lives of older adults in extant literature this is an important consideration to provide context to where intergenerational friendship ‘fits’ in the older friends’ daily lives.

Being friends in action in the context of family members and families

Kathryn stated that while she is ‘very lucky’ and has ‘a lovely family’:

I would say it’s hard to do without friends and I always had lots of friends, and very close friends. You can confide in them, there is lots of things you would tell friends that you would not tell anyone else. Yes, there would be times you would tell your friends what you wouldn’t tell your family. (Kathryn)

The intergenerational friend as a confidant in a way that family cannot be is further illustrated and is also important to Iris, as she explained:

They [intergenerational friends] would offload to me family worries, a daughter or son having a difference with them or you know that sort of everyday experience. You get it off your chest and sometimes if you get an experience like

that off your chest to somebody who isn't a member of family, it's good to offload onto a third person who isn't connected to the family. And one feels better for having done it. (Iris)

While Iris commenced by explaining that she is a confidant for her younger friends, it emerges through this short narrative that the role is mutual. Reciprocity in sharing a confiding role is part of being a friend. Iris explained how confiding in a friend leads to feeling better; she is speaking about her experiencing this feeling after she has shared her worries with her friend. Holding an 'outsider' position, the intergenerational friend is ideally placed to give or receive confidences concerning family members.

The importance of reciprocity is emphasised by Bill. Bill drew my attention to a photo of him and his wife. It was the frame that held particular resonance for Bill, however, and not its contents. He explained how a friend had gifted the photo frame to them when Bill was recovering from a serious illness. Inscribed on the frame, and pointed out to me by Bill was the inscription 'so rare, so few, great friends like you'. This prompted Bill to recall the context of the gift giving as he explained:

It was the friendship though; it was, it was, the psychological support that was the biggest thing of it now. It wasn't that they [intergenerational friends] were here putting clothes on me or putting dinners on the table for me. Though they would have done that as well, but it was the psychological support. That I knew that I had these people, friends, were obviously wishing you well and anxious that if you wanted anything that they would do it for you, ya know, that's really what stood out to me now. But, you know we were, we were good friends in our own time too. (Bill)

Given that there is an expectation in literature that practical and instrumental support is what is important in intergenerational friendship, particularly to men in any type of friendship, Bill contravened this notion. It is the emotional and psychological support that Bill valued in his friendships. Bill additionally evoked the reciprocal nature of his friendships, as he alluded to the support he has provided in the past to his friends, in the context of support provided to him now.

With illness as the context, further insight into differing functions of friends and family relationships is illustrated by Tommy. Tommy explained how he had been seriously ill and recovering from surgery for a number of weeks. Tommy was effusive in his praise for his wife and children, describing how they took care of him throughout his illness and recovery. His intergenerational friends had supported him throughout his illness by telephoning him regularly once he had left the hospital. He confided in them his fears and concerns that he did not want to worry his family about.

Tommy described how he had missed the company of these friends, he iterated how he had been 'feeling down' as he missed the laughter and exchanges of good-humoured teasing which were a feature of his friendships. Tommy pronounced that he could temporarily forgo his negative feelings about his illness during these exchanges with his friends. Being with his intergenerational friends was so enjoyable that he was provided with a respite, he could forget that he was ill. Tommy broached the subject with his closest intergenerational friend, Martin, and Martin explained to Tommy that they (Martin and two others, Joe and David) had not wanted to intrude on what they perceived as family time. As a result, Martin, Joe and David had agreed to call in that day, the day of our interview, and bring him for a drive in their car. Tommy's anticipation of the drive was palpable, as he spoke with enthusiasm of seeing his younger friends. Tommy's joy

was observed and welcomed by those within Tommy's family. As I was leaving their home Tommy's wife remarked, while being unaware of the content of my interview with Tommy, that she hadn't seen him as 'happy in himself in a long while' as he anticipated meeting and getting out with 'the lads'.

As far as Tommy and other participants are concerned, friendship is not something 'less than' family relationships (which is normatively understood to be the primary relationship in the lives of older people), but instead fills an emotional 'gap' that family cannot. Friends are observed to be meeting different needs to those usually associated with being a spouse, parent or grandparent within a family. Intergenerational friendship offers the people who took part in this study a chance to be themselves beyond these responsible roles. The people who took part in this study described how they value the opportunity that their intergenerational friendship offers them to act in a more light-hearted, carefree manner or conversely to share worries and concerns about family members with someone who can be trusted yet who can perhaps be an impartial confidant.

There were many accounts related in the interviews of the emotional support that the older friend gained from the younger friend. Many of the narratives centred on the loss of family members, of struggling to live with the loss. For example, Valerie, now a widow, described how when her husband died her friend, Denise, provided constant support despite being resident in another country. Denise was abroad for three years in total. Yet the emotional support between the two close friends did not waver in that time and was transmitted through the phone lines in their frequent and long telephone calls, as Valerie explained:

When Craig [Valerie's husband] died she [Denise] was in America. Herself and her husband were over there for a couple of years working. I missed her terrible. ...I mean after Craig died you know because, as she said herself, 'I

wish I had been there for you'. You know, but sure, she couldn't, you know, it would have been nice, and that killed her was that she wasn't here. She used to ring me every week. She would always ring; I never had to ring her. She would always ring me. (Valerie)

Valerie went on to confide how much that support meant to her. The distance apart became irrelevant as she could confide in Denise who provided the emotional support Valerie needed to get through that transition in her life in the months following her husband's death.

Support in relation to other spousal concerns was also iterated by May. During our interview May's husband, Mervin, interrupted May as she spoke of her friendships, as he wandered into the room where we were conducting our interview. May explained how Mervin had Alzheimer's disease and that she was his primary carer. She spoke then of the strength, enjoyment and emotional support both she and Mervin garnered from their intergenerational friendships.

Her two friends, a married couple Naomi and Niall, visited frequently. May and Mervin regarded Naomi and Niall as friends. While May and Naomi chatted, Niall would bring Mervin out into the garden where they would 'potter around' doing some chores, chatting and spending time together. For May, this respite was very welcome and she could relax and spend time with Naomi, who would provide a listening ear and emotional support if May was finding that day a difficult one. May also spoke of how she enjoyed seeing her husband laughing and occupied outside, happy to be spending time with Niall. In Valerie's and May's accounts, situations are described which could be understood as age related. While widowhood or forms of dementia can be experienced at younger ages,

they are more likely to occur in older age. The negative age-related status transitions and illnesses are made more manageable by the emotional support and caring of an intergenerational friend.

'Action' as emotional support during illness

Emotional support in the face of illness was also provided by the older friends to their younger friend. Sheila relayed what she refers to as a particularly dramatic and distressing incident whereby she provided emotional support and was a confidant in a harrowing situation:

I knew Caroline [younger friend] was suffering from depression, and roughly in about a month after, early in the morning the phone rang and it was her. She said 'I am going down now to the river to do away with myself and I said 'Oh my God, you are not going to do that', 'I am' she said. 'Well, hold on' I said, 'I'll be over in fifteen minutes'. She was very bad now Well, we had a cup of tea and I stayed with her until lunchtime. I just talked to her. Caroline always says to me afterwards 'you saved my life'. (Sheila)

Sheila spoke further of how she was aware that the young woman's family would be heartbroken if anything happened to her. She described how she calmly relayed this to Caroline, reassuring and calming her and encouraging her to get medical support. Caroline confided in Sheila as her trusted friend. Sheila felt that after this incident the friendship deepened and became even closer. Caroline continued to confide in, and depend on Sheila for emotional support since then. Darina spoke of one of her intergenerational friends, Alice, with whom she maintains regular contact, but rarely,

now, meets face-to-face. Darina provides continual and frequent emotional support by telephone:

One [Alice, her intergenerational friend] in particular is in a rather sad situation, a lot of nerve problems, and physical joint problems, and can't work, and is out of work months. I listen to her. She is really in a sad state, to be pitied really, because I can't see where she is going from here. Alice is only middle fifties.
(Darina)

Alice was a former work colleague of Darina's and they would have met for lunch or coffee after Darina retired. Alice was no longer able to attend work and rarely left her home. By maintaining frequent phone contact Darina feels she can still support Alice, and that their friendship is stronger than ever through this bond. It is notable, given the importance attached to propinquity in the friendship literature, that for Darina the meaning-making of being a 'true' friend does not require her physical presence but her affective actions in providing emotional support through the medium of the telephone. This narrative and the stories that immediately precede it focus on the more solemn elements of friendship. However, as Iris pointed out:

A friendship is not always a cry for help. It's just being together, friendship, chit-chat that sort of thing. So we don't notice the age difference and that. (Iris)

Without exception, the people who participated in this study signalled the significance of sharing fun and laughter in their intergenerational friendships.

Fun in friendship: having 'the craic' and 'the spraoi'

This light-hearted commonality was signalled to be of immense importance in the experience of intergenerational friendship. It was without exception emphasised and alluded to by each individual as they reflected on and signalled implicitly and explicitly the important place it held in their friendships: it took the form of enjoyment and fun often expressed through laughter. The terms used in the title of this section - spraoi and craic - are both colloquial Irish language terms for fun and laughter. The value of laughter is emphasised by Valerie, who had revealed that she missed, Craig, her [deceased] husband and sometimes she felt lonely and depressed. Valerie mentioned the importance of shared laughter in her intergenerational friendship with Denise:

Yeah, a bit of a laugh there....if you are feeling down you could say, Denise will we go for a walk. Ah yeah, a great relationship, you know we have a great aul laugh. She is great fun and all, I am eighteen years older than Denise, I never really think of it that way. (Valerie)

A more serious benefit of laughter, laughter as a therapy is proclaimed to be important to Lucia as she engaged in coping with widowhood. Laughter in enduring friendships discounted the need for further friendship formation. Lucia declared:

Friends are very important. Friends, what would you do without them? I'm not good on my own. I love people. I don't see myself making any more close friends. They [the ones I have], will grow old with me. I get on with younger and older people; age doesn't matter to me at all. I love people, I love talking to them and having a bit of laugh. Laughter is a great therapy. (Lucia)

Eileen perceived shared laughter as an essential element of the process of transitioning from a good friend to a close friend as she stated that shared laughter and joy is a conduit for close friendship:

We [Eileen and Joanne] had the greatest laughs... we laugh and laugh when we go out, and, I mean, I have to put great effort into it [going out] now, because I'm killed with arthritis. We had more laughs and fun together, and that brought us even closer. (Eileen)

Tommy throughout the interview referred to 'the craic' (a colloquial term for fun) he enjoys having with his intergenerational friends; he mentioned the word 11 times in our interview. Tommy had previously spoken about how he felt the need to confide in his friends and to seek their emotional support during and after a recent illness. It seems then that he needs both of these characteristics in his friendships as both are signalled to be of equal importance to him. Walter spoke about 'having the spraoi' (a colloquial term for fun) and located it in tandem with providing support when it is necessary, indicating the importance of doing both in a friendship and in a reciprocal manner:

You would always have a bit of a laugh. You wouldn't want to be too serious, [although] when there is trouble in the family or anything you would call down you know and they would call up to you. (Walter)

Kathryn reflected on how fortunate she is in her intergenerational friendships, she remarked particularly that 'they are all very good, good fun, and good people'. In this statement we see how being fun is a characteristic that Kathryn observed and admired in

her friends, along with the other equally important characteristics of being ‘good’(supportive), good people (trustworthy and loyal).

Reflecting on the previous paragraphs and the emphasis that the older friends in this study placed on joy, laughter and fun in friendship, in the literature pertaining to the study of older age these enjoyable and carefree characteristics are rarely mentioned in conjunction with older age (Chapter 2). Fun and laughter are a vital part of ‘being friends in action’ for *all* of the older friends who shared their views in this research. Some illumination as to why these light-hearted and enjoyable elements are important in intergenerational friendship is offered in Chapter 5.

In summary, along with being fun and enjoyable company, a friend is a loyal and trusted confidante who will listen to worries and anxieties and these confidences are held in trust. Crucially, as examined in the next section, these characteristics (*inter alia*, being a confidant and confiding, trusting and being trustworthy, being supportive and giving support) are required to flow both ways and possibly these characteristics have underpinned the expectation of reciprocity between the friends.

Reciprocity: ‘giving and taking’ between intergenerational friends

Reciprocity can be understood as giving and taking between the friends. It takes many forms, but the essential action is the bidirectional flow of the attributes that the friends considered essential in their friendships. Giving and taking emerged as an important feature of intergenerational friendship for the older friends. This is salient as the literature point out that older people are motivated to choose intergenerational friendships as the lone passive recipients of the ‘bounties’ of friendship (in the form of care). Iris denounced

this form of friendship as she sketches a picture of the mutual flow of confiding between her friend, Jane and her:

Then I can go and offload to her. I call it offloading and Jane can offload to me because we're very good friends You're equals in their [friend's] company; you are equals when you're chatting. (Iris)

Iris confides in her friend Jane and her friend confides in her, and for Iris, this is enabled because they are equals within the bounds of friendship. They share the same equal status as they are *very good friends*. For Janis, the bounties or benefits of friendship are not unequally experienced, there is exact measurement of equality in the entire experience of friendship with both parties to the friendship giving and taking in equal measure. Janis explained:

I think it's like a shared experience and also that we are both getting something out of it, out of the relationship and the friendship because I would say it's very 50/50. (Janis)

Maria emphasised how mutuality is an essential component of her intergenerational friendships. Maria was in the oldest-old group and had mobility difficulties; it would be easy for an observer to assume that she was the 'recipient of care' in an intergenerational friendship. This is not the case, rather the process inherent in being a friend is one of 'give and take' as Maria stressed in her narrative:

But I know that if there is anything the matter they would come to my rescue, you know, that sort of thing. And there is solidarity about the friendships that they give me, its solidarity. They are with me; they are for me. That's the sort of thing you

expect...and you are for that person....it has to be mutual...that's how I feel, to have a friend you have to have mutual understanding and mutual consideration.
(Maria)

The shared elements alluded to here by Maria - solidarity, understanding and consideration - are signalled as being important to Maria as a necessary ingredient in her friendships. Maria and her friends share these ways of thinking about friendship. Her statements that her friends are 'with her' and 'for her', are both strong statements of social support, but she also alluded to a broader 'if anything is the matter', this could encapsulate a broad array of support. Other people alluded to more pragmatic forms of giving and taking and these are drawn together in the following discussion.

