International Journal of Ageing and Later Life, 18(2), 2025 © The Authors
doi: 10.3384/ijal.1652-8670.5199

Past, present, and future in the context of queer ageing: a qualitative study with same-sex couples in Scotland

*By Dora Jandrić**

Abstract

This paper explores imagined futures of same-sex couples in Scotland through the intersection of their age and queer identities, focusing on the concepts of queer time and chrononormativity. The paper draws on qualitative interview data gathered through two joint semi-structured interviews with seven same-sex couples, and written accounts that the couples produced between the interviews. The paper demonstrates how these couples belong to the future and use their actions and knowledge to construct it. The paper contributes to ageing and future studies by exploring the queer ageing experience and the intersectionality of sexuality and age in the construction and imagination of the future. By exploring the social, cultural, and personal experiences of aging among queer adults, the findings of this paper contribute to the international discourse on aging and sexuality.

Keywords: ageing, chrononormativity, queer time, same-sex.

**Dora Jandrić,* PhD in Sociology from the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

Introduction

Our understanding of time is based on individual perception and the historical and cultural contexts we live in (Baars 2012; Butola 2011), which are, for the most part, informed by heteronormativity and chrononormativity. Heteronormativity "regulates those kept within its boundaries [heterosexual people] as well as marginalizing and sanctioning those outside them [people who identify as non-heterosexual]" (Jackson 2006: 105). In a similar vein, chrononormativity regulates the way in which we measure time and prescribes the "correct" time and order in which to fulfil important life events such as marriage, having children, retirement, and death (Freeman 2010). The way in which we understand the future is likewise informed by our lived experiences and knowledge of relevant social, political, and personal events, making the future a real space and time that is informed and constructed by our actions and plans (Adam & Groves 2007). One of the most common narratives regarding the future is that "the children are the future," an example of which can most prominently be seen in Greta Thunberg's climate activism. The focus on the younger generations as key actors for the future is in line with chrononormative thinking, as it emphasizes the biological progression of time and age, implying that older people cannot occupy the future because of their proximity to the end of their lives. Queer time, as a response to these norms, creates an opportunity to imagine the future outside of the chrononormative "markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (Halberstam 2005: 2). Therefore, queer time allows for the imagination for alternative, queer futures, ones that are occupied by older people as much as they are by the younger ones.

The intersection of age and sexuality places the ageing LGBTI population on the margins of society because of beliefs that older people are asexual (Gott & Hinchliff 2003), heterosexual, and cisgender (Simpson et al. 2018). These stereotypes portray older LGBTI people as "outside mainstream temporalities and standing in the way of, rather than contributing to, the promise of the future" (Port 2012: 3). This group's "nonfuturity" (Sandberg 2015: 20) is further emphasized by the legacy of the HIV/AIDS pandemic of the 1980s and 1990s, as the lifespan of people who contracted HIV was limited to such an extent that it erased any possibility of having a future and positioning them as figures of society's "death drive" (Edelman 2004: 3).

This paper explores the prospect of studying the future through the intersection of age and LGBTI identities, arguing that older LGBTI people understand their role as "protagonists and agents of change" (Adam & Groves 2007: 164) and actively participate in the shaping and constructing of the future. By presenting the stories told by seven same-sex couples in Scotland, collected through semi-structured interviews and written diaries, as well as their recounting of past and present lived experiences, I will illustrate how the participants' knowledge of historical and political events makes them key actors in the construction of the future. The paper also addresses the gap in knowledge on older people and their belonging to the future (Port 2012), specifically focusing on the intersection of sexuality and older age as perceived barriers to participation in imagining and creating the future (Edelman 2004; Sandberg 2015).

Literature Review

The unique ageing experiences of LGBTI individuals have been gaining increased attention in academic discourse (Almack 2018; Heaphy et al. 2004; Hoekstra-Pijpers 2022; Kneale et al. 2021). However, research on the futures of LGBTI individuals, and same-sex couples, has been confined to younger people, excluding queer older people from narratives about the future. This literature review provides an overview of queer ageing, queer time, and chrononormativity, and the non-linearity of the past, present, and future in constructing queer ageing experiences. Since this paper has couples as its main participants, it will frame the past experiences, present challenges, and future aspirations of those participants through the lens of interpersonal relationships they built and maintained throughout their lives, and it will address this in the findings section.

Queer Aging: A Unique Journey

Queer aging experiences are distinguished from heterosexual experiences by a combination of historical contexts and present-day realities (Kneale et al. 2021). Events such as the decriminalization of homosexuality, the enforcement and abolishment of Section 28 (which will be explored in more detail below), and the advancements of LGBTI rights such as equal marriage and adoption, all had an impact on the lives of LGBTI people. It is important

to understand that even though those events happened in the past, their echoes still remain embedded deep in the everyday routines of the couples in the present, while also helping them imagine their ageing futures that are "distinct from the many representations of hetero-happiness" (Changfoot et al. 2022: 1) that we see in media today. When talking about ageing, there seems to be a need to have a normative time when old age begins, as illustrated in a number of sources (see Stacey & Averett 2016; Westwood 2017). Moving away from the prescribed beginnings of old age, we can see that some groups, such as people living with HIV, sexual and gender minorities, and ethnic minority groups, might experience symptoms of ageing sooner than their peers (Rodés et al. 2022), which can queer the beginning of old age and the ageing experience in its entirety (Chazan & Whetung 2022).

