

## **Title**

Exploring the meaning of home and its implications for the care of older people

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## **Key Words**

Older People

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## **Conflict of Interests**

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

## **Abstract**

### **Title**

Exploring the meaning of home and its implications for the care of older people.

### **Aims and Objectives**

To explore the meaning of home for six baby boomers and consider how this insight can be used when caring for older people in hospital or residential settings.

### **Background**

Feeling at home is important to help retain a sense of autonomy, security and well-being, but home is a complex concept to understand. The baby boomers are a large cohort entering later life and understanding their sense of home is not only an example of anticipatory gerontology but it could also provide the tools to explore home with the current older population, who may be in a variety of care settings.

### **Design and Methods**

A qualitative hermeneutic approach was adopted to explore the meaning of home of six baby boomers. The participants were asked to take photographs showing what home meant to them and interpret these in a recorded photo-elicitation interview. Small teams then reviewed the images to provide further insight. Finally, all the data was reviewed to provide an overall analysis of the revealed meaning of home.

### **Results**

Having possessions or stuff was important for the meaning of home; being familiar with the local environment was also 'homely', as well as certain textures and familiar sounds and smells; relationships with others and the ability to have choice in where and how the participants live were also significant for their meaning of home.

### **Conclusions**

The meaning of home is complex. Nevertheless, in this study an evocative sense of home was revealed and these insights could be used in discussions with older people in care settings to help increase their sense of autonomy, security and well-being. Furthermore these insights could also be used to develop a framework to help nursing staff guide these discussions.

### **Relevance to Clinical Practice**

- By considering the multisensory nature of the meaning of home nurses can create a sense of home for patients.
- Feeling at home can improve the well-being and a sense of autonomy for patients.
- Enabling patients to feel more autonomous recognises the importance of a person-centred approach to care

'What does this paper contribute to the wider global clinical community?'

- This paper gives an example of anticipatory gerontology by exploring the meaning of home for the baby boomers, a large cohort of people entering later life in the Western World.
- Insights about the multisensory nature of home could form the basis for the development of a practice framework to guide nurses' articulation of the meaning of home in planning care.
- Articulating the meaning of home in care plans could lead to a greater sense of home in care settings for older people and thereby improve their sense of well-being

### **Keywords**

Meaning of home

Senses of home

Photo elicitation

Nursing home

Older People

## INTRODUCTION

The proportion of the population aged over 65 years is set to increase significantly over the next 11 years, as a result of the increase in birth rate following the end of the Second World War (Office of National Statistics [ONS] 2017). This period of increased birth rate is often referred to as the baby boom years and those born at that time referred to as the baby boomers (Eurostat 2017, Willetts 2010). Ageing research is therefore important to enable nurses and other health and social care professionals to understand the needs of this age group. Settersten (2006) refers to the importance of anticipatory gerontology in which those who are about to enter later life, such as the baby boomers, are also included in aging research. This anticipatory gerontology can help shape and influence policy, care practices, health promotion strategies and living arrangements.

### *Background*

An ageing population makes living arrangements, housing choices and ageing in place of interest to an international audience (Stones and Gullifer, 2016; Mackenzie, Curryer, Byles. 2015; Wiles et al, 2012). Being able to live independently and in a place of choice would be the intention of the majority of adults as they get older, especially since with advanced age people spend an increasing amount of time within their own home environment (Davies 2016; Fjordside & Morville, 2016, Gillsjö & Schwartz-Barcott 2011). The majority of people aged over 65 years living in the European Union (EU) live well and independently in their own homes (International Longevity Centre [ILC] 2016). However others have admissions to hospital and a smaller yet significant proportion move to live in a residential setting. In 2011 the proportion of older people living in residential settings in the EU was 1.7% (ILC 2016). In England 65% of those admitted to hospital are aged over 65 years old; this includes baby boomers born between 1945 and 1951 (Age UK 2017). Furthermore, NHS digital (2016) report that, when broken into different age bands, hospital figures show that the baby boomers (all those born 1945-1965) represent the largest group of patients in England.