Practical forms of 'giving and taking'

Beyond the intangible, emotional giving and taking that the friends engage in, more pragmatic exchanges are recounted by the friends. Bill, in a previous section, has spoken about the importance of reciprocity in his friendships as his younger friends provided emotional support while he was ill. Bill contextualised the emotional support against a backdrop of his support having been given to his friends in the past, evoking the principle of reciprocity. It was possible to identify numerous examples of reciprocity from the data, as the individuals spoke of the many ordinary transfers that are undertaken with their friends in their everyday lives. The range of exchanges is broad and rooted in everyday requirements, but essential. For instance, Valerie provided a description of such an exchange:

Yeah, if anything goes wrong with my iPad, straight up to him, or my phone, straight up to him, he will fix all that for me. Yeah, if I wanted to put an app on it [her phone], up to Conor and Conor sorted it out for me, you know, and did all the things for me on it... When they go away even for a day I always go up and feed the cat, you know when they go away on holidays I will always mind the cat and of course Conor will always come back with something [a gift], and I'd say what are you doing bringing back something to me. (Valerie)

Services, in the form of practical assistance, are offered and given by the friends that address necessities which they could source possibly as paid services but which the friends are happy to perform as a form of barter. This is additionally practised as a form of knowledge exchange. Consider how May cited practical examples of reciprocity in the form of knowledge exchange and exchanges of care as 'an unspoken agreement' in her intergenerational friendship:

When I got a computer I asked Naomi to learn how to use it and she taught me the basics. I always done sewing for Naomi and Niall. If I am stuck I know I can depend on her. I had a fall here and my husband doesn't drive anymore so she [Naomi] came over and brought me into CareDoc and waited with me and brought me back again and wanted to know did I need anyone to drive me to the hospital the next day. To me that is friendship. I would do the same for her if anything happened to the kids or anything and she needed a hand. I am there for her. It's sort of an unspoken agreement between us. Well, to be there when you need them [friends] I do think that is important, on the phone or drop in to say such and such a thing has happened can you give me a hand and for me to do the same for them, it has to be two way. (May)

The process is not linear in a like-for-like way. Darina offered an account of an exchange that is, for her, linked but may not be obviously so. Darina spoke about supporting her intergenerational friend, Eoin, as he struggled to live with Parkinson's disease. She and Eoin telephoned each other, providing emotional support as a confidant in listening to Eoin's struggles with his illness and encouraging him to persevere. Visits to Eoin's family home, as his wife and children had also become her friends, were also important. Darina spoke of how Eoin had provided practical assistance to her many years earlier, as a widow raising young children:

He used to come by if I needed anything fixed. He is very kind and helpful, and very capable and he got to know me very well, and my youngest son. Anyway, this chap Eoin used to come by and help me if my car was acting up, or something needed to be fixed, and we stayed close all these years ...and we are in touch. And he has actually become ill with Parkinson's at a very young age, which I find very sad. (Darina)

Temporal considerations seemed irrelevant as Darina remembered being the beneficiary of knowledge at a time when it was valuable for her and she sought to reciprocate with an offering of emotional support when her friend and his family most needed it. Performances of give and take are perceived to be more nuanced than may first appear. The giving and receiving may be immediate or may span across many years. It takes many forms as these accounts and many others in the data testify, spanning across many domains both practical and affective.

Furthermore, an insight into why reciprocity may be so important to the older friends can be extrapolated from Brendan's account. Brendan indicated that providing practical support and knowledge to his friends fulfilled a particular desire for him:

I suppose from a personal satisfaction point of view just feeling needed, and useful, and in demand, you know just in that friendship sort of way. (Brendan)

The importance of friendship permeates this narrative as Brendan had earlier spoken of how retirement from his job, illness and attaining older age had led to him feeling isolated and useless: 'you are just sort of dropped out of society'. Performing reciprocal 'acts' within a friendship makes one feel useful, needed and included, providing a sense of personal satisfaction and belonging. Reciprocity as a component of intergenerational friendship contradicts the narrow perception in extant literature of intergenerational friendship as imbalanced, often portraying the older friend as the 'receiver' and the younger friend as the 'giver' of bodily care and support. While sharing was a significant factor in friendship, other more challenging factors also featured.

Being challenged and being curious through differences

Woven through the narratives were some challenges, in the form of differences to be managed that could be viewed as a 'downside' of being an older friend in an intergenerational friendship. First, these took the form of acknowledging the ageing body: particularly a 'depleting stamina'. Second, being at a different stage of life with different priorities often presented challenges in friendship maintenance. A macro level influence, in the increased labour force participation of women, impacted on the intergenerational friendships of some of the older friends who took part in this research. However,

‘differences’ were additionally perceived as being an interesting element of intergenerational friendship. None of the participants indicated that these factors led to friendship cessation. Instead, the people who took part in this study ‘managed’ or valued the differences. I will now explore these factors in more detail, commencing with depleting stamina.

For many who took part in this research, the nature of the meetings with their intergenerational friends had changed due to depletion in stamina recounted by the older friend, which they attributed to ageing and being older. The older friends recognised this change and made adjustments accordingly, Janis and others spoke of resting prior to meeting with their younger friends to prepare for an outing together. For instance, Maria spoke of a comparison with her intergenerational friends with whom she worked, often in meetings that took place in the evenings:

You see the thing is if you have got vigour and muscle power you can go on and work for ages, see, I am really ready for bed by half past nine, and I am really, really tired, you know you do feel tired, and you do.....you know you haven’t the energy, you really haven’t. Whereas people in their 60s, they still have energy.
(Maria)

One couple in the interview described how ageing and their experience of the constraints of an ageing body influenced the nature of their socialising with their intergenerational friends. Breda and Bill had been discussing the recent ‘murder mystery’ themed party they had held for 17 of their intergenerational friends as a ‘thank you’ for their (caring about) support during Bill’s recent serious illness. They reflected on how entertaining their intergenerational friends had changed. In the past, Breda and Bill had

frequently entertained their friends at home. Yet, this had become an infrequent occurrence in recent years. Bill observed that as he and Breda had grown older, they tired more easily:

Yeah, I'd say it's just like the two of us; a lot of the entertaining at home now can be quite tiring. Ya know when you get to our age. (Bill)

Breda made observations on changes she had observed. These observations can be conceptualised as macro level changes influencing micro level experiences in intergenerational friendships. Macro level changes in society, in the form of the increased participation of women in the work force, impact on intergenerational friendships. Breda remarked that she sometimes felt lonely during the day. When I probed on why this was the case, Breda spoke of how friends do not call during the day now as they used to:

Not as often [visiting] as they did, everybody seems to be working during the day now, you know, and then in the evenings they want to come and sit down, or go to meetings or watch the television or whatever. (Breda)

For Breda, being at a different stage of life meant she had the time and desire to be with intergenerational friends while they are working and unavailable. In common then with many of the older friends, Breda had peer-age friends along with intergenerational friends. As a possible 'solution', Breda played bridge several mornings a week with a group of retired people. In this way, Breda mitigated the 'downside' to having a friend network of only younger friends by seeking pursuits within a time that was convenient to Breda and other older people.

Anne also reflected on how *her* intergenerational friends juggled work and family life with young children. The younger friends were constrained in meeting Anne as often as she wished. They prioritised the call that children claimed on their time. Anne joined a book club with her peer-age friends:

I am in the book club, but not with either of them [intergenerational friends]. They would not have the time. (Anne)

Anne did not express any resentment; instead she took a conciliatory stance to facilitate intergenerational friendship maintenance. Anne further elaborated on this factor of being an intergenerational friend to an age-other:

It's difficult, she, Beth, doesn't have a huge amount of time, so I just let her lead as to what she wants to do.... Yes, she makes time...yes, it's great. I do appreciate that, but I always let her lead I would rarely text her and say 'oh, it's a lovely day, maybe we should go for a swim', because I would never put her under that pressure. Because I know how difficult life is for her, and so I always wait for her, and she knows that, she knows that it's not that I am not interested. She knows that I let her lead on that. (Anne)

Walter also explained that he understands his friends' commitment to their younger families. He reflected on how he feels lonely sometimes as he would like to see more of his intergenerational friends:

I'd be lonely at times. I be lonely at night time here, sitting at the fire and everything. I'd wish someone would call. Watching television, I don't watch much television, watching videos or that, there's nothing like the real thing. But

people have their own house and their own families to look after and you can't expect them. (Walter)

For Walter, the company or distraction provided by television or other forms of media is not a substitute 'for the real thing' i.e. the presence of his friends. His friends, who are all younger, have less free time than Walter whose children are grown. In a later section, it emerges that Walter formed a process to manage this element of friendship. Darina mused on how her peer-age friends have more free time to spend travelling as their children have grown-up:

I have friends, they would be barely eighty [years of age]. They would be younger than me and we would always go on a holiday to [place] with them, but they would be my age group. (Darina)

For Darina, her peer-age friends fulfil a need as they are located in a different stage of the life-course and are free to travel at will, unconstrained by other commitments. The value of a mix of friends from across the age spectrum seems useful to many of the individuals.

Anne provided insight into differences in opinions between her and her younger friends and describes them as 'intergenerational' in nature. In engaging in generational observing, Anne proclaimed:

We would rarely disagree, but when we do, it would be intergenerational. I would have a view on that wouldn't necessarily coincide with her, Beth's view, like em, Beth was having, one of her daughters was having a teenage birthday party and we were joking and laughing about it, and she was saying, 'I don't know how I am going to keep control, you know (laugh), you know yourself', and I said, 'you

know, as long as nobody ends up pregnant or whatever, nine months later that they don't come to you with-what happened at your party?'...and they both said 'well sure that could happen anywhere'. Whereas I would be saying it definitely won't happen on my watch (laugh). That [opposing points of view] was definitely intergenerational, I would be taking steps to make sure that nobody got pregnant. I have often seemed much more old-fashioned in my views...they seem to take it on the chin, that, you know, ok, well these things happen. (Anne)

Anne's views on teenage pregnancy, she feels, are at odds with her younger friends' views and she points to a generational difference. However, Anne went on to clarify how these intergenerational differences add an additional element of interest to their friendship for her. Engaging in friendship with younger women exposed Anne to alternative family practices and attitudes:

Well I reckon that it keeps me young, listening to, you know, to them, and being involved with them. I am interested in their views on their relationships with their husbands. [This] would be very different to the relationship that I had with my husband. You know, their husbands are very hands on and they are all, everybody is very involved with the children. Whereas my husband would have been very old fashioned, of his day, 68 [years of age], you know. But it is different, and I find that interesting. Now my husband would never have come to the beach, whereas their husbands are on the beach with me. It's just interesting, the differences. And when Deirdre [intergenerational friend] works from home her husband would be very involved. The two of them are very involved with the children, and all that has to be done with four teenagers, driving them and

dropping them here, there and everywhere and all their activities. My husband wouldn't have been like that...but that's his generation. (Anne)

Conclusion

The participants' narratives addressed what they considered important to impart in relation to their experience of being an intergenerational friend. Janis's words 'eventually it was obvious we were friends because we were friends in action' were used as a labelling device to capture what the older friends who took part in this research understood intergenerational friendship to be, how the friends met and how they 'performed' as intergenerational friends. While this analysis may appear to be descriptive, it is the substance of how an intergenerational friendship is practised and portrayed by the research participants. Understanding and exploring these processes and analysing the meaning and actions performed by the older friends, is at the foundation of the interpretative rendering offered, throughout this chapter, and the following two chapters.

The process of forming and building intergenerational friendships was one of commonalities. The friends are not of the same generation; therefore, commonalities cannot be centred on a shared age location. Commonalities in sharing ways of thinking and being, while essential to the older friends in many ways, are complemented by the opportunity for the intergenerational friends to explore, examine and evaluate the prevailing norms of their generation in light of other ways of thinking and living. The interest in exploring these generational differences within friendship speaks to a societal/cultural disconnect that some of these older friends may feel which is somewhat mitigated by intergenerational observing and exchanges. This way of thinking is further expanded on and analysed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

‘Doing ageing’ through intergenerational friendship

‘People are people, you know, we don’t wear a birthday card around our neck....Friendship is friendship no matter what the age’. (Iris)

Introduction

The components of ‘being friends in action’ were examined in Chapter 4. The older friends spoke of shared interests, leisure pursuits and hobbies. Participants discussed the shared normative expectations of friendship in confiding, trusting and supporting each other, being loyal and of the importance of giving *and* taking. They described their enjoyment in simply being with, and having fun with, their friends. Furthermore, commonalities relating to age emerged as the older friends who took part in this study provided additional insight into what ‘doing’ intergenerational friendship entailed and the significance of age in friendship.

This chapter focuses more on concepts that are related to identity (for instance, in ‘being not only old’) and that are more theoretical (for example, the homophily of doing-and-being, ‘ageing-together’ and the importance of *differences* in intergenerational friendship, the categorisation of friend ‘types’ and negotiating age-related transitions). The succeeding paragraphs examine the ways in which the older friend negotiated being older through intergenerational friendship. Contradictions emerge and as a result an elaboration of a form of age-identity is implicitly and explicitly made visible in this study. Building this identity commences with a discussion of the homophily of doing-and-being.

The chapter presents a detailed discussion of the concepts and renderings presented. To conclude the chapter, a contextual categorisation of the processes of ageing, through seeking and growing intergenerational friendship is offered.

Drawing on the preceding material (Chapter 4) and incorporating additional insights which emerged from the data concerning sharing an age identity and ways of ‘thinking and being’, permitted a concept which was grounded in the data being made visible. I have labelled this concept a homophily of doing-and-being. In the following sections this chapter moves on to illustrate the elements of the concept of a homophily of doing-and-being and to further build the concept, beginning with the role that age plays in intergenerational friendship.

The role of age in friendship

The older friends spoke of the relevance of a chronological age difference in their friendships in different ways. The irrelevance of age as a counting measurement is frequently alluded to. Tommy expressed how counting years lived is a narrow representation of who a person is as he stated: ‘I think age is only a number’. Age was dismissed by Iris as irrelevant as she explained that:

People are people, you know, we don’t wear a birthday card around our neck. No, we’re quite relaxed with each other you know and people’s values are different but that necessarily hasn’t got to do with difference in age. Friendship is friendship no matter what the age. (Iris)

Iris alluded to how people appear. It could be argued that in essence people do ‘wear’ their age. The ageing body is a signifier of chronological age. Clothing and styling can additionally be age specific, with older people often constrained in what they wear through social sanction. The fear of social sanction, particularly for older women, is culturally accepted. However, Iris implicitly signals that the appearance of older (or indeed younger) age is not a barrier to pursuing friendship. A difference in values, regardless of the age of the person who holds them, is a more significant determinant to friendship formation than age difference for Iris. Reflecting a similar attitude but being more descriptive on why age is discounted in friendship, laughter and enjoyment along with mutual respect are signalled by Sheila to be important considerations:

Age doesn’t matter to me, to be honest. I get on with a girl of sixteen as much as I get on with a person my own age. I love the young people. I have a lot of time for them. I find the best way in life is to treat people good and to have a laugh with them and enjoy their company, and that’s the way you will get on in life... What makes a good friend I think would be you treat the person nice and if you think they have a problem you do your best to help them with that problem... I get a lot of happiness from my friendships. (Sheila)

Recognising a person as an individual and demonstrating an interest in them as an individual makes age irrelevant in a friendship. Demonstrating mutual respect for the age-other is professed as holding more importance than chronological age as Brendan elucidated. However Brendan illustrated how mutual respect was built over his working life:

I think it [intergenerational friendship] is a positive thing. I mean, to me sort of working with younger people, age was never a factor. I was never conscious of my age, even at the moment now and the young lads [players in the football club] would be in first year in college, and they would be 18, 19, 20 age. I don't think they are saying 'your man's an auld fella'. I would say they are more interested in how you treat them if you treat them as people. (Brendan)

Brendan demonstrated an awareness of generational conflict as he wishes to clarify that intergenerational interaction is a 'good thing'. He pointed to his experience of a life spent in the company of younger people, not as friends but in a work context. He then moved on to stress that the outcome of this experience was the realisation of the importance of mutual respect for the age-other. In his current intergenerational friendships with significantly younger friends, age difference is both acknowledged (respected) and ignored (irrelevant once age difference is respected). Brendan's friendships are friendships of people, and respect for young people in general is a transferable element deployed in intergenerational friendship formation.