Central to understanding queer aging in this paper are couple relationships, which serve as microcosms of shared experiences and perspectives (Valentine 1999). Through the joint narration of past and present events, couples reflect on personal experiences and contextualize them within broader socio-political contexts. The dynamics of mixed-age couples further enrich these narratives, highlighting the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and the co-creation of a joint future (Jackson 2010). The paper therefore understands age as subjective, and older age as unable to be prescribed by ticking off normative societal and biological expectations (Sandberg 2008). As this paper will illustrate, the ageing experience and the imagination of the future are portrayed as hopeful, despite the fears about health, accommodation, and death, that come almost naturally when thinking about later life. Queerness is what makes the future positive and non-normative (e.g. Jones 2011), as it allows imagination beyond the here and now, and into the then and there (Muñoz 2009). This paper continues the academic discussion of queer ageing and imaginations of the future, adding to the works like those of Simpson (2015) on ageing gay men, and Traies (2016) on the lived experiences of older lesbians, and exploring these concepts through a lens of coupledom.

Queer Time and Chrononormativity

Queer time is characterized by its deviation from chrononormative norms, encompassing diverse relationship dynamics, family structures, and lifestyle choices. Queer time is a response to both chrono- and

hetero-normativity, as the temporal trajectory that does not follow the prescribed norms of the dominant group, but rather creates norms of its own (Halberstam 2005). Queer time draws on life events which can be different to the ones predetermined by chrononormativity and defined by the milestones in an individual's life. The beginning of queer time for an individual is usually marked by an event that acts as a break from the established norms, such as coming out (Klein et al. 2015). However, queer time is not exclusively in opposition to chrononormativity. It exists within its framework of heteronormative coupling, marriage, and family formation (Freeman 2010). As Freeman (2010) further explains, calendars, diaries, and other ways in which people measure time are used to create rhythms that should be followed, and that are guided by chrononormativity, making it the mainstream understanding of time. Couples who transition from heterosexual relationships to same-sex ones navigate complex intersections of time, identity, and societal expectations, living across two temporal planes at the same time.

Events that happen during a person's life, as well as memories of those events, build parts of the identity of that person. When recalling key events, people position themselves within the temporal and social contexts of the times of those events, building a narrative about their own identity. Within those stories, people also position themselves in relation to others who occupy their memories and who serve as reference points for their own identity (Jenkins 2008). Mead (1934) explored the role of time in identity construction, and his ideas are the basis of the argument made in this paper that queer time and queer identities, both individual and couple ones, mutually construct each other. As the focus of this paper is on same-sex couples, Mead's (1934) theory needs to be applied to those events that were instrumental in the creation of the queer relational identity, in the past, present, and the future. Events such as coming out, beginning their current relationship, getting married, or moving in together, as well as their imagined futures, all create their couple identity. Therefore, queer time, across the life courses of the research participants, holds a central role in shaping their queer identities.

The above addresses several gaps in research. Firstly, I focus on the lack of attention on older people in general, and LGBTI older people in particular in research on futures, adding to existing discussions on queering ageing studies and the intersection of sex, gender, and older age, such

as those by Sandberg and Marshall (2017), Chazan (2020), Chazan and Baldwin (2021), and King (2022), to name a few. Secondly, there are no other studies about the futures of same-sex couples in Scotland or anywhere else. Available research on same-sex couples, both young and old, focuses on finances and health expenditures (Gavulic & Gonzales 2022), parenting (Tao 2023), and the impact of marriage on health (Umberson & Kroeger 2015), often comparing same-sex to opposite-sex couples. By exploring ageing within a same-sex couple, I also contribute to methodological discussions on the benefits and limitations of interviewing couples together. This paper makes a significant contribution to studies on queer time by exploring it through the ageing experiences of same-sex couples, making the argument that the role of queer time in constructing their identities in the past and present is what gives them the possibility of actively imagining and contributing to the future.

Historical Context

To study the present lived experiences, it is necessary to explore the historical context of the participants' youth and pinpoint key events in queer temporality. Going through defining developmental milestones when anything else than heterosexuality was considered either a disease (D'Augelli & Grossman 2001) or criminal behavior (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. 2017) had a profound impact on how the LGBTI population lived their lives. Most of the participants in this paper hid their sexuality from themselves, their family, and friends. 1967 brought about the beginning of change in England with the decriminalization of homosexuality (Criminal Justice Act 1967). Scotland followed in 1980 (Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980), but at the same time, the HIV/AIDS pandemic started to gain impetus, stigmatizing men who had sex with men and intravenous drug users as the main sources of the disease. As the decriminalization marked a potential of the co-existence of queer and heterosexual lives, the stigma and discrimination around HIV/AIDS threatened to dismantle that potential. The pandemic also increased the visibility of LGBTI people in the public sphere, raising awareness about marginalized communities. Hand in hand with the antagonism was the fact that homosexuality was still considered a psychiatric disorder in the United States (de Vries 2015), and a mental illness by the World Health Organisation (Stonewall 2016).

In one of the most notorious attempts to erase LGBTI identities from the public sphere in the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, a former prime minister of the UK, introduced Section 28 of the Local Government Act in 1988 (Local Government Act 1988; Weeks 2007), which prohibited promoting homosexuality by the government and its employees (including teachers and social workers), and framed same-sex relationships as "pretend" family relationships (Reinhold 1994); this had a chilling effect on how professionals spoke to the people they were supporting, with LGBTI identities being wiped from those interactions. Political campaigns and efforts by the LGBTI community saw progress in the political and public sphere in the UK, and in Scotland in particular, in the last 25 years.

After the 1997 referendum and the devolution of the Scottish Parliament (Mitchell 2000), a series of positive changes for the LGBTI population marked the 2000s in Scotland. The devolution allowed Scotland its own legislative power over health and social care, education, local government and housing, justice, and policing, among other areas. In 2000, Section 28 was abolished in Scotland, and the ban on LGBTI people serving in the armed forces was lifted at the same time. In 2004, the Civil Partnership Act was passed, which allowed same-sex couples to form civil partnerships. In 2007, the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act, provided same-sex couples equal rights in adopting and fostering children, and the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act, which came into effect in 2014 in England, Scotland, and Wales, brought around marriage equality. The most recent developments in the UK included the 2017 posthumous pardon to all gay men who were prosecuted because of their sexuality, and the introduction of same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland in 2020.