The importance of feeling at home has been explored by seeking what is the meaning of home for older people (for example Dahlin-Ivanoff et al 2007; Mallet 2004). These studies have highlighted that the meaning of home is complex and difficult to articulate yet its significance is important to consider when caring for older people. For example, people feel an emotional and environmental attachment to where they live, (Saarnio et al 2016, Dahlin-Ivanhoff et al., 2007; Fänge & Ivanoff, 2009). The home environment is where an older person's identity is represented and their sense of who they are is retained; home provides a

sense of self, security, safety, and well-being (Sixsmith, et al., 2014; Stones & Gullifer, 2016). Furthermore, feeling in *control* and having *choice* about how and where they live are significant as people get older (Fjordside & Morville, 2016); So helping older people maintain their identity by being autonomous in decision making and how they wish to live their life is a core aspect of creating a sense of home (Means, 2007). Lack of this autonomy impacts upon well-being and consequently health (Fjordside & Morville, 2016),

The baby boomers have shared similar social and historical events (Gilleard and Higgs 2007). They experienced significant changes in their lives which offered them far greater choices with regards to education, mobility and living arrangements than previous cohorts (Pruchno 2012) which could impact upon their meaning of home especially as they age. However it has not been asked specifically what the meaning of home is for the baby boomers entering or about to enter later life. Therefore the aim of this research was to explore the meaning of home for six baby boomers and see how it compared with an older cohort. This is an example of anticipatory gerontology that could add to the growing understanding of the meaning of home for those entering later life, but it could also provide the tools to explore the meaning of home with the current older population.

## **METHODOLOGY and METHODS**

Given the complexity of trying to understand the meaning of home, a qualitative hermeneutic approach has been adopted in the study, with a focus on the various layers of interpretation that allow a full understanding of the lived experience at any given time (Gadamer 2006). Hermeneutics as a philosophy enables the interpretation of actions in order to reveal deeper meaning, which Heidegger (a hermeneutic phenomenologist) formulated and Gadamer further developed (Holloway and Wheeler 2010).

Gadamer (2006), a former student of Heidegger, argues that hermeneutics is about trying to understand and interpret the meaning of something that is not clear or unambiguous. Understanding is achieved through recognition of an individual's past, present and a having a shared understanding with another. Gadamer (2006) discusses the 'fusion of horizons' where appreciation of another's experience is achieved through openness and listening. This approach resonates with nurses because it respects the unique lived experience of the individual to enable a person-centred approach to care delivery (Phillips 2007).

Participants were asked to take their own photographs, revealing what home meant to them, and these were discussed in a photo elicitation interview. Participant-generated photo

elicitation is a visual research method in which participants are asked to explore a specific phenomenon by taking photographs of their choice and to interpret these in an interview (Harper 2012; Pink 2007). The use of photographs has been linked to the accumulation of richer, deeper data and, if the participants generated the image themselves, greater autonomy is achieved (Wang & Burris 1997; Harper 2002; Plunkett et al 2012).

Photographs document the individual, lived experience of the participant (Wang & Burris 1997). So the use of photographs is pertinent to the individual's meaning of home, especially as everyday life is initially conceptualised by what we see (Weber 2008, Rose 2012). The participants' own photographs of home are particularly powerful, since these are inextricably linked to self (Moore 2000). Moreover, images have the potential of "freeze-framing" events, emotions and relationships (Frith & Harcourt 2007, p. 1342), which, according to Pink (2007), encourages a reflexive approach by participants as they interpret their meaning of home. This means that using images of home, which the participants have created themselves, can stop time and enable participants to reflect on their own meaning of home and bring to the surface their subconscious thoughts. Harper (2002, p. 13) maintains that this use of photographs to stir the sub-conscious reveals a deeper understanding and meaning, because participants connect with their "core definitions of self".

In participant-generated photo elicitation interviews there are layers of interpretation. Firstly participants reflect upon what photographs to take in response to the phenomenon being explored. Then, during the photo elicitation interviews, another layer of interpretation is made as the participants reflect again on the significance of the images they took, and more is therefore achieved than just an interview on its own (Pink 2007, Rose 2012). Photographs are tangible and can be treated "as concrete and objective records of events that can be examined, and explored in the interview" (Cronin 1998 cited Frith & Harcourt [2007] p. 1343). The handling and sharing of images also helps reduce any awkwardness of the interview, providing a focal point for discussion rather than face-to-face eye contact all the time (Banks 2007). It also fully engages the participants; this is helped by the tactile nature of passing the images between the participant and the researcher. Banks (2007) suggests that the strength of this approach is that it is open-ended, evocative and empowering for the participants.