Developing an understanding of the elements involved further identifies how this process progresses. It is the attributes of the friend and components of the friendship that are important. As Simon explained, he had initial age awareness when he encountered age-others; however, sharing an interest overcame any age-gap in his friendships and eliminated age awareness:

... You can relate directly to a thirty-year-old or a seventy-year-old equally, and I think...that... my involvement with musicals particularly has really got rid of any

sort of age awareness that I would have, or that other people would have for me.
(Simon)

The disappearance of age awareness for Simon is promoted by a shared interest (music), and it is bidirectional. The people in this study appeared to be satisfied that fondness, mutual respect, enjoying each other's company and shared interests displaced and erased age-awareness. Thus for them, chronological age and therefore the age gap was immaterial in friendship.

An element of *why* this may happen is now explored; an internal process is revealed by the participants as they share their feelings. Feeling the same-age inside is posited by the older friends as they signalled sharing a same-age identity with their younger friends. May felt that there is no 'age' difference (despite a chronological age difference):

We have a very good friendship, and in their [her two intergenerational friends] company there isn't any great age difference, not in your heart. (May)

The older friends perceived age as immaterial as they and their friends are essentially the same *undefined* age inside.

Further elaborations, however, illustrated that the shared age identity in some instances is not undefined or ageless but youthful. Maria expressed a similar sentiment in expressing solidarity beyond chronological age, yet here the shared age is one of youth:

No, I don't feel any age difference, because we [Maria and her intergenerational friends] are united in spirit, and the spirit is ageless. I mean, my mother used to

say when she got old, 'I don't feel old, I feel young because your spirit is young'.

You know, your spirit is young. (Maria)

Maria describes an inner intangible 'spirit' that she conceptualises as being young. This 'spirit' is independent of the ageing body. For Maria and others, being with younger friends promotes and maintains a younger age-identity, the participants feel young and intergenerational friendship facilitates this feeling. Maintaining a youthful age identity was spoken of by Anne who pointed out that spending time with, listening to and interacting with her intergenerational friends 'keeps her young'. Intergenerational friendship ties provide insight for the older friend into how age-others think and experience their everyday lives in contemporary society. There is a unique benefit of having younger friends with an acknowledged and sought after outcome, i.e. maintaining a youthful self. Feeling young, while being chronologically old, was explored as the friends reflected during the interviews.

A friendship characteristic that promoted this shared youthful identity is fun and laughter. Being light-hearted and being herself within the friendship promoted a shared identity for Valerie, as she feels the same age as her younger friend. Valerie explains:

We have a great bit of a laugh, you know. Chatting and laughing, telling jokes.

And, you know... I don't feel any older than her, you know...it's not like I'd say...

'I couldn't say that to Denise', I could say anything to her. (Valerie)

Taking the concept of feeling young further, mentions of being childlike or adopting childlike behaviour is spoken about by people who took part in this study. Iris ponders:

...so like we're all children at heart so that childish at heart even at this age (91),
so maybe they give you a kind of false stature that you don't really earn. (Iris)

Iris feels childlike inside and yet her years evidently lead others to confer on her a maturity or gravitas which she stated she has not earned. In making this statement Iris was questioning whether she earned this stature by pointing out that she often acted in a childish way. Iris is alluding here to the positive stereotyping of the oldest-old as wise, an attribute that she considered is unwarranted as she still *sometimes* feels childish at heart. Not only feeling childish but acting in a way that is normatively regarded as unique to childhood was described by Simon. Simon outlined how he, along with his intergenerational friends, indulged in childish behaviour and 'play':

There was a children's playground, but a bunch of us friends went in, and we started using the swings and the roundabouts because there's no other opportunity to do it. This was 11 o'clock at night (laugh). Any other time of the year, or any other place, we definitely wouldn't be caught inside a children's' playground, but we happened to spot it, and it was empty, and it was dark enough. But just to go in and just to behave in a silly fashion, and get on all the swings and the roundabouts, and the seesaws, and anything else that was available. I hadn't ever been on any of those devices in my entire life. You know, so when we had the opportunity we used it. And otherwise being silly. (Simon)

Awareness is illustrated in the narrative, that 'being silly' and 'play' and carefree enjoyment is not considered normative behaviour for older people. Simon considered that it was only appropriate to use the playground under the cloak of darkness so that they

would not be observed by others. Bolstered by the presence and encouragement of his younger friends Simon fulfilled a long-held desire. Simon remarked that this was one of the elements of his intergenerational friendships that he valued. Being friends with younger people allowed Simon to ‘be silly’; he grasped the opportunity to act in a carefree and fun way. Peer-age friendships were not seen to support these more carefree explorations for older adults. The maturity and gravitas that Iris spoke of (outlined earlier in this section) as being normatively or stereotypically associated with older people are understood by Simon to be deterrents to a more light-hearted way of being and thinking. Simon shared these light-hearted ways of thinking and being with his younger friends; he is, therefore, being ‘not only old’.

Being ‘not only old’

An emergent concept is constructed, drawing on the implicit and explicit exhortations of the older friends that they are ‘not only old’. In Chapter 4, accounts emerged of the people who took part in this research continuing to pursue interests and hobbies and to perform in diverse roles; for example, being a professional, being a musician and of course, being a friend. The older adults are not only older adults. They carry forward the interests, roles, and statuses that they have formed throughout the life course, along with possibly ‘new’ interests and pursuits as described by Anne, Simon and others (Chapter 4).

In the preceding paragraphs, the friends further illuminated not only being old but feeling younger and doing things that span childlike and youthful adult behaviour. I use an analogy to illustrate the concept from the data, that of ‘continuity’ and also of ‘expanding not contracting’, which I will explore in a later section. This process is visualised by using the analogy of a Babushka, or Russian doll. ‘Babushka’ in Russian means ‘old woman’ and this is the outer visible surface of the doll. However, contained

within are other dolls or figures which in turn also provide another figure, until the final doll at the core is a small and solid figure which here signifies childhood and childishness (where ageing begins) which is retained by the participants, though it plays a 'smaller' part as they age. Each doll separates in the middle section. Thus the layering of the nesting dolls can be perceived. The friends in this study speak about feeling the same inside as their younger friends; they share an all-age (layered yet existing simultaneously) identity. This becomes clearer as other understandings of the role age played in friendship emerged from the data. The people in this study spoke of an age awareness (along with previously having spoken about feeling the same age), whereby chronological age had relevance to intergenerational friendship.

Being age aware

Perceiving an age-gap may prove a supposed deterrent to intergenerational friendship formation. Participants offered insight into age-gap 'hurdles' that they had experienced which denied or delayed intergenerational friendship formation. Lydia spoke about her daughter's friend. She enjoyed the younger woman's company as they have so much in common and she would dearly have loved to form a friendship with her. However, Lydia went on to discount the possibility of friendship formation with this younger adult. She expressed the opinion that based on the age difference alone, this younger woman would not consider her suitable friend material. Lydia perceived that, as the age-gap was considered insurmountable from this prospective younger friend's point of view, seeking to form an intergenerational friendship was hopeless.

The 'age gap' can delay the recognition of an intergenerational relationship as a friendship. This is explained by Lorna as she reflected on her friendship with Megan:

Sometimes I can't figure it out; I'd say why is she, Megan, bothered with me now, [I am] so much older than her, but no, she is a true friend. (Lorna)

For Lorna, the age difference alone *should* act as a constraint for Megan. It seems that it would be an understandable and acceptable deterrent to friendship formation between older and younger adults, as Lorna puzzled over why Megan pursued their friendship. It is evident here that the age gap was relevant to Lorna yet it was not an impediment to friendship formation to her younger friend.

The perception of a generation-gap, and an age-related status change in the form of retirement, as leading to the 'fading-out' of a friendship was experienced by Lydia as she explains:

When I was working I had younger friends, two girls in particular I worked with. They were young enough to be my daughters. I was very friendly with them, we got on great. I have a great relationship with them. They were good friends, and they were lovely. They don't keep in touch with me since I retired, only on Facebook. I know they mean nothing by it. That is the generation gap. When we were working it was great, but since I retired its different. I didn't expect that. I thought they might see me a bit more or text me to catch up or to meet for lunch. Oh, I said to myself, 'you're that much older. That is it'. They can't see that age doesn't matter; they perceive you as being older. You feel the same age, you feel exactly the same age [as them]. I see myself as just the same, but they don't. (Lydia)

Lydia described a separation process; her younger friends remain in work while she has had to retire. This signals a generational difference to her friends which was not evident when they were integrated in the work-place. Lydia is surprised at the termination of the friendship as she continues to 'feel' the same age as she always has. However, for her younger friends an age-related status change was tantamount to the onset of older age. This, Lydia feels, was at the core of the fading away of the friendship.

Janis withheld recognising her relationship with the younger women as friendship due to her understanding of what others may perceive friendship to entail in age terms. Janis outlined the strength of the conviction that a generational age difference between older and younger adults forms a perceived barrier to friendship formation, from a younger person's perspective. Janis had initially encountered her two intergenerational friends through mentoring them as an art teacher. She observed an ambiguity in recognising the intergenerational relationship as a friendship, despite acknowledging an initial predisposition to do so:

It took me about five years to realise we were actually meeting as friends. I had parked that idea that we might be friends for about five years or quite a while.
(Janis)

Sharing an interest in art, spending time together, going on outings, and having fun over an extended period of time led Janis, finally, to acknowledge that her relationship with these younger women was a friendship.

The age gap for these older friends prevented a friendship formation, was considered a credible deterrent to friendship, and in another instance led to a delayed recognition of an intergenerational relationship as a friendship. What is particularly

interesting is that the participants had given many accounts and implicitly stated throughout our interviews that age ‘didn’t matter’ in friendship. In these contradictory narratives, they reveal that age does, for some people and in some situations, in fact matter in friendship. Another way in which the age differences matter and are acknowledged by the friends is illustrated, and the actions and meanings that ensue are now explored.

Ageing together: ‘old’ and ‘older’ intergenerational friends

This data provides accounts and insight into how intergenerational friendships are forged by those taking part in this study at an earlier stage in their lives. In essence, the intergenerational friends ‘grew’ into old age together. The older friend experienced the transition to old age first and they recognised this as an opportunity to share their experiences with their younger friend. In a unique characteristic of intergenerational friendship, the older friend prepares and guides their younger friend through their transition to older age and old age practices. The concept of generativity is useful to conceptualise this process and can be used to explain some aspects of what’s ‘going on’ between the intergenerational friends. Intergenerational friends ‘growing old together’, is arguably unprecedented as it is the longevity of contemporary populations in western societies that has brought about this phenomenon. The following narratives seem to provide indications of generativity between the older friend and the younger friend in preparing the younger-old for older age.

Most intergenerational friendships in this study have endured for ten years or more with many of the friendships continuing for up to, and over, 40 years. The friends arguably, therefore, grow ‘into’ old age together. Accounts of ‘growing older together’ emerged from the data. Iris had stated that age does not matter in friendship as she and her friends ‘are the same age in their hearts’. However, later in our interview Iris reflected

and she went on to clarify how she supported her intergenerational friend, Molly, as she was faced with ageing. She stated:

Sometimes I can kind of advise her, Molly, to write things out if they're difficult and in that sort of a way so we have a very good friendship. In Molly's company there isn't any great age difference, you're equals in their company. You're equals when you're chatting except if it comes to this business [ageing] when the experiences you've been through may help her. I can be of more use in saying to her 'look I went through this' so I can be more use like that. (Iris)

Iris's narrative indicated that the transition to older age is something that one needs to address and manage. Iris, being older can deploy her older age identity to assist her younger friend as she, Molly, ages. At times therefore she feels the same age as her younger friend, but at other times she is aware of being older and the experience and insight that this brings. Iris shared these insights with her younger friend in order to help her negotiate her own ageing.

Walter provided additional insight into 'sharing older age' as he spoke of his intergenerational friend, Graham. Every weekday, Walter takes his main meal in an old people's community centre. Walter described how he brought Graham along one day so he, Graham, could experience and see what it was like there:

Oh yea, Graham is sixty and would sit next to me at the table, but the others are all old do you know (Laughter). (Walter)

Walter brought Graham on a visit to a place where he considered his younger friend might attend for meals and other supports when Graham gets older. Walter found this amusing

and laughed loudly as he recounted this experience. He enjoyed the experience, showing Graham how to perform older age in a place where only older people congregated. A striking imagery about 'place' is provided by Iris as she described similarly helping her other friend, Jane. Iris, at 91, spoke of her intergenerational friend, Jane, who at 68 would be considered old by many, but not by Iris as she recounted:

Jane is 68 and feels terribly old. So I tell her she knows nothing about it and I feel that I can be of use to her in a way because I have been through some of the things she might be going through and I've managed to get out the other side. You know how they [younger friends] feel because you've been there. But young people couldn't possibly know how you feel being very old because they haven't been there yet, bless them, (laughter) and I hope they're not in a hurry to go. (Iris)

It is interesting to note the imagery that is evoked by Iris as she speaks about being long-lived. Iris construed oldest - old age as a 'place' ('you've been there' and 'they haven't been there yet' and 'not in a hurry to go'), where Iris is a 'resident' and Jane is due to arrive. Getting older is described as an ordeal to get through, and it seems that being among the oldest is not a pleasant place to be. Iris cautions her friend against prematurely embracing the practices of oldest-old age, seemingly, advocating for the delay for as long as possible. There is additionally a sense of acceptance, even resignation, in Iris's narrative as she has managed to negotiate the process of transiting from old to oldest-old age. Iris explained that she has 'managed to get out the other side' and perceives this insight into the successful negotiation of age transitioning as being of value to her younger friend.