The above events, key for LGBTI equality in the UK, frame the lives of the present LGBTI population. These events can also be viewed as examples of queer time (Halberstam 2005) as they disrupted the familiarity of chrononormativity. Likewise, personal lived experiences of the LGBTI population, such as coming out, getting married, or forming a civil partnership, are all examples of the disruption of chrononormativity and the introduction of queer time. These experiences all exist alongside chrononormative expectations of heterosexuality, and inform the imagination of the future of the older LGBTI population.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were in a same-sex relationship, mutually defined by both partners as a significant couple-like relationship, regardless of duration and co-residence status. The decision to conduct couple interviews impacts the content and quality of the data, and depends on the goals of the research at hand (Gabb 2008). Focusing on the couple rather than on the individual better captures the partners' "joint commitment to their relationship" (Hydén & Nilsson 2015: 717), and provides insight into how their present and future are jointly constructed. Potential issues that might arise in joint interviewing are a power imbalance between the partners, differing opinions about the future, and an unwillingness to talk about uncomfortable issues in front of each other. The participants in this research definitely had points of contention when talking about the future but were quick to discuss them and hear each other out, creating a comfortable interview experience. Recruiting and interviewing couples allowed for a better understanding of relationships that were negotiated daily (Valentine 1999) and extended into their imaginations of the future. One of the partners needed to be over the age of 55, while the other partner could be of any age. Being younger than 55 was perceived to have different enough experiences to make them unsuitable for the study, unless they were in a relationship with someone above that age range, as was the case with several couples in the study. The age range of the participants, therefore, extends below 55 and was between 36 and 77. Participants were recruited by advertising the research in older LGBTI Facebook groups, and through word-of-mouth. All participants self-identified as middle class, left-wing, and as having no disabilities. The final number included was seven couples. There were three male couples, and four female couples. They were all white, the male participants identified as gay (n = 6), the female participants identified either as lesbian (n = 6) or did not want to label their sexual orientation (n = 2), but all were in same-sex relationships at the time of our interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted two joint semi-structured interviews with the couples over 12 months in 2016/2017. The first interview was designed to build rapport and get to know the couple. We mostly discussed their relationship, lifestyle, and stories about the past and present during this interview. All couples were given a notebook, and I asked them to create a personal representation of their future based on their conversations and reflections of joint, as well as individual experiences (Day & Thatcher 2009). The way in which they accomplished this representation was flexible and person-led, resulting in mostly written accounts with a few small drawings, and one rap poem. This method sought to give the couples the freedom to produce data in their own time and at their own pace, permitting "the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context" (Bolger et al. 2003: 580). In the second interview we talked about what they put in the notebook, and we discussed more general themes about the future.

Apart from addressing the invisibility of couples in academic research, the decision to conduct joint interviews came from a desire to study the couple interaction in creating narratives about the past, present, and future. Through our conversations, both partners often looked to each other for confirmation of the facts they described, and they often corrected each other when talking about events they experienced together. These methods were deliberately selected to reduce the power imbalance, which is a perennial challenge for interview-based research (Anyan 2013). Interviewing them together also helped level the power differential between the researcher and participants, as they had each other to rely on (Zarhin 2018). The notebook served a similar purpose because it gave them power over when to fill it out, and which information to include. Some of the statements they wrote down in the notebook had not been discussed between them before that point, so the research acted as a catalyst of their conversations about the future.

I recorded the interviews on my smartphone, after obtaining consent from the participants, and transcribed them myself. I used NVivo 11 for the organization of transcripts and easier management of codes and themes. The analysis consisted of two phases: a thematic analysis

followed by a narrative analysis. Thematic analysis, according to Guest et al. (2012), focuses on "identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas" (p. 13) that emerge from the data. During this thematic phase, I identified the themes that kept emerging in all interviews and written accounts, as well as those that arose only occasionally but were linked to the overarching question of the imagination of the future, such as death. The second iteration of analysis was a narrative analysis, which I used to explore the ways in which my participants made sense of their realities and how their stories were told, instead of what the stories were (Phoenix et al. 2010). In this round I looked more closely at how the couples told the stories of their lives, and how these stories fit into the social and historical context of the events they were discussing. These two methods of data analysis encouraged a deeper examination of the narratives shared by the couples and teased out nuances in their accounts. The entire process of data collection and analysis was iterative and reflective, as I went back to the transcripts and written accounts to revisit certain themes and explore them from different angles.

Ethical Clearance

The research was granted ethical clearance at the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. The data gathered was handled according to the guidelines of The Data Protection Act (1998), and the research was designed along the following ethical principles: consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. This level of ethical clearance reflected the concerns about interviewing potentially vulnerable people, in this case older people belonging to minority sexual identities.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are divided into three sections: past and present, short-term futures, and long-term futures, in the order they were talked about in our interviews. The information in brackets after each quote contains key information about the participants: pseudonym, age, and quote origin (first interview, second interview, or written account).