## **Methods**

### ***Choice of sample***

Recruitment of participants was accomplished through chain referral or snowball sampling (Holloway and Wheeler 2010), a variation of purposive sampling, whereby colleagues/family members of the researcher were asked to identify people who met the criteria of being a

baby boomer, (i.e. born between 1945 and 1965), living independently and able to give consent to the study. Ethical approval was granted by the lead author's university Ethics Policies and Procedures School Research Committee. However, Wiles et al (2008) suggest that not all the ethical issues are apparent at the start of a study so consent should be sought throughout the process and the respect for the participants maintained. Using visual methods has its risks, especially when participants take their own photographs (Allen 2012). Also photo elicitation interviews can bring to the surface hidden or forgotten memories, which can be painful. This was discussed at the start of the process and outlined in the participant information sheets given to each participant.

Having identified potential participants they were contacted by phone and given an overview of the study. At this point if the participants agreed to proceed they were sent, via an email (at their request), a participant information sheet and a consent form outlining the purpose of the study, data collection and how the data would be used, including using the photographs in publications. A summary of the six participants is listed below, highlighting their current marital status, whom they live with, type of housing, how long they have lived there and their occupation.

(All names have been changed to maintain confidentiality).

### *Participants*

Dan - is a 62 year old married man (at the time of the interview), born in 1949. He lives in his own thatched cottage in a rural location. He has lived there for over 25 years. He works full-time as a managing director of a local science based company.

Ruth - is a 61year old married woman, (at the time of the interview), born in 1950. She lives in her own home, which had been a school room in the 19th Century. It is located in a semi-rural location and she has lived there for 15 months. Ruth is a self-employed researcher.

Tessa - lives in her own home with her husband, in a small town. She is 57 years old (at the time of the interview) and was born in 1953. She works part-time as a receptionist in a local GP surgery. She has lived in her home for 21 years.

Karen has three homes, one in the city, one in Europe and another in a rural location, which is where we met for her interview. She was born in 1962 and was aged 49 years at the time of the interview. She and her husband have owned their UK rural home for 22 years, the home in Europe 18 years and her city flat for eight years. She works part-time as a self-employed natural therapist.

Paul was born in 1964 and was 47 at the time of the interview. He lives with his wife and two children in an urban setting. It is their own home and they have lived there for 19 years. Paul works full-time as a labourer.

Barbara lives in an urban setting. Her home is rented and she has lived there with her husband and two children for 14 years. She was born in 1964 and was 47 at the time of the interview. She works part-time as a self-employed domestic cleaner.

### **Data Collection**

Participants were offered the use of a digital camera or, if they choose, the freedom to use their own camera. When the participants had finished, the photographs were printed and the photo elicitation interviews were undertaken at each participant's home, recorded and later transcribed. The participants were only asked one question and that was to share their thoughts about their photographs, in whatever order they chose. There was minimal input from the researcher, with points of clarification asked, or reiteration of key points made. Because the photographs were generated by the participants, it was important to retain their autonomy and minimal questioning reduced the influence of the researcher on the participants' own interpretations. Woolrych and Sixsmith (2011 p.275) note that this approach enables the participants to be creators of their own knowledge, challenging the power relations between the researcher and the researched associated with more traditional forms of research. "Participants are then able to exercise control over the presentation of themselves through the research". As a result of minimal questioning, the participants were all very reflective as they interpreted their meaning of home from their photographs.