Lorna, who in common with Megan her intergenerational friend, is a parent; provided insight into some of the difficult transitions to be overcome as one advances through the life course. Lorna reflected:

Megan has two kids, and her son is 25 now and he lives elsewhere. He is going to get married soon. Her daughter now is in university. So, like me now, we are free to travel. I encouraged her to take up golf; because I could see that her kids were growing up and would leave soon, like my own. (Lorna)

Here Lorna anticipated that Megan would experience the ‘empty nest syndrome’ as her grown children depart the family home. Lorna, deploying the experience that being older has afforded her attempted to help her friend to mitigate its effect. Reflecting on her own experiences, Lorna identified that being involved in a leisure activity assisted her deal with this age-related transition, therefore she is encouraging her friend to follow the same path. There is a sense of loss related to this ageing transition, yet Lorna is evoking a sense of positive transitioning also as she is signalling a sense of freedom to pursue her own needs and wishes now that her family have grown. Lorna is encouraging Megan to follow her lead in seeing and preparing for this transition in a positive way.

As the intergenerational friendships endure, the friends are sharing age related, life-course transitions as they progress through the life course together. The older friends impart ‘new’ ways of thinking and being to the age-other. Being of a different generation has a unique and supportive role to play in ageing within an intergenerational friendship as the friends share performing older age together. In the following paragraphs I introduce the concept of a ‘homophily of doing-and-being’. This concept is built on and incorporates the accounts of sharing ways of thinking and being within intergenerational

friendship, along with additional concepts and insights from the material outlined above and in Chapter 4.

A homophily of ‘doing-and-being’

The principle of homophily (‘birds of a feather flock together’) is considered to have a significant influence on friendship formation and maintenance (as previously explored in Chapter 2). Applying the concept of age homophily - as researchers present it in extant literature - to friendship means that peer-age friendships are not only the preferred but the only feasible friendship option. Individuals are motivated to seek others of a similar age with whom to form friendships. The key point is that in belonging to the same age bracket or generation, individuals find someone ‘like themselves’. Being of the same age and generation is perceived as a precursor for shared interests and attitudes, which is normatively and empirically considered necessary for friendship formation and maintenance.

However, the emergent processes of seeking and being an intergenerational friend in this study challenge this understanding and may ‘stretch’ the application of the principle of age homophily to ‘things’, a homophily of doing-and-being: in the form of interests, leisure pursuits and additionally through ways of thinking and being. Ways of thinking and being are those attitudinal, elusive and affective elements which were explored in the previous chapter. In this research, I make an argument for a homophily of ‘things’: of doing-and-being. The intergenerational friendships explored here, with many enduring through adulthood and into old age, are observed to be formed and sustained by a homophily of ‘doing-and-being’.

The ‘things’, the doing-and-being, that bond the friends together are threefold. First, being ‘friends in action’ (outlined in Chapter 4), second, in being not only old (i.e. in shared age identities) and lastly the way the friends share the attitudes and approaches to friendship and to living their lives, i.e. ways of thinking and being. These commonalities when combined form an overarching concept that draws the friends together and that allows the friendship to grow and to be maintained. The three elements can be categorised as ‘doing-and-being’. In hyphenating this word, I indicate that these processes are inextricably linked, as the participants conveyed them. In this research I make an argument for a different understanding of the concept of homophily: a homophily of ‘doing-and-being’.

A homophily of ‘doing and being’ supported the nascent intergenerational encounters to flourish and evolve into friendships. A homophily of doing-and-being bonded the friends together as the friendships are maintained by those involved. This occurred alongside the transitions, changes, challenges and physical limitations that ageing and an ageing body may bring. The participants alluded to the joy and enjoyment experienced through being an intergenerational friend. The people who took part in this study revealed some unique positive benefits or outcomes experienced through being an intergenerational friend. The following section will illustrate the portrayals that emerged from this study that indicate how some participants did not associate these positive experiences with having peer-age friends or with being chronologically older. For them, the socially ascribed attributes of ‘being’ old or young, that is, the social constructions and social norms that are commonly understood as pertaining to what it means to be young or old, are dichotomous. The participants’ subjective understanding and the meaning that they attach to being older or younger is more complex and fluid.

Intergenerational friendship: part of a strategy for 'doing' ageing

Intergenerational friendship formed part of the process that shaped the older friends' approach to ageing in their everyday lives (micro level). This was influenced by stereotyping and commonly held understandings of ageing and older people in contemporary society (macro level). Engaging with intergenerational friends was congruent with the meaning these participants attached to ageing and to 'being old' or 'being young'. Furthermore, intergenerational friendship is an integral part of this strategy for 'doing ageing' in a meaningful yet mundane (everyday, normal) way. The participants considered how adults 'should' be in old age and younger age; they exhibited an awareness of the desired behaviour and norms associated with being an older person in contemporary society and the 'suitability' of intergenerational friendships in their everyday lives.

The following paragraphs will outline the process of an 'avoiding and aligning' approach, i.e. the participants avoided some activities and behaviours which they deemed as negative and aligned themselves with others which reinforced their openness to seeking, forming and embracing an intergenerational friendship. In identifying and connecting these 'aligning and avoiding' categories which emerged from the data I will then go on to argue that some participants simultaneously believe in, and reject, age stereotyping.

Intergenerational friendship formation: aligning and avoiding

The participants spoke of seeking friendship with younger people. Throughout Chapter 4 and the previous sections in this chapter, many older friends alluded to enjoying friendships or being disposed to forming friendships with people of *all* ages. The participants were clear in stating that the characteristics of friendship with any person of

any age were similar and that age was irrelevant in friendship. However, some of the older friends in this study seemed predisposed to intergenerational friendship from the outset. Iris saw the advantage of intergenerational interaction in that her younger friends live in a contemporary way and pointed to this as the characteristic that is of benefit to her as she stated:

...because they [intergenerational friends] are in the world as it is now. They keep me younger. (Iris)

Sheila perceived that she has an affinity with younger people while others of her age do not. She associated her regard for younger people with her stance on being forward-looking and not entrenched in the past:

...I tolerate young people. You find some older people always giving out about young people, 'we never had what they have', but I like to think I move with the times. (Sheila)

Brendan explains that his younger friends are active and engaged:

....they [intergenerational friends] would be optimistic people...I would not hang around with negative people for too long you know. They [intergenerational friends] would be out and about you know, doing and eh, you gravitate towards people like that. I'm not saying you would avoid, but you wouldn't invest too much time because that [negativity] can bring you down and that's a big issue for older people, you know. You can go into a shell, you know, and you know I suppose really it can be a sort of a negative vibe you know like health is bad and struggling. (Brendan)

The inference then is that the representations of ‘older people’ are somewhat negative, representing older people as struggling to cope with bad health and isolated from everyday activities. Some context for the meaning this way of thinking holds for Brendan was provided in his earlier comments about his reluctant retirement:

When you retire it is challenging, it’s quite a challenge to yourself as an older person because you drop out from a very busy, vibrant life, and you are just sort of dropped out of society, so coping with that can be big. (Brendan)

Retirement from formal employment was not a positive transition for Brendan. The image Brendan painted was that retirement resulted in isolation from society: intergenerational friendship was his ‘anchor’ to remain connected to contemporary society. At a time of significant change and transition from middle to older age - in many contemporary societies retirement age is considered to signal the onset of older age - friendship gained a new significance in Brendan’s life.

Keeping abreast of social and cultural changes through intergenerational friendship also appealed to Anne, as she expressed what was interesting about her intergenerational friends:

I am interested in their [intergenerational friends] viewsbut it is different, and I find that interesting. (Anne)

For Anne, being engaged at an intergenerational level meant exposure to social change and this provided her with a lens to view changing social norms and viewpoints. Other

participants were clear in their preference for spending time with younger people over spending time with older people. Breda, in her eighties, explained:

There's nothing but old fellows in there [segregated older-age social group]; I'd rather be with younger people You [younger people] don't moan, you don't want to be boring. (Breda)

Eileen perceived 'older people' as inward looking, and voiced her frustration:

Older people you know, they are all caught up in their life. If they are married [it is with] the man is their life, now I don't agree with that at all. I feel you should have an independent life as well as your home life. Then of course, some people of my age well, they never stop talking. If it wasn't the children and how well they achieved, and then when it comes to the grandchildren they are talk, talk, talk. So much so that I feel like saying you know, telling you oh they said this and they said that, and I say 'you tell me that every time you meet me, will you stop'. I said 'nobody of my age wants to hear that, we all have grandchildren'. I can't keep my mouth shut when I hear that sort of thing, I open it too wide sometimes but, I mean, I think that you can talk about other things like, a bit of everything. (Eileen)

Eileen signalled here what is annoying and inconceivable to her: a widespread conceptualisation of older age and older people (including in the social science literature) as cocooned in family and family life. The reification of family in society is mirrored in Eileen's account of her encounters with many older people. For Eileen, this is what she finds difficult to endure, and she is orientating towards younger people who share her broader interests.

An interesting ‘inversion’ of this process is practised by Lucia. For Lucia, her lifelong peer-age friends are engaged in ‘active ageing’, they are being busy, active and useful and Lucia sketched out how she found this immersion in activities difficult as she could no longer concentrate on performing such tasks. Lucia described that as she has aged she finds it difficult to concentrate on the intricacies required for crafting:

I have my own age group friends as well [as younger friends], and I would see those. But with them [peer-age friends] it is knitting and sewing, it is not me, I go haywire. Mentally I can’t do that; I would be in a nursing home. I hate it. I go to the gentle exercise class instead. I get too confused if there is too much going on. I can’t do it [knitting and sewing], not anymore, I can’t concentrate now. I get confused now to be honest with you that is the clearest way to put it. With Lydia [her intergenerational friend], we look at sports on TV, we love sports. We both hate knitting and sewing too. There are other things that I could do, I could go bowling, but that means going out in the dark at night. Then I have to come back to an empty, dark house. That is not for me. So now, with my own age group we just meet for coffee and then I go home. (Lucia)

Lucia removes herself from her older friends’ company as they are engaged in activities that she no longer enjoys. Lucia lives alone since her husband died; she portrays how difficult this makes going out at night, to engage in activities such as bowling, as she dislikes returning home to an empty house. A sense of vulnerability is signalled by Lucia in this narrative as she describes ‘going out in the dark at night’. Lucia portrays a process of disengagement from night time leisure pursuits due to fears of personal safety, as she is no longer part of a couple.

However, Lydia shares Lucia's interest in watching sport; this requires little effort on Lucia's part and takes place in her or Lydia's home (with Lydia driving her home). Lucia feels safe and this pastime, watching sports programmes on TV, demands little cognitive engagement for Lucia as she sees it. Lucia, having both younger and older friends, expressed a preference for the undemanding company of her younger friend in oldest-old age as opposed to her 'busy' older friends. Similarly, Sheila spoke about how she had lots of older and younger friends and wished to express a candid opinion on her friendship preference:

...some of the older people come down on the younger people and especially if they become pregnant or anything. I could not bear that; I would be there for the younger people. I prefer to be honest now, my own age group, some of them, can be boring, I get on very well with the younger generation....I would have a lot in common with the younger people ... some of the older people are just complaining and giving out. (Sheila)

The portrayals of older age being synonymous with being negative, 'boring' or 'moaning' is linked to being resistant to social change, along with being closed to accepting new social norms.

The consequences of holding this perception resulted in some of the participants avoiding joining older adults' (same age) groups, perceiving 'them' as negative in their attitudes, for example, complaining and moaning about ailments or government performance. Lorna explained her viewpoint on avoiding spending too much time exclusively with people of her own age:

If I mixed all the time with people in their 80s like me, some of them are very negative. In every way, like they moan and complain, if it's the bus service or the government, you know they complain, a lot of older people, and that's why I think having a relationship with younger people, it's different. (Lorna)

In choosing to spend time with 'younger people', who seem to be a homogenous group with ascribed 'positive' attributes (for instance, 'in the world as it is today'), and in avoiding spending time with a homogenous group that is 'older people' (inward looking, complaining), a process is evident. Negative stereotyping plays some role in the friendship choices made by the older people who participated in this study.

Negative stereotyping can be observed and deduced in the narrative stereotypical 'sketches' of older people drawn by some of the participants. The following paragraphs outline this array of socio-cultural stereotypes and their characteristics as sketched by the participants, before moving on to explore the connection to how holding these stereotypical portrayals of older age shapes the older friends' own approach to ageing and intergenerational friendship formation.

A stereotypical array: the 'old fogey', 'old haggard' and 'old fuddy-duddy.'

Insight into the meanings that these participants attached to 'being old' were often subtle. For example, Tommy distinguished between being chronologically old and acting old as he declared: '[I] probably don't act it [75 years old]', implying that, in his opinion, 75 year-olds are expected to act in a particular way. He gave an example of what he saw as being expected of him as an older individual by others of his generation as he spoke about being in the pub with his intergenerational friends:

I think some people think that when you get older, you shouldn't be here [in the pub], and you should go home earlier maybe (laugh). It comes to a certain time and they think they should be going home, you know, they think like that when they get old. I think that anyway, some of my people my age, like, they think that you might be out of place if you are there [in the pub] at one o'clock, two o'clock, (laugh). (Tommy)

Some of Tommy's friends and acquaintances who are his own age self-regulate their own behaviour by what they perceive to be socially expected of them. The fun and carefree characteristics of late-night drinking with a younger group of people are regarded as being incompatible with old age. Social norms become social restrictions for the older patrons as they remove themselves from 'fun' social situations and return home at an age-appropriate time. The powerful influence of social norms to regulate and constrain the behaviour, and integrated social interaction, of these older people is thus evident.

Other meanings were more explicit and were presented in the form of negative stereotypical 'sketches' of a hypothetical individual: the 'old fogey', the 'old haggard' and the 'old fuddy-duddy'. These stereotypical representations reveal participants' perspectives on how 'being old' *could* be for these older adults if they did not choose to act and think differently. The portraits share the common traits of being an extremely undesirable portrayal of older age, for example, Lydia spoke of avoiding being seen as an 'old fuddy-duddy'. She elaborated on what an old fuddy-duddy was as she stated:

I will never be old. It's being set in your ways and not being able to adapt. I will never be old in mind-set, or set in my ways. I would never like to be an old fuddy-duddy. Complains, moans, someone who is stuffy! Fuddy-duddy is being set in

your ways. Have you read 'Who moved my cheese' that book? That is a fuddy-duddy. Being set in your ways and not being able to adapt. I never want to be an old fuddy-duddy as it's someone who is blinkered, who doesn't move with the times. (Lydia)

Avoiding being a 'fuddy-duddy' is linked to the avoidance of 'being old' for Lydia. Failing to observe and to become immersed in contemporary society and new ways of thinking is at the core of what Lydia understands 'old' to be. Performing old age as a 'fuddy-duddy' is being old. Refusing to change and adapt to new social norms defines the old 'fuddy-duddy', along with complaining. Lydia displayed her own credentials as she alluded to reading a book that encourages the embracing of change; she is actively seeking the skills to avoid becoming a 'fuddy-duddy'. She declared that she will never be old, thus discounting her inevitable chronological ageing as relevant to 'being old'.