The Past, Present, and their Mutual Construction

The stories about the couples' pasts were saturated with heterosexism, homophobia, and discrimination. Growing up during the time when being a gay man was illegal, the male couples recalled how they tried to pass as "straight," with some entering heterosexual marriages, and others undergoing conversion therapy. These events also illustrate an attempt to conform to chrononormativity by fitting their histories into more traditional heteronormative temporal norms:

> Yes, I was trying, I mean, I think that I was on a sort of denial trip all in all, and that I didn't sort of really, I always knew I was gay, but I managed to sort of hide from it and pretend it wasn't there. That's really why I got married I guess, but then when the marriage came to an end, that's when I really had to face it, you know. (Robert, 76, first interview)

> I was also very unhappy with the way I was leading my life, as a gay man. Went to the doctor and he said "oh, you should have aversion therapy." And I thought "yes, all right, if that's going to make me *normal* [emphasis in the original interview], I'll do it." So I went and had aversion therapy in a hospital. And it really had no effect whatsoever on me. [laughing] (Jeff, 70, first interview)

Heterosexual marriage is still the norm, and society therefore ascribes a "privileged status" to these relationships (Brook 2018: 348). Using marriage to hide his sexual identity from others and from himself, Robert believed he was following the heteronormative path that would make him normal and ordinary (Richardson & Monro 2012) in the eyes of his immediate community. Jeff's motivations behind undergoing aversion therapy were the same – he was willing to do it if it meant he would become "normal." While these experiences belonged to the past, their impact had far-reaching consequences into the present. As Fred, Robert's husband, explained, they were still cautious of showing affection when out in public, even though they were openly out in the town they lived in:

> One of the problems is that gay people of our age, as we were all brought up at a time when what we did was illegal, we could be sent to prison for, we could lose our jobs for, et cetera, so people of our age may be less likely to be open than younger people. You might see lots of younger gay couples holding hands in the street, it will be very, very rare that you'll see, well me and Robert don't, because we were brought up in an era where to do so would have, at best, led to talks, and at worst, at a certain time, would have led to prosecution. (Fred, 67, second interview)

The impact of the past on the present represents a linear consequence of one action on another. In the above examples, it also points to the impact of chrononormativity on what we know is the couples' queer time, indicating the continuing prevalence of heterosexual norms in mainstream society. In another example, the linear flow of time was disrupted, as the present was used to explain events in the past:

> The first time I came to [city], came to this house, I'd spotted, in a frame, in a hallway downstairs, the document that was basically the founder's declaration of [a gay-rights organisation], William was one of the founders of that campaign. That's why I thanked him over lunch the next day, and, in particular on behalf of me and all my generation, my gay friends for that. And it got me to where I am today. (Peter, 36, first interview)

This example illustrates how the present shapes the past as we reflect on it with new knowledge and experiences. After noticing the document on William's wall, Peter reframed his past to fit the present, imagining how his coming out and living an openly gay life were influenced by William's actions in the past. Peter's identity as a gay man was a result of "unique temporal and existential concerns" (Fabbre 2014: 163) that mobilized William to take action in his youth and establish the organisation. The age difference between William (63) and Peter (36) illustrates how the same event can be experienced from two generational viewpoints.

Another example of stepping into queer time is presented by Sarah and Jane, now married to each other, who were both in heterosexual marriages when they came out. For them, coming out was an act of breaking away from the heteronormative life they lived up to that point, and reclaiming their own queer identities:

> For me, it was complicated because I was married to a man at the time, and I was, I had two young children, so it just, as the dawning happened to me, I thought, I knew I was unhappy, and then started to think why that might be, and as I began to realise what was happening, I then thought "well I can't do anything about this because I've got two small children," and I had no role models, nobody else that I knew was in a position like I was, and I just thought I will have to just forget it, because I can't do this and make my children unhappy. (Jane, 56, first interview)

Jane's coming out symbolizes a disruption of chrononormativity and stepping into queer time. In her case, queer time is not a complete opposition to chrononormativity, as it includes her children, marriage to Sarah,

and the formation of a new family, elements that have similarities with a chrononormative understanding of a life trajectory. By coming out, Jane disrupts her chrononormative temporal progression, and positions herself and her relationship between the dominant, heterosexual norms, and the other, the queer. This is visible in Sarah and Jane using marriage, often considered "central to heterosexuality" (Brook 2018: 348), as a tool to encourage same-sex couples, specifically women, to come out and get married if that is what they want.

Breaking mainstream temporal norms was an iterative process for these participants. As Sarah and Rachel explain in the following extracts, coming out is a process often repeated daily:

> So I don't think you come out once, I think, that's why I was hesitating. Every single day you have to come out. Jane gets into a taxi, they'll say "what does your husband do?" You know, and then you have to come out again, or can you be bothered? (Sarah, 61, first interview)

> I'm still in process of coming out to various people, at different times, and places, and stuff like that. (Rachel, 58, first interview)

Coming out breaks the boundaries of chrononormativity (Freeman 2010) and opens a space and time for queer identity construction, creating a new temporal reality. The events that the participants recalled from their past, along with the events that happened after coming out, created a clear link between time and sexual identity. Their coming out journey might have started in the past, but it is happening in the present, and will most certainly continue in the future, ascribing its importance across every phase of the couples' lives and further establishing their belonging to queer time.

Short-Term Futures: Independence, Choice, and Control

When talking about their short-term futures, the futures that they will live to experience (Cook 2018), the couples focused on their health, accommodation, family, and death. The discussions around these futures also included the wish to have control over one's life and maintain independence for as long as possible.