### **Interpretation of data**

Gadamer (2006b, p. 30) supports the "back and forth" process, when interpreting data, in order to deepen understanding. Given the complexity of the meaning of home, it was appropriate for the methodology to include four layers of interpretation, going 'back and forth', to achieve a deeper understanding of what home meant to the participants. The first layer of interpretation was made by the participants as they selected which photographs to take. The second was when they reflected and interpreted the meaning of their printed images. The next layer of interpretation was made by small panels of people of different ages, ranging from 19 years old to 88 years old. These small teams looked at each participant's photographs to see if they could interpret the meaning of home from them. Fenge and Jones (2012, p. 306) support the use of teams suggesting it adds "multiple views



and perspectives into the interpretive process". The teams were insightful and expressed an understanding of the participants' meanings of home just by looking at their photographs. At these sessions in which the teams gave their own interpretations, notes were taken. Holloway and Wheeler (2010) recommend the addition of multi-perspectives to the interpretation of the data to avoid researcher bias. Furthermore Gadamer (2005) adds that every contribution leads to further development and understanding of the lived experience.

The holistic-content approach of Lieblich et al (1998) was used during the final layer of interpretation of the data. This involves reading all the material, (in this study this includes looking at the photographs, the transcripts and reflective team notes) several times until patterns emerge and the meaning 'speaks' to you (Lieblich et al 1998 p, 66). When all the data had been looked at in this detail, it could be seen where there were similarities in the individual stories and where there were differences. These interpretations are now presented in the findings.

## **FINDINGS**

Having possessions or stuff was important for the meaning of home; being familiar with the local environment was also homely, as well as certain textures and familiar sounds and smells; relationships with others and the ability to have choice in where and how the participants live were also significant for their meaning of home.

### *Importance of Stuff*

The participants all took photographs of things or stuff in their homes that represented their meaning of home. Ruth mentioned that perhaps home is a visual "presentation of ourselves" and, like many of the participants, she shared images of the 'things' that were important to her sense of home, (see Figure 1 Ruth's study).

Other stuff was shown in pictures of the activities that they like to do in the home, such as reading, watching the television, drinking cups of tea in their favourite chair and playing music. Dan liked having familiar stuff like his favourite cup, despite it being cracked, saying

Having a chip on a teacup and everyone thinks why don't you throw it away and I sort of think, well I have been drinking out of this teacup for the last 3 years and I'm not going to throw it away now!

Karen talks a great deal about the importance of stuff and how it can represent home or her feelings of home. In each of the three homes she owns she has a cupboard that holds all her stuff that she removes and then returns to the cupboard as she arrives and departs in each home. When she discusses her cupboard she emphasises the importance of her stuff saying,

It is kind of a mini thing within the home that it is completely my stuff, and that sort of made me think that effectively wherever I can do that, I can make home. So it becomes my encapsulation of home, and I open that, and gradually unpack it, and I live from there while I'm there. And then it all goes kind of goes back in again.

If she's travelling she takes a collection of visual cues and other stuff to make her feel at home. For example photographs of her family, or post cards of her favourite paintings, or small collections of shells that she has collected with her children. Having her stuff wherever she is makes Karen feel at home.

#### *Familiarity with the local environment*

Being familiar with the local environment was identified as being important for the meaning of home. Dan took a photo of the valley (see Figure 2) as he approaches his home expressing how it made him feel saying,

And we sometimes stop at this lay-by and gaze down 'cos it really can be quite nice with the sunlight over it. So it's about feeling that one is at home if you know what I mean and all the rigours of the journey you have been on or if you have been abroad or, umm, and that is why I particularly wanted to take a picture and perhaps discuss that sort of aspect, that sort of feeling of homeness.

Ruth lives in a semi-rural location and, having moved home several times she finds that her dogs enable her to get to know people quickly in the local community and this familiarity with local people is important for her sense of home,

That's the other thing. Dogs are the big thing. Dogs are part of that. I couldn't imagine a home without a dog. You come in and the dog's waiting there to greet you. And of course nearly everyone in the road has got one so that's how you meet people...you go out with the dogs and you bump into people all the time, which is really nice.

Paul took photographs of the views from his bedroom window feeling a sense of home because he was familiar with the community, saying

The views from the windows, looking out from the windows, it's um something you see every day and it is something you are used to and which you associate with home.