Simon spoke about how he consciously feared being considered or becoming 'the old fogey'. When I asked Simon to describe what an 'old fogey' was, he replied:

The old fogey. Um... [is] bad on the pins [legs], y'know, getting a bit feeble, eh, getting forgetful. I mean very, I'm forgetful anyway, but getting very forgetful and thereby finish up in, in maybe ridiculous situations. [The old fogey is] A person that people try to avoid because they're boring or they're just not able to keep up, maybe from a mental point of view and physical point of view. That's an old fogey. (Simon)

'The old fogey' represents a fearful portrayal of older age: frail, experiencing falls and forgetfulness, an isolated figure of ridicule, who is rejected and avoided by those in their

community. The characteristics of the 'old fogey' are an exaggerated amalgamation of what is often the focus of cultural and media representations of older age. In a similar vein, Hugo spoke of the 'old haggard'. However, in this short narrative the link between 'being older' and 'acting older' is illustrated:

If I was to sit down here and just read the papers and sit at the fire I'd be a zombie I think. I go to visit a lot of my friends and that sort of thing. Well, of course, you have to face reality, I am older but it doesn't really come into the situation really. I never think of myself as just an old haggard or something like that. (Hugo)

These participants displayed ageist opinions and a form of in-group ageism, of people of their own chronological age, for example, describing 'older people' as boring. These participants are making-meaning and framing older age as deficit through the array of socio-cultural constructs in the form of these stereotypical 'characters', i.e. the old fuddy-duddy, the old fogey, the old haggard. In making comparisons between the 'negatively marked' group that is older people and differentiating *themselves* so as to align themselves with the 'positively marked' group of *younger acting* people these participants narratively constructed (through these descriptive stereotypes), and subsequently rejected a stereotypical older age identity. Declining an older age identity often involved rejecting particular activities or understandings as the next section outlines.

'Expanding and not contracting'

An illuminating statement was uttered by Janis and provides a succinct summing up of rejecting the negative socio-cultural older age identity and caricatures discussed by many of the people who took part in this study:

We [older people] are not behaving, we are not closed down. We are not contracting, like I am expanding. It [intergenerational friendship] is based on that, going out into the world discovering new things, learning new things, having fun while we are doing it, catching up on our lives. (Janis)

The explicit connection between intergenerational friendship and a particular attitude is evident here. The process of seeking social interaction, enjoying life, an openness to being immersed in contemporary ways and continuing to seek out new experiences form part of this attitude. Janis elucidates how she shares these attributes and experiences with her younger friends as they have had lots to talk about as the ‘catch up’. The concepts of ‘expanding’ and of ‘not contracting’ are implied in the narratives of other participants who spoke about continuing to participate as they had always done and not retiring or isolating themselves.

These concepts were outlined in Chapter 4 as the participants portrayed the processes and incidences of continuing to seek social inclusion and friendship. In essence, this concept, ‘expanding, not contracting’ is interwoven with many of the processes and accounts the participants offered in their narratives. For instance, participants spoke about seeking new interests and seeking insight into new social norms while continuing to maintain their own old-age identity as they transition to older age. In performing as an older individual who rejected ‘contracting’, participants then went on and spoke of

rejecting formal mandated chronologically age-related retirement and of seeking continued involvement.

Being 'one of the people' through pursuing 'active involvement'

The notion of an 'active retirement' is a normative and familiar concept in contemporary society. Policy makers, health professionals and researchers promote this approach as being a healthy and a positive tactic for older adults to take in order to age 'well' and to experience a good old age. For Brendan, however, this tactic had a negative connotation. Brendan perceived the organised segregation of older people at a societal level. He observed how older people choose to gather into collective older age activities. While it is implied that these older adults strive to pursue an 'active retirement' or an 'active age', Brendan spoke instead of the process he characterised as an active involvement and 'not being ready' to embrace this way of socialising:

I've seen it, active age week and all that, and I don't know if I'm running away from all that, or what, but I don't think [wife] or myself even I think she would be the same. I don't think I'm ready for that yet, even though I'm 71 years of age. I'm not ready to settle for that, maybe. Don't get me wrong on this, they are great people and they are great out there, but my interests are active, active involvement, but I am not ready to go on the day trips on the bus together. And they might be even older, and I am probably older than some of them I would say. (Brendan)

Brendan rejected the model of ageing advocated through the organisation of older people into age-specific activities. The active ageing framework has been advocated as a way of successful ageing for older people, often involving interventions which bring older

people together to promote social inclusion (see Chapter 2). Brendan depicted peer-age engagement as segregation in contrast to intergenerational involvement which is inclusive and active. Reifying old age and cultivating age silos was rejected in favour of intergenerational activities. While other participants such as Angela spoke of being involved in both intergenerational and older-age specific activities, others, such as Brendan found organised age-specific activities unacceptable and unnecessary for themselves.

The recognition that retirement is a form of enforced age-segregation from the employment arena is alluded to by Janis. Janis clearly stated that despite no longer being in ‘paid employment’ she is not ‘retired’ and cannot envision a time in the future that she will be:

I have never retired. I won’t retire, why would I? I mean I have retired from paid work, somebody else paying me. I won’t take anything like that again because it would encroach on my freedom, but I am still working as an artist and as an art teacher. I am working at my music, and working in the garden and etc. etc. (Janis)

Simon, who had previously spoken about how music provided an ‘ageless’ shared interest, elaborated on how he transitioned after ‘formal’ retirement into a new career. Simon’s lifelong interest in music allowed him to pursue a second career in entertainment, thus fostering intergenerational friendships:

There’s no natural limit to that [music] where the government says you must leave and you must stop. Ah, whereas I think in normal occupations, you see retirement coming up, you yourself know the old problem of the person who retires. They go home and they just fade, because they’ve nothing else to do. But I’ve always been

blessed with a mix of activities. Then the music is always the night job... and the night job just keeps on going forever. (Simon)

Here, Simon is linking retirement from formal work (the day job) with decrepitude and decline in older age. Removed from the workforce, a process of invisibility and exclusion is proclaimed by Simon and Brendan, as older people 'fade' when they are no longer busy in a meaningful way and engaged with society. Given the emphasis placed on the benefits and rewards of an 'active retirement' in much literature and discourses around ageing, Simon's perceptions challenge commonly held assertions of the concept. The concept of an 'active retirement' and its connection to an 'active age' seems to hold negative connotations for some of these participants and it is construed as a form of differentiation or exclusion from 'mainstream' society. The notion of retirement was rejected, and instead, remaining involved and continuing to engage and 'expanding' were championed. Participants continued to 'be and do' what they have always been and done (albeit with some modifications). Part of this 'being and doing' was continuing to pursue existing interests but additionally pursuing new interests and goals, in the words of Janis 'continuing to expand and not contract'. This involved concomitantly forming new intergenerational friendships.

One of the oldest-old participants, Hugo, continued to pursue and to expand his professional interests through involvement in a group comprising retired professionals. The group meets to discuss current affairs, financial markets and other related subjects. The group had the added benefit of providing a network of possible intergenerational friendships as most of the group (while being of retirement age) were of a younger generation than he. As Hugo iterated:

Oh yes them [interests and pursuits] are important, very important because you create tremendous friendships and it broadens your scope in life. (Hugo)

This statement highlighted a rationale as to why Hugo and some other participants pursue an intergenerational friendship. For some participants, therefore, ‘expanding, not contracting’ applies to friendship formation in that they seek to expand their friendship network. Angela sketched a dramatic portrayal of how important continuing to expand through social interaction is: its absence has serious consequences as isolation and stagnation can overcome the oldest-old individual:

I think it is important for older people to get out and meet, meet younger people and talk, and get out of yourself. Mentally, mentally it is important. Because you can be there inside four walls and if you don’t get out and meet people the four walls are going to fall down on you. So that’s what my idea has always been anyway. (Angela)

Iris also iterated how continuing to be mentally active and ‘search for more’ kept her engaged and included in life:

...and I find that very interesting [her discussions with her intergenerational friends] because when you’re my age if you give up searching mentally you might as well lie down and die unless you’re anxious to learn more in your old age, no matter how mundane your interests. Maybe the searching for more does keep you momentarily active I think (laughter). (Iris)

Again in common with Brendan, Iris evoked an imagery of a process of a gradual invisibility and exclusion, should she succumb and cease to engage with contemporary society and her intergenerational friendships. Engaged in the process of expanding, in ‘searching for more’, Iris remains embedded and active in the society in which she lives. ‘Active’ is portrayed by Iris not as a physical but as a mental process: looking outwards into contemporary society and ‘searching for more’. Brendan tied being active and involved to his identity in older age:

Well, I’m just thinking like as you get older because of the loss of maybe self-worth and because of loss of the job and all that. I think you need to come to terms and probably need to be involved in things. I mean being involved you are making a contribution to society. (Brendan)

The link between formal employment and self-worth is explicitly drawn by Brendan. Brendan was flagging his wanting to and yet being unable to continue in formal employment due to policy as he portrayed his mandated retirement as a ‘loss’. By being active and involved, Brendan is seeking a solution to the loss of self-worth that he had experienced when he was mandated to retire. Status and structural transitions that being retired brings are being accepted by Brendan and as a result he is seeking a new way of remaining involved and connected to society. Making a contribution to society through an informal way in utilising his work related skills for the benefit of the age-other is how Brendan is seeking continuing involvement and connection.

Kathryn, (aged 94), signalled her interest in remaining involved in and connected to contemporary society, not by deploying existing skills but in learning new ones. Despite some initial grappling with technology Kathryn persisted in her attempts as she

expresses delight in the resulting connectedness that expanding her knowledge brings. Kathryn had received a new smartphone and with the assistance of her intergenerational friend was using it to text, she noted:

I have texted her [her granddaughter] a couple of times, and I did get an answer. They send me photographs and photographs of the baby. I have the laptop over there, and I had it for I don't know how many years, and I never made a good fist of it. I had lessons, private ones in the house and outside and eventually it got that it was nearly driving me cracked. And I said 'what's the use' and I left it there, was paying for it and not using it, so I got rid of it [Wi-Fi]. Now I got that mobile last September and what I am thinking of getting the one that you can get the internet on because people say it is very easy compared to that, wonderful the internet. I think that's amazing. Yes, I think technology is great. I love getting the texts: and I think technology is wonderful. I always say I like to think I move with the times, I think technology is great, and I do like to think I move with the times and keep up with them. (Kathryn)

Kathryn is continuing to engage with technology, she is planning to access the plethora of material available on the internet. She is keeping up with current technology and current affairs, undeterred at 94 years of age, from seeking lessons and guidance to achieve this aim. This notion of the continued pursuit of activities and interests and the concomitant impact on ageing identity and the 'spectre of the number' (chronological age) is further elaborated upon by Simon:

So I'd say physically and mentally, having lots of activities, all quite different, keeps you from thinking about ageing too much. There's also, there's always the

spectre of the number. You know I'm 70 next month, I said 'Come on, it's only a number. It's not a condition!' So y'know, that's where I try to think that way.
(Simon)

Similarly, Tommy said:

Most of my friends like, say, 'you are down there drinking with young lads'. And this lad, Don, would say all our lads my age is dead. They weren't all dead, but they weren't out. Ye know but sure, you could stay at home. I find it keeps you young, with the kids, especially you know with the 50-year-old crowd. I would be out and about all the time like, you know, maybe too much. But, you have a different outlook on life, you know, and eh you know, you have the proper mental attitude to life when you get that way, you know, you go out and meet people.
(Tommy)

For Tommy, choosing an intergenerational social environment promotes social involvement. He is aware of his younger friends' teasing that people his age are absent from the social scene because they are deceased due to their advanced years. This teasing resonated with Tommy as he reflected that while people his own age were not dead, they were not out enjoying social involvement. I enquired from Tommy what he meant when he spoke of 'the proper mental attitude to life'. He explained:

[Being] active and everything you don't think of your age, you know. You think you are one of the people and you are. It's [intergenerational friendship] a great thing. You know, it keeps you in a positive attitude and you don't think age. It was only when I got sick that I found that I was 75. (Tommy)

Social inclusion is evidently a significant driver for Tommy to pursuing intergenerational settings and friendships - 'you think you are one of the people and you are' signals the importance of intergenerational integration and friendship to Tommy in remaining connected to, and a part of, his community. Being socially active within an intergenerational setting supported Tommy in challenging the negative connotations he associated with being old. Old age did not 'find him' as he maintained a younger age identity and a positive outlook. However, Tommy found old age in illness. Being incapacitated due to ill health, depending on others for care, and being confined to a hospital or his home were the situations and conditions Tommy associated with older age.

To revisit a quote used earlier in this section, Janis had outlined how older people like her were expanding and were 'not behaving and were not closed down'. This statement contains a stringent denial and a challenge not to old age *per se* but to the inferred expectations of how adults 'should' be in older age. By 'expanding and not contracting' Janis implies that older people like her are not following these strictures ('are not behaving') and are continuing to be, or at least are striving to be, interested and immersed in contemporary society. Older people are open to new experiences and social relationships ('we are not closed down').

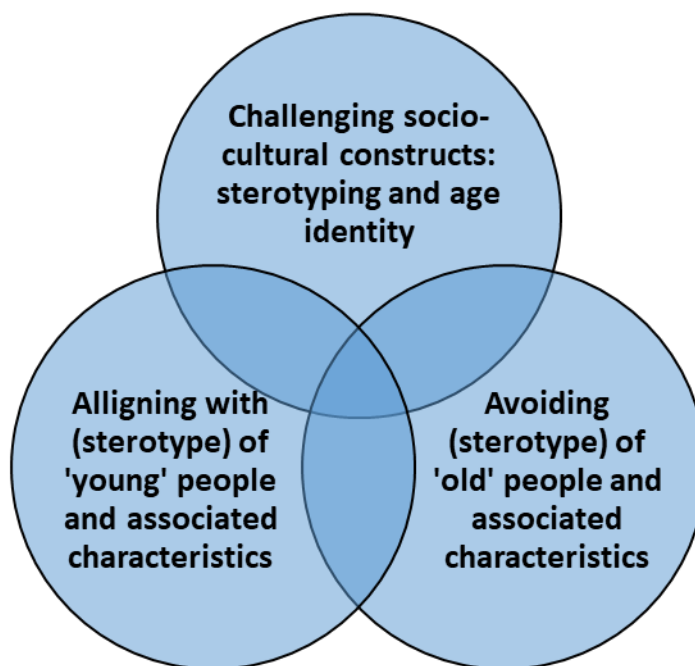
Performing age as a social and cultural construct

The 'performance' of age encompasses three elements (see Figure 1 below). First, the socio-cultural stereotypes that the older friends were 'afraid of becoming' i.e. the social construction of ageing and age identities, conflicted with how they perceived their own identities to be in older age. Second, this then led to some of the participants aligning

themselves with younger people (thus forming intergenerational friendships) and ‘young’ ways of doing, thinking and being (keeping up with the times, feeling the same age inside). Finally, some strove to avoid ‘negative’ older people (for instance, avoiding age homogenous organisations) while many others instead spurned socially constructed ‘older ways’ of doing, thinking and being (by remaining socially active, not retiring, avoiding age segregation, and so on). In interacting and in resolving the tension between performing age as they were experiencing it and chronological age norms, the older friends are seeking resolution through intergenerational friendship; peer-friendship does not offer the same solution.