One of the ways in which the couples wanted to maintain their independence was to age in place, in their own home, maintaining the freedom

to continue their relationship and lifestyle (Davey et al. 2004). One of the threats to ageing in place was the need to go into residential care, which is a common concern among the older LGBTI population (Simpson et al. 2018):

> Fred: We're not in a financial situation to be able to afford private care, but in Scotland that shouldn't be a problem. Ideally, we could live in some sort of sheltered accommodation where we're still semi-independent. If we had to move into a sort of a care home, then we would want to move in together, in a double room. We wouldn't want to be separated.
>
> Robert: Being separated in care I regard almost as a fate worse than death.
>
> Fred: Yes.
>
> Robert: It could happen.
>
> Fred: These days, it's less likely to happen than in the past. But even so, it's certain we have to be wary. And then, of course, once you're in the hands of care workers, you rely on their attitudes, and their views. (Fred, 65, & Robert, 76, first interview)

The intersection of the past, present, and future in the above example further illustrates how the three temporalities inform and construct one another. In terms of future studies, understanding how plans and imaginations of the future are constructed is a step forward towards a more holistic approach to studying time. Fred made a clear link between the past and the present, projecting his expectations to the future as well. Both Fred and Robert were concerned about being separated, which could have happened in the past, when the attitudes of care workers in formal care institutions were more negative towards LGBTI people (Furlotte et al. 2016). Despite there being greater tolerance today towards same-sex couples and LGBTI individuals (Simpson et al. 2018), personal lived experiences still impacted the imagination of the future more than potential knowledge of what goes on in care settings. One thing that all imagined futures presented by the participants included was the necessity of maintaining their independence. While this was often described in terms of good mental and physical health, it was also reflected in other aspects of the participants' narratives:

> Jane: Maybe they'll give Sarah a perm and put her in a crippling dress when she's too demented to know, to be able to tell them that's not what she would do.

> Sarah: Can you imagine? The stockings around my ankles. (Jane, 56, and Sarah, 61, first interview)

Kathy, who wrote a rap poem in her and Rachel's notebook, expressed a similar idea about being unable to wear clothes that she chose for herself:

> We want any intervention to recognise our status and preferences
>
> We don't want apprehension of becoming stateless with severances
>
> To suffer circumvention of our rights and heinous negligence's
>
> Those without comprehension putting us in shapeless dresses. (Kathy, 57, written account)

These women viewed their attire as an outward symbol of their identity and a way to express their agency (Buse & Twigg 2015). Their sense of style was developed simultaneously to their coming out journey and is a physical manifestation of the life they lead in queer time. Losing their independence in later life would not only mean being physically dependent on someone because of health issues, but not being able to exercise their agency through something like clothing and style. While they were growing up and coming of age, the female participants abided by patriarchal norms of what was "proper" and how women should dress. The part of their lives they led before coming out and, one in line with chrononormative and heteronormative expectations, is a part they are now rebelling against by wearing what they want and living by their own rules.

Death was discussed in the framework of short-term futures as an end to the couples' imagined life-course. In a similar vein to maintaining independence in their life, having control over their death was a topic of conversation among most of the couples. One of the ways of controlling death was writing their wills, and planning for funerals and other practicalities surrounding the end of life. The other was hoping that assisted suicide would be legal by the time the participants needed it:

> You know, suffering hurts me, seeing my mother starving herself to death hurts me. Can't do anything to change it, can't do anything about it. And I do think that if we make the choice in our right mind, we should be able to choose to terminate our lives. I've got nothing to fear as far as when I'm dead, I'm dead. (Jeff, 70, second interview)

Hoping for a choice in the future and imagining it will be available tames the uncertainty of the future (Groves 2014). Relating back to the desire of controlling the future, Westwood (2017) explains that taking one's own life can signify "the ultimate expression of autonomy" (p. 5) as it gives the individual control over their life and maps out their future more clearly. It also creates a future that is free of chrononormative boundaries as it allows the participants to end their lives before its prescribed, "natural," end. While heteronormativity framed their lives in the past, the participants are taking control over their presents and futures, even if most of it is in the form of hopes and imagination.

The couples imagined their short-term futures based on the experiences and knowledge of their past and present. From fears of discrimination in formal care settings that stemmed from the legal and medical terminology and attitudes surrounding LGBTI lives in the past, to concerns about losing their independence to the level that they were unable to dress themselves or live their lives as they were living them in the present, the imagination of the short-term futures was a reflection of events, experiences, and knowledge from the couples' past and present.

The Fear and Hope of Long-Term Futures

The couples' long-term futures, the ones that will happen after their death, included fears and hopes for future generations, and the imagination of Scotland as utopia, all of which can be understood as "an experience of time that may be socially shared" (Cook 2018: 3). Based on their past and present experiences, the socially shared ideas of the future almost always included children and younger generations of LGBTI people. As Gloria writes in her account, she considers Emily's children and grandchildren as her own, emphasizing the importance of her family of choice (Weeks et al. 2001):

> The presence of children and young people in my life (mostly Emily's grandchildren) somehow makes the future seem a more real place and, for all I said earlier about not looking ahead, I can't help but hope for their complete happiness. I imagine them always being a part of my life. Now Emily's youngest daughter and her wife are about to adopt two children and they clearly figure in my imagined future. (Gloria, 58, written account)

Children do not only serve as physical vessels of Gloria's imagination, but as agents in framing the future as a *more real place*, colonizing it with their presence (Adam & Groves 2007). Even the children who were not yet there, as was the case with the adoption Gloria mentioned, *clearly figured* in her future, and, apart from being a loving addition to the family, the children also figured in Gloria's imagination as mediums for domesticating the uncertainty that the future might bring (Groves 2014). In this extract, we also get a glimpse of two families of choice, one of Gloria and Emily, and the other of Emily's daughter and her wife. Their presence strengthens the link between the queer present and future and carves out the space and time where such families can exist parallel to hetero- and chrononormative expectations.