Tessa believes she is not attached to the bungalow where she lives. Yet having her own space and own material things are very important, saying "I would be happy to move elsewhere as long as I had certain things around me". The photographs also show a sense

that the participants see their homes as a place in the community but also safe from the community. The image of the outside of their homes, or the approach to their homes, is reassuring; they are safe within or they will soon be safe within. So, overall, a controlled familiarity with the local community was considered an important aspect for feeling at home.

### *Importance of textures*

The participants discussed the importance of comfort and how different textures, or the tactile nature of home comforts can make them feel a sense of home. For example they took a photograph of their favourite chair, where they sit and watch the television, look out into the garden, meditate, or just be. The sense of comfort this offered provided a real sense of home (see Figure 3 participants' chairs). Others took photographs of their beds and the pleasure of their own linen. Ruth said

I think I'm quite a comfort person, because... it's really important to me to have nice bed-linen and I change it regularly. And we've got this enormously wide 6 foot bed that is so comfortable that whenever we go anywhere else it's horrible.

Barbara, Ruth and Tessa also took photographs of their baths noting the significance of having their own bath at home was important, a place where they could relax, and form part of their ritual before going to bed. Barbara said

But I felt that it was important to keep the bath because I always feel, it's just somewhere to go and take yourself off in the bath. But I think for women in particular the bath to lie down and soak in the bath is one of those places. So that's why the bath was really important to the home.

Karen also discusses the importance of feeling at home towards the end of life and importance of feeling comfortable in a homelike environment. She tells a story about how her mother-in-law had died in her daughter's home in the wrong bed sheets, believing she would have felt uncomfortable saying

I think how she hated the sheets that they weren't full cotton. The daughter just always used polycotton, you know half- and half. I remember her coming to stay with me and then absolutely berating the daughter: "Why don't you have linen sheets? Why do you have these ghastly polycotton things?" And I therefore, after having that conversation, was always seeing her lying there thinking: You must be hating those sheets on one level.

### *Familiar sounds*

Another aspect of the meaning of home that some of the participants referred to was the comfort in the familiar sounds of home. Ruth and Paul mentioned how the sounds of their dogs walking around a night were familiar and reassuring. Paul remarked how odd it was not to hear these sounds when a previous dog had died,

'it was that weird thing about not hearing the dog walking around. Because the floors, it was not hearing the walking around on the laminate floors. Tip tat. And I couldn't get used to it'.

He has now replaced the dog and the comforting familiar sounds have returned.

In her current home Ruth has moved to a semi-rural location and enjoys this setting and feels a sense of contentment as she walks to the front door of her house listening to her footsteps saying 'I walk in the gate and I crunch up the path in my boots and I think "Oh" and I feel as if I'm in the country. So I love this [laughs]. So that is really nice'

Dan sums up the importance of the reassuring familiar and comforting sounds of home to his sense of home when discussing the photographs of his Aga (a heat storage stove), and the walls creaking,

You go down in the morning and there you feel the warmth in the middle of January and hear this gentle chugging sound and again if you're in the house on your own it's a gentle comfort as you hear this chugging. You can hardly hear it when there's someone else talking. It's a gentle sort of noise.... Everything sort of squeaks and moves and again they're all just sounds that you become familiar with... You become, oh it's the house and its talking to you and its ok (laugh)

### *Familiar smells*

Surprisingly, the photographs triggered memories of familiar smells associated with the notion of home. Not all participants talked about familiar smells, but they did feature strongly. This emphasises how evocative the meaning of home is; participants experienced thoughts of home through deeply held physical and strong emotional feelings. Paul shared an image of his hallway and an oil painting on the wall painted by his father. As he talked about this image he mentioned his childhood and his family home, how his dad painted the sea views they could see from their home, and how he would visit his aunty who was an artist and her home smelt of paint oils saying, 'So my memory has always been of the smell of oil painting and canvases and that sort of stuff'. These memories made him reflect how his parents had created a safe and secure home when he was growing up and that he wanted to do the same for his own children.

Another example of how the images made the participants reflect on the familiar smells in their homes was by Karen. When discussing the image of her Aga she noted preparing meals for her family and how they would rush in from school and be delighted if they could smell their favourite meal being cooked. Dan summed this up when he reflected on the importance of sounds and smells when looking at the photograph of his Aga saying, 'you can be reassured by sights, smells or be reassured by sounds, so that's what that picture was simply about'.