Figure 1:

Performing age: a social and cultural model of an intergenerational friendship



The flagged difference between peer-age and intergenerational friendship proved to be intriguing as friendships are formed between generations. What emerged from the data was a lack of intergenerational difference (contemporary insights were perceived as interesting) in tandem with a *peer-age* difference.

Participants do not deny their own chronological age, yet the behaviours, stances and views (labelled here as performance) they associate with their younger-age friends are congruent with how they perceive their own behaviours and views to be. For the older adults who participated in this study, ageing is about performance - how they 'perform' as older adults in their pursuits or interests - and not about chronological age. The 'spectre of the number' is still evident, for example, Simon mentioning being 70 or Tommy 75 years of age. Fear of becoming isolated, boring, or a figure of ridicule through being forgetful or falling, underpins the narratives. Social constructions and commonplace prominent negative cultural representations and images of older age are therefore being identified, feared and resisted by the participants.

A paradox is evident, in that almost half of the participants are subscribing to stereotyping and ageism in describing 'old' people as a homogenous 'boring' or 'moaning' or segregated group or in the pejorative terms of 'old fogey', 'old haggard' and 'old fuddy-duddy'. As chronologically older adults, the participants are embracing being older in a way that they perceive older age to be. The people who took part in this study are challenging negative stereotyping through, among other things: the formation and maintenance of intergenerational friendship, seeking out age-integrated environments, sharing commonalities with younger adults, and expressing an interest in new social norms. The participants described continuing to do the things that they have always enjoyed with older and younger friends, and additionally, they pursued new interests and

experiences. They sought social engagement through established and new intergenerational friendship(s).

‘Typologies’ of intergenerational friendship: a categorisation of processes

The participants expressed a broad array of their experiences of being older. They conveyed through their narratives the varied ways in which they ‘do ageing’ through intergenerational friendships. As a heterogeneous group (mirroring the heterogeneity of older people in society at large), their experiences differed. Within the accounts of ‘doing ageing through intergenerational friendship’ three typologies emerged, reflecting its complexity. Inherent in these processes are the influence of the broader social, cultural, structural and status, transformations that influence and shape intergenerational friendship formation and flourishing in older age. These three typologies are concepts used as tools to form an analysis and to draw together the participants’ experiences. Three core categories emerged: adjusting, mixing and aligning. I conceptualise these into ‘the adjusters’, ‘the mixers’, and finally ‘the aligners’, to reflect the older friends’ place in performing the process as they experienced it.

First, insight emerged from the data into the *adjusters* experiencing being an intergenerational friend. At the beginning of Chapter 4, I outlined how the oldest-old participants, for example, see the narratives of Jack, Kathryn, Hugo, Walter and Iris, engaged in intergenerational friendship as they described coming to terms with the loss of their peer-age friends. The participants acknowledged the loss of a unique friendship type, of sharing generational social experiences with those same-age friends who are no longer available. Sharing memories was perceived as a form of connectedness and belonging. A process of adjustment to this loss incorporated seeking new, younger friends

and/or developing existing relationships to the status of friendship. Seeking and experiencing enjoyment, belonging and the other characteristics of friendship continued to be important to them as they negotiated a life-course transition, that is, in being longer lived than their peers. The adjusters are remaining embedded in friendships and in society in oldest-old age.

Second, *the mixers* similarly engaged in processes of belonging and connectedness in older age through forming intergenerational friendships. However, they additionally sought and maintained peer-age friendships. The mixers, with the narratives of Breda, Jennifer, Darina, Anne, Bill and Janis providing example of this approach, proclaimed that the characteristics of both types of friendship were the same, that age did not matter in friendship. However, the processes of negotiating status and structural changes in older age highlighted the value of this approach as they formed a ‘mixed’ age friendship circle to negotiate these transitions. For example, while younger friends were engaged in employment during the day, the older friends met their peer-age friends to alleviate loneliness and to enjoy their company. As many of their younger friends were constrained from travelling at will due to caring for children, the older friends sought the company of their peer-age friends, who were more likely to be free to travel. Younger friends provided insight into new social and cultural norms and development that peer-age friends did not. The characteristics of friendship that were important to the participants, they proclaimed, were existent in both intergenerational and peer-age friendships. Older age was experienced in a meaningful way through a mix of all-age friendships.

The final conceptualisation I outline here, of doing age through intergenerational friendship, is *the aligners*. These participants, recalling for instance the insights provided by Lorna, Lydia, Tommy, Simon, Sheila and Brendan, expressed an explicit preference

for younger friends. Contemporary social and cultural forces, which were negative and prejudiced against older people and old age, underpinned this friend choice. The people in the study pronounced that they sought out younger people over older people. They exhibited and expressed positive ageism towards younger people and negative ageism towards older people. They wished to align themselves with younger people in their older age. The choices they made in friendship reflected this process. In making this choice they aligned themselves with the positive characteristic ascribed by an ageist society to youth. Intergenerational friendship was expressed as being preferable over peer-age friendship. They construct their own ageing within and aligning with intergenerational friendship.

The processes that I have drawn together to construct these three typologies are grounded in participants' accounts. I organised them into conceptual categories to illuminate the heterogeneous experiences of older age and friendship among the people who participated in this study. The emphasis is on meaning and action as conveyed by the participants and the three 'typologies' or categories form an interpretive rendering of the accounts and statements of the participants. The intention of these 'typologies' is not to generalise but to provide a contextual understanding and deeper insight into how these participants 'do' ageing through intergenerational friendship within a contemporary society. The typologies do not capture every person's experience fully, but they do serve as a useful simplification of complex lived experiences.

Conclusion

The internalisation of deficit stereotypes spurred the older friends to adopt a 'meaningful' approach to intergenerational friendship, ageing and being older. The term 'meaningful'

best reflects the process and the participants' approach, in that they continued to be themselves: in doing the things they had always taken pleasure in doing, with people who shared their interests or simply with those whose company they enjoyed, regardless of chronological age. However, being older played a unique and significant part in the intergenerational friendship. The oldest-old described feeling and doing being older and therefore initiating the youngest-old into the practises and performance of oldest age, concerned to make the transition more manageable for their younger friend. The older friends signalled a variety of age-related transitions that they were negotiating or had negotiated, married to widowed, employed to retired, full-time parent to 'empty-nester', losing peer-age friends, loss of stamina and the continuous transitioning to being older aged in an ever changing world.

The simultaneous acceptance of the deficit portrayal of older age in relation to others, i.e. 'the old people' and the rejection of such a portrayal in relation to themselves was discussed. The participants demonstrated 'othering' in ascribing deficit portrayals and characteristics to 'old' people - they did not consider themselves to be part of this deficit group, despite their chronological age. Stereotyping and ageism are being simultaneously accepted and rejected in this narrative. Therefore, the nexus of being old for these participants is not chronological age (as embraced culturally and by institutions and society as an organisational category for *inter alia* education, retirement, and welfare supports) but how old age is 'performed'.

Old age is not only a tyranny of ever-increasing numbers along a numerical line which progresses, for example from age 65 to 95. For those engaging in intergenerational friendship, old age is reframed into a spectrum. The process of being old is a 'spectrum of performance' over which one can move forward and back. The older friends are active in challenging this tyranny of numbers. 'Contracting': moaning, complaining, 'excluded'

old people are at one end of the spectrum and at the other end, the ‘expanding’: positive, socially engaged, culturally aware old people. The older friends signal that they share the ‘expanding’ characteristics with younger people, according to many of these narratives. Yet, when falling ill or when their younger friends need their guidance and experience, the older friends demonstrated the consequences (positive and negative) of being ‘long-lived’. They call on the experience and insight that they have garnered through living a long life.

Intergenerational friendship plays an important part in the everyday lives of the people who participated in this study. The participants described the various meanings, emphasising joy and laughter, and the roles that intergenerational friendship played in their lives. Intergenerational friendship proved to form part of a strategy - for some of the participants - to challenge ageing stereotypes and to continue to ‘be themselves’. Intergenerational friendship provides the opportunities for expanding, and the greatest mobility along the spectrum of performing age. Recalling that many of the people in this study pronounced being not only old, acting in a childish, carefree way, feeling ageless, and feeling and acting old and young simultaneously, a fluid all-age identity is deployed and maintained through intergenerational friendship. The chapter concluded with a rendering of the contextual experiencing of intergenerational friendship as expressed in the data, organised into three conceptual categories: the adjusters, the mixers and the aligners.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, will draw together the concepts and insights provided in this chapter, and the previous chapters, to offer a succinct and high level analysis and synthesis. Additional literature that was identified to provide theoretical and contextual relevance is introduced to engage the concepts that emerged from this study, in line with the Grounded Theory method. Concluding reflections complete the chapter.

Chapter 6

Conclusions: From homophily to ‘all-age’ friendships

‘You think you are one of the people and you are. It’s [intergenerational friendship] a great thing’. (Tommy).

Introduction

Chapters 4 and 5 gave voice to participants as they portrayed their experience and meaning of their intergenerational friendships, with each chapter concluding with a synthesis of key insights garnered. In this chapter, some extant literature and theories are re-visited and selected additional literature is presented to contextualise the findings within sociological and gerontological paradigms. An abductive analysis is therefore provided utilising this literature. Some recommendations for researchers are made in light of this analysis with suggestions for further research. The chapter, and the thesis, concludes with some final reflections on the research and the research journey.

The three key concepts that emerged from the research are now presented. First, challenging age homophily with a ‘new’ conceptualisation and understanding of homophily as a ‘homophily of doing-and-being’, which is an umbrella term for three components of this concept: [being friends in action (doings), being not only old and, lastly, sharing ways of being and thinking]. Second, identity construction emerged as a key concept as participants signalled a process of maintaining and deploying ‘all-age’

identities through intergenerational friendship. Third, continuity in belonging and connectedness are analytical concepts that emerged from the participants' accounts. These key concepts and others were made visible through deploying a Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology and employing rich interview data supplemented with observational memoing.

Reflecting on data gathering

A qualitative approach is taken in this thesis to capture the meaning and experience of intergenerational friendship in the context of being older in contemporary (Irish) society. The constructivist paradigm acknowledges the diversity and co-construction of 'knowing'. A key way this featured within the research is in the role played by the researcher's observations. The study was designed as an interview based study initially. While carrying out fieldwork to conduct the interviews, observations on the settings, material objects and incidents arising presented as potential sources of rich insights for me. In extant literature, Covan (2007) emphasised the point made by Strauss: 'if something was important we could see it or hear it' (p. 69). These factors led to my decision to deploy a systematic data gathering procedure in the form of observational memos. The observational memos shed further light on the meanings, actions and processes of intergenerational friendship formation and maintenance enacted by the participants, in their interaction with materials that held meaning and salience for their intergenerational friendships.

In utilising observational memoing in this study I extended the methodological 'remit' of the GT method by including more than talk/narrative collected as data. Taking the 'all is data' tenet of CGT I have detailed a formal method for putting this into effect in my fieldwork. Therefore, as a researcher, I engaged in listening and seeing to

understand the social processes being enacted and recounted by the participants. My approach challenged the emphasis and privileging of what is spoken by gazing outwards and around the participant in the naturalistic research setting i.e. in the participants' own homes. This approach also pointed to a reflexive researcher, which is an essential component in a CGT study as the researcher is located in the data collection in a transparent manner, thus enhancing the rigor of the research (Charmaz, 2014).

What we knew about intergenerational friendship

Prior to commencing my fieldwork I conducted a review to ascertain what was known about intergenerational friendship in academic literature. The central themes that could be discerned from the literature are now summarised, as detailed in Chapter 2. The importance and benefits of friendship to the well-being, health and happiness of older adults had been explored extensively in epidemiological (see for example Li and Liang, 2007) and social science research (Allan, 2010; Blieszner, 2014). There is consensus that friendship is a 'good thing' in later life. Demir et al. (2013) call for further scientific research to explain 'when and how' friendship is associated with happiness. Friendship is often seen as a panacea for many of the perceived ills associated with older age as friendship might stave off loneliness, passivity and the associated negative effects of health.

Therefore, for many researchers and other actors such as advocacy organisations, the 'point' of friendship is often conceived as being a tool (ultimately) for public health improvement. The focus is on the 'outcomes' and not on the subjective experience of friendship. Can one design and implement an effective policy tool without first understanding the processes that inform it? Delving further into this analysis, one has to

question why older-age friendship is considered ‘suitable’ for policy intervention in contemporary western societies, while other close relationships, such as friendships among younger adults, romantic partnerships or marriage, for example, are not?

In seeking to answer these questions, I concur with Timonen (2016) who asserted that older adults are considered more problematic (costly, burdensome) than younger adults, and secondly because their autonomy is taken less seriously with ‘preconceived notions of what they [older people] are interested in, in how they occupy themselves, and what makes their lives meaningful’ (p.102). Hence, policy intervention in the realm of the personal relationships of older adults is perceived as acceptable, even necessary (p. 102). Our [researchers, policy makers, society] inability, or reluctance, to see older people ‘as a thoroughly heterogeneous population’, Timonen (2016) went on to argue, is at the nexus of attempts at ‘model ageing’, i.e. to mould an older population to be ‘successful’ and ‘active’ agers (p. 102).

Assertions are made in the literature about specific types, or typologies, of friends (for an example, see Matthews, 1985) and friendships. It is stated in clear terms in extant research that peer friendships are the preferred form of friendship as the friends have a lot in common based solely on their age (for example, see Adams and Blieszner, 1989). Older people are perceived as being reluctant to form new friendships in older age (Gabriel and Bowling, 2004). In general, friendship is considered considerably less important for older people than family, with representations of older people commonly situated within their roles in the family, i.e. as parents or grandparents, and their functions in these roles. Outside of the family or within, older people are alternatively considered useful (for childminding or volunteering), selfish consumers of scarce resources which are denied to younger generations, or as being frail, dependent and requiring extensive care.