When discussing how short-term futures were imagined, I outlined that they were based on lived experiences from the participants' past and present. The long-term futures were imagined in the same way, drawing on political campaigns and social movements the participants were involved in, as well as the socio-cultural contexts of their youth. As Rachel explains, the actions of the older LGBTI community in the past brought about legislation that allowed same-sex couples to get married and adopt children. These victories, however, did not mean that there was nothing left to fight for in the future:

> I don't think as a community, LGBT community, we can sit back on our laurels and think we've won, I think we've won some battles but we haven't won the war yet, and if we sit back on our laurels and just think "well that's what we've achieved, we've got everything now, so we can just sit back and enjoy it," and we're doing a service to those who are coming behind us, cause we've got to fight for their rights, and for something for them to inherit, and that's definitely the way I see it. (Rachel, 58, second interview)

The idea of continuing the fight for the younger generations places the older same-sex couples very clearly in the future. The actions they took in the past resulted in the freedoms the LGBTI community has in the present. Consequently, they hope the actions they take in the present will realise a more equal and inclusive future. However, the imagination of a more equal future would not be possible without a socio-political context that allows for such thinking. The hope for Scotland and the trust in the

political leadership at the time (2016/2017) went hand in hand in some of the accounts:

> But I also think is that, part of it in our psyche is that we know that the rule of law, society will not turn against us. Which is not necessarily the case, others, you know, I think Scotland is particular, you know that the fact is that the rule of law, we have in parliament leaders of the political parties whether it's just, society is not going to turn against minorities, cause we are, we have a, you know, we have two LGBT leaders, right, and two parties, so I think…as a gay couple we feel safe, so our future here in this country, we know it's nobody be turning against, and that's not necessarily the case elsewhere, right? (Alan, 63, second interview)

The knowledge and experience of customs, traditions, laws, and moral codes make the future more predictable (Adam & Groves 2007), as they are familiar to the people who imagine it. Even though the participants' past experiences with institutions and heteronormative moral codes have not always been positive, the changes they witnessed and experienced during their lifetime offered them hope that the positive movement would continue into the future. Like Alan, Emily was hopeful of the future political situation in Scotland because of the government and the trust she put into the first minister at the time, who she described as "our little, fearless leader" (Emily, first interview).

Hope was also the key building block of utopistic thinking about Scotland. The knowledge of the past and present allows us to imagine the future. For Scotland to be imagined as utopia, positive changes had to have taken place during the participants' lives, as utopias reflect the socio-political and historical contexts that were experienced in a specific place and time (Bloch 1995). Based on this, Rachel reflected on what makes Scotland different in comparison to the rest of the UK, and the rest of the world:

> You see, that's where I think that's where Scotland and independence is different, because Scotland in outward-looking, the government is outward looking, it's internationalist, it wants to welcome migrants, whereas this small Britain idea, isolationist like Trump and all that, "we're British, we want to be British." (Rachel, 58, second interview)

While another Scottish independence referendum is uncertain at the time of writing this paper, most of the couples in this research hoped for it to happen at some point in the future. They were determined to support Scottish

independence because they believed it would bring Scotland more freedom to create better legislation and support for its LGBTI population. In the current political situation, however, it is unclear whether the referendum will take place during their lifetime, or whether it will just remain a part of their queer utopistic imagination of the future. This uncertainty has been further amplified by the recent resignation of the Scottish First Minister, Humza Yousaf in 2024, and the public's opinion of Scottish independence (McDonald 2024).

Conclusion

This paper fills a significant gap in knowledge about the ageing experience and the perception of the future by older same-sex couples. While research on future exists in the areas of economy, climate change, and others, an "in-depth consideration of how the future of society is perceived by individuals is largely absent from the literature" (Cook 2018: 2). I addressed this absence by presenting narratives about the future of society as told by older same-sex couples in Scotland and argued that they are constructed from their experiences in the past and present. In response to a lack of research on LGBTI older people's futures, I argue that their lived experiences, unique life trajectories, and queer identities are key elements in considering how queer time, and queer futures, are imagined and realized. Ideas such as that gay men in the 1980s had a limited lifespan due to HIV/AIDS (Sandberg 2015), and that older people are closer to death (Baars 2017) and therefore have no place in the future, show how the intersection of sexuality and age places the older LGBTI population on the margins of studies about the future. The paper demonstrated how that same intersectionality is the very reason why they should be included in studies about the future, and considered its active participants.

Furthermore, the paper offers a critique of Edelman's (2004) argument that thinking about and imagining the future requires a reproductive drive that would populate the future with children. While reproduction is reserved for heterosexual couples in the biopolitical agendas of nations (Foucault 2008), the paper illustrates how it is no longer an exclusively heteronormative privilege but extends to queer individuals and relationships as well. The queering of reproduction and family formation was visible in the narratives shared by the participants who had children and who imagined their future through them. For the participants who did

not have children of their own, the future was occupied by younger generations. The fears of discrimination that permeate the short-term futures are more real and more prone to impact those younger generations and are based on the things the couples themselves experienced. The long-term futures, still open and free to be constructed, hold a promise of hope and equality for children and grandchildren.

One of the limitations of this paper is the small sample of participants which means that the findings cannot be generalized to the wider LGBTI population of Scotland. However, the findings from their narratives can be used to study LGBTI ageing in similar cultural contexts. Additionally, the participants were mostly recruited via online forums and groups, meaning they had technological literacy and were members of different social groups. This also means that people with different lived experiences, those who might be isolated and technologically illiterate, are not represented in this sample. As mentioned above, the participants self-identified as being middle-class and left-wing, which represents a particular set of ideas and beliefs presented in this paper.

While chrononormativity shapes the key events an individual must accomplish in life, using "time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (Freeman 2010: 3), that is towards reproduction and continuation of the population through children, queer time offers an alternative mode of existence. Starting off as its opposition, queer time disrupts the chrononormative expectations of heterosexual coupling, marriage, and having children. Instead, it offers a parallel path where individuals have the freedom to choose their families, and, if they so wish, live outside the prescribed temporal norms. The stories presented in this paper illustrate lives lived in queer time and the imagination and construction of queer futures. They also reflect the couples' struggle to fit into chrononormativity and queer time simultaneously and provide us with the possibility to explore how their agency could better inform the understanding of the two. By studying the life course and subjective ageing experiences in the context of queer time and future studies, we can better understand the elements that go into the creation of multiple possible futures, and what it actually means to grow old as a same-sex couple in a country such as Scotland.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks her friends and colleagues for their feedback and insightful suggestions, which have significantly enriched this paper, and the research participants, without whom this paper would not have been possible in the first place.