## *Relationships*

Relationships with families were noted by all as important for their meaning of home. Their roles as parents and grandparents and being able to create a sense for home for their children and grandchildren suggested a great deal about the significance of home. Karen's children have left home, but two of the images she took were of her family dining tables in her rural home in the UK and in France. These large tables that accommodated her family of 10 demonstrated the on-going emotional response she had about the meaning of home being very much related to her role as mother and nurturer (see Figure 4). She said,

And even when the table is bare like this, it still has such a strong presence, because it just is a different size and it just is very much what home is about and it is the place that is noisy and busy.

Tessa's home is very much associated with her family and friends. Despite saying she could live anywhere, when she did move from her current location she was terribly homesick, needing to live nearer to her place of birth and her parents. Paul's idea of home is bound up in family and he cannot bear the thought of his home without his children in it, saying home means

Everything. Seriously, yeah, you'd go mad without it really. It is. Yeah. I mean we are quite homely",

and his relationships with his wife and children are central to his meaning of home.

Relationships were not the only emotional response the participants had for their sense of home. Home provided a sense of security, sanctuary, and refuge. Dan took several images of the outside of his home, which was surrounded by high hedges and even when visiting to undertake the interview the researcher could not find his front door (see Figure 5). He talked about this emotional sense of home, saying

You've got this security type blanket I think its about that way as home, I do see it as a refuge in some way. That sounds a bit frightening doesn't it, somewhere you can go and shut out the world. I think that sometimes the pressure of all sorts of things can get on top of you, whether its work or money or anything at different points in your life can... I think there are different points at times that can pressure you, it depends what's going on, so yeh, I definitely have a feeling of refuge within the house, we'll all be safe and secure, just close the door and....(laugh) that will be fine (laugh).

## *Importance of choice*

The importance of choice in where they live, who they invite into their homes and what they do in their homes was a significant finding associated with the meaning of home for all the participants.

Paul says being able to choose how he lives and what he does within his home, without it being invaded by others is very important for his meaning of home, saying,

It's your space. No one else is going to invade it. No one else is going to hassle you. You just come in and relax, shut the curtains and put the TV on or whatever, or read a book or have a bath or whatever. You know, it does mean everything. That's what I like about the house; it's sort of a bit rough around the edges. With home, you do think of it as a base, it's a nest and stuff. It's somewhere to come back to. Although it is not pristine, we've still got that feel of homeliness about it.

Ruth reflected about a friend of hers who had gone to live in a nursing home and feeling that this new home did not feel like her friend's home saying,

I go and visit a friend who's with dementia in an old people's home, and um....I don't know, there's no way.... it's going to ever look like home there. And her room doesn't look anything like her house did when she was there. It looks like a straight hotel room. And there's very little of her in it, very little.

Barbara on the other hand feels she has less choice because she lives in social housing. She feels since the introduction of 'bedroom tax' in the UK (Power et al 2014), where people are encouraged to downsize when their children leave home, she will be made to leave the home she has created with her family saying,,

It is Housing Association, so when your children leave, you have to downsize now. It's just the rules. So I don't want to leave, I can't ever see....So we've got the first memories in the house. So again that is important because on every room we've made all these memories in this house. So that is important really. So that will be a really sad say when we have to go.

Dan can never imagine moving from his home, choosing to remain in the house he has lived in for over 25 years. It provides a safe haven for him away from the pressures of everyday life, saying

You've got this security type blanket I think; it's about that way as home, I do see it as a refuge in some way. That sounds a bit frightening doesn't it? Somewhere you can go and shut out the world. I think that sometimes the pressure of all sorts of things can get on top of you, whether its work or money or anything at different points in your life can... I think there are different points at times that can pressure you. It depends what's going on, so yeah, I definitely have a feeling of refuge within the house, we'll all be safe and secure, just close the door and that will be fine.

## **DISCUSSION**

Feeling at home is important. As this study has revealed, the meaning of home to baby boomers is complex, but it can be unravelled into certain key features. Since, as noted before, baby boomers represent the largest group of in-patients in England (NHS digital 2016), an appreciation of the factors that create a sense of home could be beneficial in care settings.