Intergenerational friendships are perceived to be of limited interest to older people. Where they do exist, intergenerational friendships are often disguised (for instance, ‘she’s like a daughter to me’), while those involved in intergenerational friendship ‘may hesitate’ to attribute the status of friendship to close intergenerational non-kin relationships (Williams and Nussbaum, 2000: p. 82). Given that Dykstra and Fleishmann (2015) and more recently Gibney et al. (2018) demonstrated the significant prevalence of this little-understood phenomenon, the deficit of research on intergenerational friendships is perplexing. In extant literature, older people are not considered suitable friend material for younger adults or of interest in themselves beyond narrow representations (Elliott O’Dare, 2017). Previous literature did not take intergenerational friendship seriously. This study issues a caution against this oversight, showing that in ignoring the naturally occurring intergenerational friendships of older people, social scientists ignore a significant and important part of many older people’s lives.

What this research reveals about intergenerational friendship

This research shows how being an intergenerational friend brings joy and meaning to the older friends in many complex and diverse ways. The data illustrated and gave voice to older participants, the ways that they ‘do’ intergenerational friendship and in turn ways of ‘doing’ older age through intergenerational friendship. Extrapolating the meanings and insights from this data proved to provide important new insights into how older people ‘do’ older age and intergenerational friendship.

Doing intergenerational friendship

The older friends in this study proved to be open and willing to forming new intergenerational friendships in older age. These friendships ‘looked’ very similar to peer-age friendships described in extant literature. The characteristics participants perceived as being important in their intergenerational friendships are consistent with existing studies on friendship in general (Galupo and Gonzalez, 2013; Felmlee and Muraco, 2009). Older friends emphasised the importance of equality and reciprocity within the intergenerational friendship. This emerged implicitly and explicitly throughout the participants’ accounts. The importance of equality and reciprocity illustrates that the older friends exercise awareness of an age difference in their intergenerational friendships. They associate a possible imbalance within the friendship to being older, and are prioritizing avoiding this imbalance within their friendships. Extant research purports that unbalanced relationships in older age are more likely to terminate and that older people are reluctant to seek informal support due to concerns over reciprocity (Lau et al., 2012; Klein Ikkink and van Tilburg, 1999). Being regarded and performing as an equal partner, giving and taking in equal measure, were ways in which participants were asserting that any social constructions of older people as being dependent, frail or a burden need not apply in the realm of intergenerational friendship.

The ‘older’ friends were also challenging other assertions in relation to ageing and friendship evident in extant literature. Seeking and experiencing enjoyment, laughter and fun was a fundamental part of intergenerational friendship. This characteristic was mentioned by every participant as one of the aspects of intergenerational friendship that they valued most. Given the importance of experiencing fun, laughter and enjoyment, why is this mostly absent in accounts of older age and friendship?

Social interaction matters for friendship formation. Smart (2007) stressed the importance of a personal life approach in social research; as a personal life is ‘lived in

many different places and spaces [...] and it forms a range of connections' (p. 29). In this research interests, hobbies and leisure pursuits are the connections that mattered as they brought the generations together in shared age-integrated places and spaces. The older friends spoke of the importance of 'expanding and not contracting' and it was often through these mediums that they were seeking new experiences, knowledge and insights through intergenerational friendships. Outside of interests, hobbies and leisure pursuits, numerous ad hoc opportunities are grasped to form intergenerational friendships. The participants demonstrated a willingness to form intergenerational friendships and to seek a 'common ground' with the age-other. It can be surmised that the main, perhaps the only, deterrent to more widespread intergenerational friendship is social age-segregation. This reasoning is compatible with the research findings of Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005), Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2006), Uhlenberg (2000), Uhlenberg and Gierveld (2004) who argue that age segregation is detrimental to all ages and forms a barrier to meaningful social interaction.

Challenging age homophily and the supremacy of homophily

In research, the common theme in relation to friendship is that it is a relationship predicated on 'sameness,' i.e. homophily. Age homophily is commonly argued to be a central factor in friendship formation. However, as discussed previously, in intergenerational friendship the 'sameness' that maintains the intergenerational friendship is a 'homophily of doing-and-being' (see Chapter 4). First, engaging in intergenerational friendships emphasises the commonalties shared by the friends, regardless of chronological age. Second, the friends, through ways of thinking and being, concur that 'differences' are perceived as useful, interesting and informative. A homophily of 'doing-and-being' therefore draws the younger and older adults together,

facilitating the friendship growth and maintenance. The significance of the homophily of doing-and-being is apparent, as most extant research on older adults emphasises how different older adults are when compared to younger adults, being a separate group with distinct characteristics and *insurmountable* differences. The way in which this research revealed a homophily of doing-and-being working within intergenerational friendship contravenes current theorising in friendship literature that older people have little in common with the age other and furthermore challenges the norm of age homophily in friendship and age-normative assumptions in general.

It would be incorrect to surmise that older adults do not have different priorities or experience differences in their approach to maintaining and conducting their friendships. Being at a different stage in the life course, along with managing the ageing body did present difficulties in the form of challenges or a ‘downside’ of intergenerational friendships, for example, a disparity in stamina was frequently mentioned. This constraint was managed by those participants, for instance, as they outlined how they enjoyed the company of their younger friends so much that they prepared for socialising with them by prioritising a rest period *in lieu* of other activities so that they would be energised to spend time socialising. This approach is conversant with a theory outlined earlier, namely Baltes and Baltes (1990) on the Selective Optimisation with Compensation (SOC), i.e. older adults adjust their behaviours to achieve goals that are selected as important priorities.

The portrayals in this study challenge previous research (see Rook, 1989) which outlined a myriad of strains in friendship. A lone participant, Lydia, came forward and spoke of intergenerational friendship termination due to age-related strains. Moreover, Demir et al. (2013) purported that friendship ‘has two major dimensions, overall quality (representing various provisions) and conflict’ (p. 861). Few conflicts are discussed by

the participants in relation to their intergenerational friendships. Differences and disagreements are mentioned but they are generally not considered as ‘strains’ or ‘conflict’ but instead are considered a *positive* aspect of the friendship.

The certainty echoed by many researchers that ‘successful’ friendships are dependent exclusively on homophily is challenged in this study as ‘difference’ emerges to be an important characteristic of intergenerational friendship. Difference is commonly perceived as a point of departure in relationships, yet in intergenerational friendships it is experienced and considered to be a positive and unique attribute of the friendship.

Being born in a particular place in time with the prevailing technological, cultural and social norms associated with that specific time, provided an intriguing difference between the intergenerational friends. ‘Different’ ways of ‘doing and being’ proved to be interesting, informative and useful to the friends as they exchanged those insights. These ‘differences’ had positive aspects as the older friends told of guiding and advising their intergenerational friends. The age difference supports the friendship as the older friends’ understanding of the processes of ageing has provided them with experience and insight in certain domains, i.e. in becoming and being older and managing the transitions involved. The younger friends in turn sought to inform and guide their older friends in relation to ‘new’ contemporary issues, for example, technology and awareness of new social norms.

Biggs (2018) recently proposed the notion of ‘intergenerational complementarity’; whereby people have the ability to be aware of their own generational position, put themselves in the shoes of the other generation (intergenerational intelligence) and have ‘the relative ability to negotiate between generational positions’ (p. 174). Biggs (2018) went on to argue that ‘[f]ew want to grow old as it is currently conceived. If the task is of cultural adaptation, then lasting solutions can be based on

intergenerational complementarity' (p. 174). While Biggs (2018) situated the possibility for intergenerational complementarity, 'in the workplace, in the family, in policy and in civil society', I argue that intergenerational friendship may present an exemplar of intergenerational complementarity at the level of the everyday in these older people's lives. A key finding therefore is that in intergenerational friendship homophily and difference elide, forming a unique part of the process of 'doing' intergenerational friendship. Furthermore, this unique aspect of intergenerational friendship appears to facilitate a particular way of relating to identity in older age.

All-age identity; facilitating 'sameness' and 'difference'

The identity older friends held and the meaning-making of being older featured as multidimensional in this research. A multidimensional identity was framed and achieved by 'not just being old' but many other doings-and-beings: the photographer, the sports enthusiast, the teacher, the professional, the musician, and performing many other roles such as partners, parents, grandparents, as well as (intergenerational) friends. Bowling et al. (2005) propose the concept of a subjective age identity, with individuals describing feeling a different age 'inside' than their chronological age. The concept of older people not feeling old is one examined by many theorists; for example, see Kaufman (1986) who posits that despite physical and social changes, older people continue to feel ageless inside.

However, in this study participants were not speaking of feeling ageless, instead participants signalled that they were concomitantly feeling *all* ages. An all-age identity was portrayed by the participants which has the effect that they can at times 'feel the same inside' as their younger friend, and yet at times can also feel older and act on this. Participants spoke of still feeling like a child and occasionally embracing childishness.

The concept of an *all-age* identity, therefore, emerges as a key concept in this thesis portraying a way of ‘doing’ older age which is conversant with being an older friend in an intergenerational friendship. ‘Doing’ intergenerational friendship and ‘doing’ older age are interwoven throughout the narratives of all of the participants, being particularly significant for the ‘aligning’ intergenerational friend type (see Chapter 5).

Doing older age through intergenerational friendship

Escaping the ‘old fogey’

The social construction of ageing and older people emerged from the accounts of the participants as a significant influence on how these participants perceived themselves and others and they conducted their friendships and pursuits accordingly. Participants were active in examining their ageing options, that is, how they chose to perform in older age. Participants were perceiving ‘otherness’ in how older adults, including themselves, are expected to conduct their lives, for example, cessation of professional roles, discounting new experiences or interests, and so on. The participants referred to and were describing detailed and thoughtful portraits of ‘the old fogey’ or ‘haggard’ or ‘fuddy-duddy’: deficit stereotypes of older people, characters that they were fearful of becoming.

These stereotypical portraits or sketches of old age can be conceived as being a manifestation of a ‘social imaginary’ of a feared fourth age (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015), a portrayal of the participants’ understanding of what the fourth age *could* bring. Higgs and Gilleard’s (2015) concept of the fourth age as social imaginary refers to a metaphorical ‘black hole of ageing’ that represents a collectively imagined terminal destination in life. Higgs and Gilleard articulated the characteristics of the fourth age social imaginary as a ‘location stripped of the social and cultural capital of later life which allows for the

articulation of choice, autonomy, self-expression and pleasure' (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015; p.14). The participants in this study concurred with this conceptualisation.

Ageing, Gilliard and Higgs (2000) argue, is a fundamental constituent of social life. Gilliard and Higgs (2000) state that 'fourth-age agendas remain agendas for the 'the other' in contrast to the self-interest of the third age ones which are personal' (p. 198). In focusing on the detrimental 'fourth age' agendas, policy makers, theorists and the like, fail to recognise the cultures of the third age; that is the vast array of ways that people experience and do ageing in modern societies, with opportunities for self-development and the pursuit of leisure activities, after retirement from formal work. In part, the ideal of equality (in living everyday life comparably, and alongside, the age-other) and the resistance to dependency motivated the participants in this study to strive to maintain a 'third age' identity.

Moving back and forth between a third and fourth age stage is observed and experienced by some participants in this data. Periods of illness interrupt a third age existence. Illness, along with the dependency and frailty it often brings, renders one more closely aligned to an old or aged identity and one's chronological age. A temporary shift to the fourth age is recounted, for example, by Tommy as he reflected on the dependency and frailty that illness wrought in his everyday life. However, recovery allowed for reverting to the third age and re-embracing and resuming social outings, being out in the world along with engaging in light-hearted banter, all in the company of his intergenerational friends. This shifting back and forth supports Laslett's (1989) argument that third and fourth ages are not linked to chronological age but are linked to experiences and age associations.

Sketching characterisations of a deficit old age, in the form of the fuddy-duddy or old fogey, prompted participants to avoid sites where older people gather in age-

segregated activities, what they perceived as ‘age silos’. Participants were challenging the stereotypical ageing script by choosing instead to age in their own way. Interesting accounts emerged from the data of an ageist stance held by the older participants towards ‘other’ older people while concomitantly exhibiting positive ageism towards younger people. The pervasiveness of ageism in contemporary societies featured as being so entrenched that it was rarely confronted or even recognised as such. It is detrimental and damaging to older people as it is visited on them (Binstock, 2010; Bytheway, 1995). Jönson (2013) described this as a process of ‘non-old’ people discriminating against their ‘future selves’.

In this research, accounts emerged of older people discriminating against those of their own age group, recall the many accounts given by some participants of older people being a boring or moaning group. In this study, positive ageism was directed at the age-other group while negative ageism was directed at the same-age old group by some participants. This approach may be considered another ‘way’ of ageing to evade becoming a stereotypical, feared caricature and a way of avoiding being perceived by others as a member of an excluded, negatively framed group (older people).

Goffman (1963) conceptualised stigma as an ‘attribute that is deeply discrediting’, with the stigmatised experiencing being socially rejected as they are distinguished from those who are socially accepted, those who Goffman referred to as ‘the normals’ (p. 3). In this rendering of stigma, applied to seeking intergenerational friendship, the discrediting attribute is ‘being old aged’ and ‘the normals’ are young people. The participants in this study anticipate the stigma attached to being perceived as members of the stereotypical ‘deficit’ group of old people. Seeking friendships with younger people, therefore, may be perceived as part of a coping mechanism to counteract the sense of being the object of age stigma.

Managing the disparity between how others perceive one's outer visible 'old' body and one's inner agelessness was considered by Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) who developed the concept of a 'mask of ageing'. The mask (the ageing body) concealed the internal, trapped ageless/youthful self from society. In this thesis, an alternative insight is provided as an internal process is revealed by the participants as they engage in intergenerational relationship building and cultivation. While the body may mask hidden identities, the participants deploy and acknowledge their identities that were built up over the life course. The participants in this study made little effort to camouflage the older body to appear younger, they 'looked their age', and many of the oldest-old people used devices associated with old age, such as walking aids. They did not attempt to be the kinds of 'super-agers' that are often portrayed in the media, for example old people performing exceptional athletic feats. Allan (2010) asserted that identity is reinforced in friendship as friends confirm and reinforce 'who you are' and, therefore, they are more likely to be peer-aged friends. It emerged in this study that identity reinforcement traverses the age spectrum and those intergenerational friends provide a valued and vital role in the process of maintaining an 'all-age', life course identity.

Social and status processes (retiring, being widowed, and ageing) are all transitions that were being experienced and negotiated by the older people in this study. The participants gave voice to their belief that these transitions could be construed as consigning them to obscurity or being made invisible at this different life stage (retired from previous work commitments, children grown). However, the older individuals instead described pursuing long-held interests and friendships with like-minded individuals. In some instances, this had not been possible due to families or formal work commitments at younger and middle age. Atchley's (1989) Continuity Theory has some limited resonance with these emergent concepts as older adults maintain their identity and

well-being in later life through seeking continuity. They seek continuity in who they have always been, in interests and pursuits that they have always practised, in continuing to be themselves. However, continuity proved to be most pertinent in continuing to belong, continuing to participate in the mundanities of their daily lives, with continued inclusion and integration in mainstream society. Challenging the ‘static’ rendering of the concept, while continuity was necessary in these aspects, participants additionally sought to ‘expand and not contract’.