Corresponding Author

Dora Jandrić, PhD in Sociology from the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland. Email: jandricdora@gmail.com

References

Adam, B. & Groves, C. (2007). *Future Matters: Action, Knowledge, Ethics*. Leiden: Brill.

Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007. Available on https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2007/4/contents (Accessed: June 15, 2024).

Almack, K. (2018). "I didn't come out to go back in the closet": Ageing and end of life care for older LGBT people. In A. King, K. Almack, Y. Suen & S. Westwood (eds.), *Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans People: Minding the Knowledge Gaps*. London: Routledge.

Anyan, F. (2013). The influence of power shifts in data collection and analysis stages: A focus on qualitative research interview. *The Qualitative Report* 18(36): 1–9. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2013.1525

Baars, J. (2012). Critical turns in aging, narrative and time. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 7(2): 143–165. https://doi.org/10.3384/ijal.1652-8670.1272a7

Baars, J. (2017). Aging: Learning to live a finite life. *The Gerontologist* 57(5): 969–976. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnw089

Bloch, E. (1995). *The Principle of Hope: Volume Two*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Bolger, N., Davis, A. & Rafaeli, E. (2003). Diary methods: Capturing life as it is lived. *Annual Review of Psychology* 54: 579–616. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.54.101601.145030

Brook, H. (2018). Re-orientation: Marriage, heteronormativity and heterodox paths. *Feminist Theory* 19(3): 345–367. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700118754675

Buse, C. & Twigg, J. (2015). Clothing, embodied identity and dementia: Maintaining the self through dress. *Age, Culture, Humanities* 2: 1–31. https://doi.org/10.7146/ageculturehumanities.v2i.130611

Butola, B. S. (2011). Time as a mode of bio-politics. *Human Geography* 4(2): 61–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/194277861100400205

Changfoot, N., Rice, C., Chivers, S., Olsen Williams, A., Connors, A., Barrett, A., Gordon, M. & Lalonde, G. (2022). Revisioning aging: Indigenous, crip and queer renderings. *Journal of Ageing Studies* 63: 100930. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2021.100930

Chazan, M. (2020). Unsettling aging futures: Challenging colonial-normativity in social gerontology. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 14(1): 91–119. https://doi.org/10.3384/ijal.1652-8670.19454

Chazan, M. & Baldwin, M. (2021). Queering generativity and futurity: LGBTQ2IA+ stories of resistance, resurgence, and resilience. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 15(1): 73–102. https://doi.org/10.3384/ijal.1652-8670.1574

Chazan, M. & Whetung, M. (2022). "Carving a future out of the past and the present": Rethinking aging futures. *Journal of Ageing Studies* 63: 100937. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2021.100937

Civil Partnership Act 2004, Ch. 33. Available on https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/33/contents (Accessed: June 15, 2024).

Cook, J. (2018). *Imagined Futures: Hope, Risk and Uncertainty*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Criminal Justice Act 1967, Ch. 80. Available on https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/80 (Accessed: June 15, 2024).

Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980, Ch. 62. Available on http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/62/pdfs/ukpga_19800062_en.pdf (Accessed: June 15, 2024).

D'Augelli, A. R. & Grossman, A. H. (2001). Disclosure of sexual orientation, victimization, and mental health among lesbian, gay, and bisexual older adults. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 16(10): 1008–1027. https://doi.org/10.1177/088626001016010003

Data Protection Act 1998. Available on https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents (Accessed: October 28, 2019)

Day, M. & Thatcher, J. (2009) "I'm Really Embarrassed that You're Going to Read this...": Reflections on Using Diaries in Qualitative

Research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 6(4): 249–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880802070583

Davey, J. A., de Joux, V., Nana, G. & Arcus, M. (2004). *Accommodation Options for Older People in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Christchurch: Centre for Housing Research.

de Vries, B. (2015). Stigma and LGBT aging: Negative and positive marginality. In N. Orel & C. Fruhauf (eds.), *The Lives of LGBT Older Adults: Understanding Challenges and Resilience*. p. 55–72. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Edelman, L. (2004). *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Fabbre, V. (2014). Gender transitions in later life: The significance of time in queer aging. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 57(2–4): 161–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2013.855287

Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978–79*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fredriksen-Goldsen, K. I., Bryan, A. E. B., Jen, S., Goldsen, J., Kim, H. & Muraco, A. (2017). The unfolding of LGBT lives: Key events associated with health and well-being in later life. *The Gerontologist* 57(S1): S15–S29. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnw185

Freeman, E. (2010). *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham: Durham University Press.