The link between home and a sense of personal identity has been widely explored (Rowles 1993; Molony 2010, and others) and in this study the participants provided examples of this in their understanding of the meaning of home. Ruth noted that the photographs of their stuff were a 'presentation of ourselves'. In this sense, the participants had been 'marking their territory', with their stuff. Shenk et al (2004) talk about how people mark their territory, claiming the space, and in so doing it could be argued, retaining their sense of who they are. Leibing et al (2016) also found that certain objects presented an older person life story, noting that they had a fear of losing their personal possessions if they had to move. Interestingly this depth of insight was only gained when the participants reflected on the photographs they had taken. In a wider sense, the photographs of the outside of the participants' homes (e.g see Figure 3 Dan's image of the valley approaching his home) also reflected a way in which the meaning of home is linked to personal identity. The physical locations of the participants' homes and their relationship with their community helped to build their sense of self, their personal identity.

Having visual cues, such as their personal possessions, around them in care settings could help patients to retain a sense of who they are and feel more at home. It is worth considering how this can be applied in an acute and residential setting. For example in an acute hospital environment a few of a patient's personal belongings could be on display, to demonstrate their story and retain a sense of who they are. Again in a residential setting having their own stuff could help an older person present who they are in a broader sense not just an older resident. In the communal settings personal items such as pictures of family or the local area, could help residents feel these areas are more like home and provide a connection to the community.

If a person has to be transferred to a residential setting, further consideration should be made about locating that person in a familiar environment, where they feel a sense of belonging and comfort in knowing where they are. The visual representation of the outside of the participants' homes in this study highlight how being comfortable and familiar with the community where you live and even the image of your own front door, as Paul took, can tell a person that they are home and safe. Having your own front door to your private space for example in a residential setting can allow residents to know that beyond that door they can be themselves.

The textured, tactile, comfort of home such as familiar chairs and favourite bed sheets were highlighted as important for the meaning of home. Leibing et al (2016) also noted that participants took photographs of their favourite chair and this represented homeness. Ruth, Tessa and Barbara all took photographs of their bathrooms, emphasising how good it feels

to have a good long soak in your own bath. This is an interesting observation for later life when baths are often replaced with walk-in showers for ease of access. Likewise in care settings, consideration of a person's night time routine, such as the comfort of having a bath to aid restful sleep could avoid a disturbed night sleep (Gordon & Gladman 2010). Leibling et al (2016) said that the inability of being able to bathe independently symbolised a turning point signifying a decline in independence.

Dan, Paul and Tessa particularly noted the comforting familiar sounds of home. Dan felt it was like his home 'speaking' to him. An awareness that the sense of sound can make a person either feel at home or feel anxious is an important consideration, especially in a care setting. Mackrill et al (2013) noted that patients can feel very alarmed by the plethora of noises in a clinical setting. However, this anxiety can be reduced if they understand more about the sound, for example the noise made by a bed pan washer, or an explanation as to why a patient might be calling out.

A sense of smell is very evocative; it evokes deep, strong and emotional feelings, it can conjure powerful memories, both positive and negative (Stafford 2012; de Lange 2011). Memories recalled by odours were found to be significantly more emotional and evocative than those recalled by the same cue presented as visual or auditory reminders (Herz, 2004). Given the visual methods used in this study it was surprising how the importance of smell in relation to the meaning of home was revealed by Paul and Karen. The sense of smell was comforting and certain smells conjured different memories of home. This was also noted by Pink (2003) and Angus et al (2005) who referred to the sensory experiences of home, including familiar odours and food. From favourite meals, to memories of shared family meals, to food preparation, the sense of smell can trigger contentment. This insight again has useful applications when caring for people in hospital or residential settings. The smell of cooking can stimulate appetites, yet will often be missing in these communal settings. Contributing to meal preparation, and the smell of preparing food in a residential setting can help individuals feel that more at home as they re-enact the ritual of cooking.