Seeking continued belonging and connectedness: being socially included

Allan (1989) counselled social researchers that locating friendships in their social context reveals the ‘real significance of friendships in people’s lives’ (p. 156). In this study, locating the participants’ friendships in a social context emerged through the participants’ accounts in an implicit and an explicit way. May (2011) cited Weeks (1990) and emphasised that ‘identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others’ (p. 88). Belonging and connecting materialises as a central underlying concept in relation to the meaning of intergenerational friendship for the older people who took part in this study.

Belonging, or a sense of belonging, is defined and conceptualised by May (2011) as not being only about the personal but additionally concerns the social and political decisions taken by a society which have resulting tangible outcomes for its citizens, that may be experienced without being noticed. As May (2011) stated, belonging is that sense that ‘we can go about our everyday lives without having to pay much attention to how we

do it' (p. 370). May further pointed out that if the individual experiences a lack of fit [feeling excluded, ignored or isolated], then a sense of unease, of not belonging, emerges.

In this research many of the participants spoke about having same-age friendships and intergenerational friendships and some relayed a preference for intergenerational friendships. I argue that for older people who form and maintain intergenerational friendship(s), the meaning they attach to intergenerational friendship is about continuing to belong, through 'belonging in the now'. 'Belonging in the now' can be conceptualised as the older person living in and being part of contemporary society, just as they have always been. The friends seek to be included; they seek belonging through participating in the world as it is today. Participants additionally look to the future.

Intergenerational friendship is a conduit to continued societal connectedness and belonging for the people in this study. Participants seek connectedness to contemporary social norms and to 'new' ways of thinking and being in the world as it is now; belonging, through going about their everyday lives, not only looking back on lives lived but living their lives today and looking forward to the future. Age norms and ageism (exhibited by the participants in the form of in-group ageism) are perceived to threaten this belonging and are negotiated through intergenerational friendship.

Challenging the ageing script

The participants did not deny their chronological age; many mentioned their chronological age and the oldest-old, in particular, seemed proud of the age they had attained. Others, in line with Simon's statement of '*the spectre of the number*' (advancing chronological age), were not so enthused. However, defiance emerged from the narratives. Perhaps the most telling insight is that many spoke of looking forward to the

future, along with speaking of looking backward at the past. They spoke of wanting to develop, to continue to learn and were open to forming new friendships. Participants continued to support and enjoy their friendships, to live in a way, and to enjoy their lives in a way, that was meaningful for them. However, they did not ignore or deny the changes and challenges that ageing in a contemporary western society presents to them.

The challenging of ageing expectations or behaviours took many forms. Gilleard and Higgs (2000) posited that in contemporary society, 'post-work lives have become richer and more complex' (p. 193). This would seem to be the case for those who took part in this study. Some participants illustrated defiance by not abandoning the professions that formed part of their identity and that they had been mandated (by employment policy) to retire from officially. Instead, they continued to pursue these professions or embraced other professions in an informal capacity, often with or through their intergenerational friendships. Hugo is an example of someone who embraced the active retirement group model. However, he and his friends disrupted and expanded on the model to form a group whose commonalities extended beyond age.

Additionally, some of the oldest-old participants, such as Angela and Lucia, rejected the 'busy bodies' expectation of the active ageing paradigm (Katz, 2000) choosing instead less onerous pastimes (watching TV or chatting) with their friends. Others spurned the segregated social arrangements/paradigms organised by the society in which they lived, for example, by not being members of groups that are specifically aimed at older people. In a sense, intergenerational friendship was framed as being an alternative to 'active ageing'. In not adopting a 'ring-fenced' social life, in rejecting to socialise exclusively among people of their own age (many of the participants had formed and maintained both same age and intergenerational friendships), participants were spurning

age appropriate behaviours, for instance, in Tommy's case, by not feeling obliged to leave social occasions early solely because they are deemed 'old'.

The people who took part in this study did not reject being long-lived, their chronological age; they did not deny that they are old. Kaufman (1993, 1986) argued that 'old people do not perceive meaning in aging itself so much as they perceive meaning in being themselves in old age' (p. 16). What the participants rejected was the ubiquity of behaviours and characteristics ascribed to older people through social norms, age norms and expectations. This stance is subjective as the participants observed and accepted the choice of other older people to adopt and conform to social norms.

Participants did not seek to be limited in making friendship choices, which were a matter of personal preference and were not constrained by the influences of an ageist, age-aware society. In being an intergenerational older friend, the friends described challenging societal and cultural expectations of what older people 'should' do and be. Biggs (2006) pointed out that 'increasing diversity in cultures of ageing contributes to a feeling that there is nothing particularly distinctive about being old' (p. 112). However, through intergenerational friendship, the people who took part in this study acknowledged that retaining feelings from across their entire life course, being long-lived and being of a different generation brought unique insights and knowledge which can be exchanged with the age-other.

Concluding reflections

The impetus for this research was to support a broader, more diverse conversation around the experience of old age and friendship in older age. Older people and the experience of becoming and being long-lived are rich with a myriad of meanings and experiences that

merit representation in research and literature. The research findings set out here have implications at the macro level, i.e. for policy and practice. Much of the policy enacted in contemporary societies is concerned with the well-being of people as they attain older age. Organisations and individuals with interests within the broader context of the third sector (befriending, community and social inclusion, loneliness interventions) and state interventions (in relation to ageism, ageing in place, active ageing) should find the insights developed through this research insightful and valuable for their ongoing work.

In contributing to the understanding of how ‘ordinary’ older people negotiate their search for enjoyment and belonging in older age, this thesis has potential to contribute to policy and practice through this understanding. As this was not applied research, I desist from making any explicit policy recommendations. However, I believe that anyone who has read the thesis should understand the value of intergenerational friendships, and also appreciate the challenges facing any attempts to cultivate them through interventions.

The data gathered in this study provides a convincing rationale that intergenerational friendship and all that it entails is congruent with and plays a significant part in the meaningful ‘way’ of ageing that these older adults have chosen to adopt. Engaging in intergenerational friendship, being an older friend, forming, maintaining and enjoying intergenerational friendship was a crucial component of ‘doing’ older age in a meaningful way for participants going about their everyday lives. Through the personal relationships comprising their intergenerational friendships, the older friends were ‘performing’ age as they experienced it. For these participants, this is what ageing and being long-lived ‘means’ in contemporary society. They are not denying being old or advocating an anti-ageing stance; they acknowledge the differences being older brings. Some participants expressed a fear of what getting older could mean for them. They were negotiating older age in a way that has meaning and is genuine for them, i.e. by being

themselves and rejecting stereotypical portrayals, constraining social age norms and ‘unreasonable’ expectations of how older people ‘should’ be. Intergenerational friendships were an essential part of embracing a good old age for these participants.

Resistance has dramatic connotations, yet as this research reveals it is in the ‘everyday’ and the mundane, in friendship, leisure pursuits, chatting and laughing, and so on, that resistance to social and cultural age stereotyping and ageism is enacted. This way of being older is not only about negotiating cultural and social barriers at the personal level but has potential to speak back to these stereotypes and ageist norms at the societal level. The ‘personal’ in the form of intergenerational friendship is at the core of the experience of the process of ageing and ‘doing being older’. The statements of exclusion and inclusion, the homophily of doing-and-being, celebrating difference and age difference within intergenerational friendship and holding an all-age identity all formed part of the participants’ lived experience of being older and being an older intergenerational friend. The ‘performance of being older’, through all these dimensions, is imbued with seeking joy, belonging and connectedness in everyday life.

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Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet

Intergenerational friendships: Older People with younger friends

What the research is about

I am carrying out research with older people in Ireland who have, or have had, friends who are much younger than they are. If you are: aged 65 or over and have, or have had, a friend who is at least 15 years your junior, whom you have known for three years or more, I would be delighted to talk with you.

Findings arising from the research will give insight into how older people in Ireland understand and experience intergenerational friendship and the role it plays in how they view the ageing process. This understanding can be used to contribute to the body of research in relation to how older adults experience everyday life in our society.

What taking part means

Our conversation should last about one hour. It is my intention to interview 30 people living throughout Ireland. Participation in the research is voluntary. You can withdraw from the interview at any time, no explanation or reason will be required.

During our conversation I would like to hear about your experience and thoughts on the close friendship you have with your younger friend(s). I am particularly interested in what you think these friendships add to how you feel about being older and living your daily life. It would be helpful if you would select and bring along photographs (up to 10) which you think will help you to explain to me what you consider important about your intergenerational friendship. These photographs of places, things, or people can be printed or saved on your tablet or phone. If you choose, they can be from social media sites such as Facebook or Instagram. The photographs will remain your property and will not be copied or used in any way without your consent. If you would prefer not to bring photographs, then please be assured that that is fine also.

I will record our conversation and type it up. Excerpts from interviews may be used in publications or presentations. The information you give will be considered completely confidential. Every effort will be made to ensure that all names, personal details and any identifying information will be removed or changed to protect your identity.

Contact details

I welcome any further questions regarding the research, please contact me:

Catherine Elliott O'Dare by Phone: 087-7849320: e-mail odarec@tcd.ie.

My supervisors' names and contact details are as follows: Professor Virpi Timonen, Phone 01-8962950. E-mail: virpi.timonen@tcd.ie. Dr Catherine Conlon, Phone 01-896 3363. Email: conlonce@tcd.ie

Appendix B

An Invitation to Take Part in Research On

Intergenerational Friendships: Older People with Younger Friends

What the research is about

I am carrying out research with older people in Ireland who have, or who have had, good friends who are younger than they are. I am interested in hearing about being an older friend, the things friends of different ages enjoy doing together and what they mean to each other despite their age differences.

I would like to talk to you

If you are

- Aged 65 or over

And have, or have had in the past, a friend

- Younger than you by 15 years or more
- Not related to you
- Your friend for more than three years

You can contact me

Name Catherine Elliott O'Dare

Address: School of Social Work and Social Policy

Room M43, Goldsmith Hall

Trinity College, Dublin 2

Phone 087 7849320

E-mail odarec@tcd.ie

What taking part means

Taking part means talking with me in complete confidence for approximately one hour. I can arrange to meet you in a place and at a time which suits you, should you agree.

If you think you may be interested in taking part in my research and you would like further information, I would be delighted to hear from you.

THANK YOU

Appendix C

Consent Document for Participation in Research

Intergenerational friendships: Older people with younger friends

☐

I have been given a copy of the information sheet and any queries I had have been satisfactorily answered.

☐

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the interview at any time, without giving a reason.

☐

I agree to be interviewed and audio recorded by the researcher.

☐

I understand that the information I provide will be treated with complete confidentiality and stored in a secure place.

☐

I understand that any photographs which I bring to the interview will remain my property and will not be copied or used in any way without my consent.

☐

I agree to the typed interviews being archived for a period of 5 years after the completion of the thesis and being used by researchers in the future.

☐

I agree that I may be contacted in the future by the researcher who may wish to clarify information with me in relation to this study or to discuss the possibility of participating in further research.

Please complete the contact details sheet attached

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

If you need any further information, please contact: Catherine Elliott O'Dare on 0877849320 or email odarec@tcd.ie.

Appendix D

*PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Intergenerational friendships: Older people with younger friends

Interview Reference: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Country of birth: _____

Length of time living in Ireland: _____

Gender: _____

Region (*please circle*): North South East West

Place of Residence: _____

Marital Status: _____

No of Children: _____

Household Composition: _____

Completed level of education: _____

Last or current **main** occupation: _____

Head of households last or current
Main occupation: _____

*Document adapted from: Participant Demographic Information Form in Conlon, C., Timonen, V., Carney, G. and Scharf, T. (2013) *Guide to Researching Intergenerational Solidarity and Justice*. Dublin: Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre and Galway: Irish Centre for Social Gerontology.

Appendix E

Interview Guide (Initial guide drafted prior to the commencement of interviewing)

Each interview will commence with a reminder to the participant as follows: I am recording this interview with your permission, as we previously discussed. I remind you that you may stop the interview at any time should you wish or if you need a break we can take one.

Photo elicitation

1. **Tell me why you selected these photographs, what do they tell me about what's important about your intergenerational friendship?** Encourage the participant to speak, it is important to let the participant take the lead in this segment of the interview.
2. **In your opinion, has selecting and using your photographs in our conversation been useful?** Prompt: If so in what way. If not, why not? On choosing the photographs did you reflect on your friendship?

Initial questions

1. **Could you describe how your friendship started and how it grew?** Prompt: How long have you known them? Where did you meet them? What were your first impressions of them? Did you anticipate when you first met that your friendship would grow?
2. **I'd like to hear about what you do with your friend?** Prompt: How often would you see them or speak with them? What things do you enjoy doing together? What interests do you share? Do you meet their other friends or partners or family? Do they meet yours? Are you both part of any societies or interest groups. Are you planning any activities or holidays or excursions in the future?

Intermediate Questions

1. **Could you explain to me what makes this friend a 'good' friend?** Prompt-characteristics of a good friend as opposed to other types of friends in their network.
2. **Would you see your friendships with your younger friends as being any different in any way to your same-age friendships?** Prompt: Do you do different things? Do you speak about different things? Do you feel differently when you are with them? Are they important to you in different ways? Do you see the future of your friendship differently? Does age matter in friendship?
3. **Could I ask you about any down-side you may have experienced in your intergenerational friendship?** Prompt: Does the age difference cause any specific problems? How are the problems dealt with or resolved?
4. **Do you recall if anyone has every commented on the age difference, if so what was your reaction and feelings at the time?** Prompt: Who commented and in what circumstances? What was your response? How did this make you feel?

5. **Does having younger friends make you think or feel about being older?** Prompt: In what ways. Is this a positive thing?

If the friendship has ended:

1. **Can you describe for me how the friendship ended, what happened?** Prompt: was it gradual or a sudden argument. Who initiated the ending- was it mutual?
 2. **Could you tell me why the friendship ended?** Prompt: Was there a background to the ending, did it build up or was it unexpected? Was the friendship undermined by anything in particular? Did the age difference contribute to the break-up?
 3. **Could you describe what the end of the friendship meant for you?** Prompt: In the aftermath, how did the loss of this friend affect your daily life? Did you continue to see any mutual friends and continue with hobbies or other formally shared activities? Did others comment on the breakup?
 4. **Looking back now, what are your observations on the friendship and the subsequent ending of the friendship?** Prompt: on reflection what are your thoughts and feelings about the friendship and the age difference. Would you make other intergenerational friends in the future?
-

Ending questions

1. **Is there anything you would like to add in relation to what we have discussed earlier in the interview?**
2. **Is there something I haven't asked you that you think is important about our topic?**
3. **Is there anything you would like to ask me?**