Fromby, E. (2017). *Exploring LGBT Spaces and Communities: Contrasting Identities, Belongings and Wellbeing*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Furlotte, C., Gladstone, J. W., Cosby, R. F. & Fitzgerald, K. (2016). "Could we hold hands?" Older lesbian and gay couples' perceptions of long-term care homes and home care. *Canadian Journal on Aging* 35(4): 432–446. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0714980816000489

Gabb, J. (2008). *Researching Intimacy in Families*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gavulic, K. A. & Gonzales, G. (2022). Health care expenditures and financial burden: A comparison of adults in same-sex couples and different-sex couples. *Medical Care Research and Review* 79(2): 281–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/10775587211004308

Gott, M. & Hinchliff, S. (2003). How important is sex in later life? The views of older people. *Social Science & Medicine* 56: 1617–1628. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(02)00180-6

Groves, C. (2014). *Care, Uncertainty and Integrational Ethics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M. & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied Thematic Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Heaphy, B., Yip, A. K. T. & Thompson, D. (2004). Ageing in a non-heterosexual context. *Ageing and Society* 24(6): 881–902. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X03001600

Hoekstra-Pijpers, R. (2022). Experiences of older LGBT people ageing in place with care and support: A window on ordinary ageing environments, home-making practices and meeting activities. *Sexualities* 25(1–2): 25–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720936471

Hydén, L. & Nilsson, E. (2015). Couples with dementia: Positioning the "we." *Dementia* 14(6): 716–733. https://doi.org/10.1177/1471301213506923

Jackson, S. (2006). Gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: The complexity (and limits) of heteronormativity. *Feminist Theory* 7(1): 105–121. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700106061462

Jackson, S. (2010). Self, time and narrative: Re-thinking the contribution of G. H. Mead. *Life Writing* 7(2): 123–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/14484520903445255

Jenkins, R. (2008). *Social Identity* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.

Johnston, T. R. & Meyer, H. (2017). LGBT-specific housing in the USA. *Housing, Care and Support* 20(3): 121–127. https://doi.org/10.1108/HCS-07-2017-0016

Jones, R. (2011). Imagining bisexual futures. *Journal of Bisexuality* 11(2–3): 245–270. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2011.571988

King, A. (2022). Queer futures? Forget it! Dementia, queer theory and the limits of normativity. *Journal of Aging Studies* 63: 100993. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2021.100993

Klein, K., Holtby, A., Cook, K. & Travers, R. (2015). Complicating the coming out narrative. Becoming oneself in a heterosexist and cissexist world. *Journal of Homosexuality* 62(3): 297–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.970829

Kneale, D., Henley, J., Thomas, J. & French, R. (2021). Inequalities in older LGBT people's health and care needs in the United Kingdom: A systematic scoping review. *Ageing & Society* 41: 492–515. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X19001326

Local Government Act 1988, Ch. 9. Available on https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/contents (Accessed: June 15, 2024).

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, Ch. 30. Available on https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/30/contents/enacted (Accessed: June 15, 2024).

McDonald, A. (2024). Is the dream of Scottish independence over? *Politico*. Available on https://www.politico.eu/article/is-the-dream-of-scottish-independence-over-snp-humza-yousaf-nicola-sturgeon/ (Accessed: May 7, 2024).

Mead, G. H. (1934 [1972]). *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Mitchell, J. (2000). New parliament, new politics in Scotland. *Parliamentary Affairs* 53(3): 605–621. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/53.3.605

Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia*. New York: New York University Press.

Phoenix, C., Smith, B. & Sparkes, A. C. (2010). Narrative analysis in aging studies: A typology for consideration. *Journal of Aging Studies* 24: 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2008.06.003

Port, C. (2012). No future? Aging, temporality, history, and reverse chronologies. *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 4: 1–19.

Reinhold, S. (1994). Through the parliamentary looking glass: "Real" and "pretend" families in contemporary British politics. *Feminist Review* 48(1): 61–79. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1994.42

Richardson, D. & Monro, S. (2012). *Equality and Diversity*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rodés, B., Cadiñanos, J., Esteban-Cantos, A., Rodríguez-Centeno, J. & Arribas, J. R. (2022). Ageing with HIV: Challenges and biomarkers. *The Lancet* 77: 103896. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ebiom.2022.103896

Sandberg, L. (2008). The old, the ugly and the queer: Thinking old age in relation to queer theory. *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 5(2): 117–139.

Sandberg, L. (2015). Towards a happy ending? Positive ageing, heteronormativity and un/happy intimacies. *Lambda Nordica* 4: 19–44.

Sandberg, L. & Marshall, B. L. (2017). Queering aging futures. *Societies* 7(3): 21. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc7030021

Simpson, P. (2015). *Middle-Aged Gay Men, Ageing and Ageism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137435248

Simpson, P., Almack, K. & Walthery, P. (2018). "We treat them all the same": The attitudes, knowledge and practices of staff concerning old/er lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans residents in care homes. *Ageing and Society* 38(5): 869–899. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X1600132X

Stacey, M. & Averett, P. (2016). Routine activities and perceived homophobia among older lesbians. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 13(1): 22–34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-015-0198-5

Stonewall. (2016). *Key Dates for Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Equality*. Available on https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/key-dates-lesbian-gay-bi-and-transequality (Accessed: July 1, 2024).

Tao, H. (2023). A desirable future or unaffordable hope? Queer people becoming parents through assisted reproductive technology (ART) in China. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 25(4): 413–427. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2022.2049879

Traies, J. (2016). *The Lives of Older Lesbians*. London: Springer.

Umberson, D. & Kroeger, R. A. (2015). Gender, marriage, and health for same-sex and different-sex couples: The future keeps arriving. In S. M. McHale, V. King, J. Van Hook & A. Booth (eds.), *Gender and Couple Relationships*. p. 189–213. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21635-5

Valentine, G. (1999). Doing household research: Interviewing couples together and apart. *Area* 31(1): 67–74. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.1999.tb00172.x

Weeks, J. (2007). *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life*. London: Routledge.

Weeks, J., Heaphy, B. & Donovan, C. (2001). *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*. London: Routledge.

Westwood, S. (2017). Older lesbians, gay men and the "right to die" debate: "I always keep a dose of something, because I don't want to become an elderly isolated person." *Social and Legal Studies* 26(9): 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663917693916

Zarhin, D. (2018). Conducting joint interviews with couples: Ethical and methodological challenges. *Qualitative Health Research* 28(5): 844–854. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317749196