The importance of relationships with family and friends was significant for all the participants. Their roles as parents and grandparents were very much associated with their feelings of home. Karen's picture of her dining table (see Figure 4) was symbolic of her role as a mother and sitting with her large family to share a meal. Likewise in older age groups a sense of belonging and relationships with family and friends were expressed as key to how people 'feel' about home both (see for example Molony, 2010 Marshall 2008). Nurses delivering a person-centred approach to care for patients, one where relationships are valued, could provide comfort to patients in different care settings. In a review by Dickson et al (2017) the



value of meeting the 'relational' needs of older people in an acute setting was noted as important if a person is to feel like a person.

Choice, control and autonomy are also significant concepts in relation to the meaning of home. Being able to choose where they live was mentioned as part of the meaning of home by all the participants, whether that was choosing to remain in their current homes (Paul and Dan), where they would move next (Karen and Ruth), or where they would not choose to live, for example in a nursing home (Ruth and Tessa). Furthermore choosing what they did in their home, whom they invited in and the idea of home as a refuge from the outside world, where they could safe and secure were noted as important. Exercising control within the home environment is also important for the meaning of home for older people (Lewin 2001; Sixsmith et al 2014), increasing an individual's self-respect (Dahlin-Ivanoff et al 2007a; Lewin 2001). For example, home is the private place where guests are invited to socialise with the homeowner if they choose (Rioux 2005). They can relax and be themselves and, by inviting people in to their homes, they can exercise control over their environment (Mallet 2004).

Involving older people in decisions about where they live and who enters their private space are essential considerations for nurses, to enable an older person retain a sense of control and autonomy. Being autonomous can make a person feel more in control and less of a burden and a task to be done, thereby increasing their sense of self and well-being. Furthermore Swenson (1991) talked about the sense of caring being important for the meaning of home. Nursing staff can help enable patients/residents choose to care for others, rather than always being the recipient of care. Whether it is laying the table for meal times or massaging the hands of a nurse, choosing to care for others can increase well-being.

Frameworks have been proposed to help capture the complex meaning of home (for example Oswald, et al 2006; and Molony 2010). However, driven by the findings from this study which made the sensual lived experiences of home so apparent a further framework for describing home is proposed, that of the Five Senses. The senses of sound, taste, touch, smell, and sight provide a useful structure to capture the many meanings of home.

A creative approach has been applied to the interpretation of the five senses. The visual sense of home relates to the things shown in the photographs and the participants' visual presentation of self and how this showed the importance of home. The sense of touch describes both the textures which people feel within the home and the factors that influence emotional feelings about home. The sense of sound highlights how different soundscapes can create both comfort and/or anxiety within the home. The sense of taste denotes preference, and so a non-literal approach to taste has been adopted to reflect how important

choice is to make an individual feel at home. The sense of smell relates to how meals cooked and shared are important features of home life as well as how evocative certain smells can be. The development and testing of such a framework could help nursing staff identify the factors that could create a sense of home for patients and help improve their well-being.

### Limitations

The research was somewhat limited by the number of participants. Having tested these methods on a smaller scale, however, they could be replicated in a larger study which could continue to add to the body of knowledge about the baby boomers. At the start of the study the baby boomers' understanding of the meaning of home was not so well understood. It is clear now, as a result of this study, that the meaning of home is individually defined, regardless of age.

The use of photographs in research is timing-consuming and produces a huge amount of data. Replicating the methods used in this research on a larger scale would have cost implications, albeit the rewards would be great.

### Conclusion

This study reinforced the significance of the meaning of home experienced by the participants. What this study was able to highlight was the multisensory nature of home, from the different sounds, smells, emotional feelings, visual representations of self and the ability to choose, as significant for an understanding of the meaning of home. These insights could help in the development of a 'senses of home' framework that could offer nurses cues in how to increase the comfort and security and therefore well-being of their patients. The need to feel the comfort of home is important regardless of age, although this study focused on the age group of people most likely to be in acute care settings and to enter residential settings. Further work needs to be undertaken to develop a framework and test it in different care settings to see if it increases the sense of home for patients and residents.

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**Figure 1** Ruths study with some of her stuff



**Figure 2** Dan's approach to home





**Figure 3 Favourite chair**



**Figure 4 Karen's dining table**





**Figure 5 Dan's house**

