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Imagining life at 60: social class and expectations about the third age among the 1958 British Birth Cohort

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CLS is an ESRC Resource Centre based at the Institute of Education

Structure of talk

Defining the third age – Laslett’s vision

Evidence from ELSA about activities and health in the third age

Key aspects of the third age

The 1958 cohort and the third age

data collection

overview of key themes

Results on social stratification, gender and the third age

Identity and the third age

Laslett (1989) A new map of life

There is a principle which I believe we should adopt as we contemplate the facts of growing old. We have to conduct our lives as far as possible, not simply in remembrance of our former, but in the presence of our future, selves.'(Laslett 1989, p22)

Laslett, P (1989) *A Fresh Map of Life: The emergence of the third age*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London.

- **Written when he was 74 (b1915- d2001)**
- **The concept of planning (life plans and strategies) is central to the notion of the third age**

Laslett's characterisation of the life course

First age: dependence, socialization; immaturity and education

Second age: independence, maturity & responsibility, earning and saving

Third age: personal fulfilment

Fourth age; dependence, decrepitude and death.

Third age: personal achievement, fulfilment; 'apogee' of personal life

Leisure is distinct from idleness, concept of rest should be dissociated from that of retirement

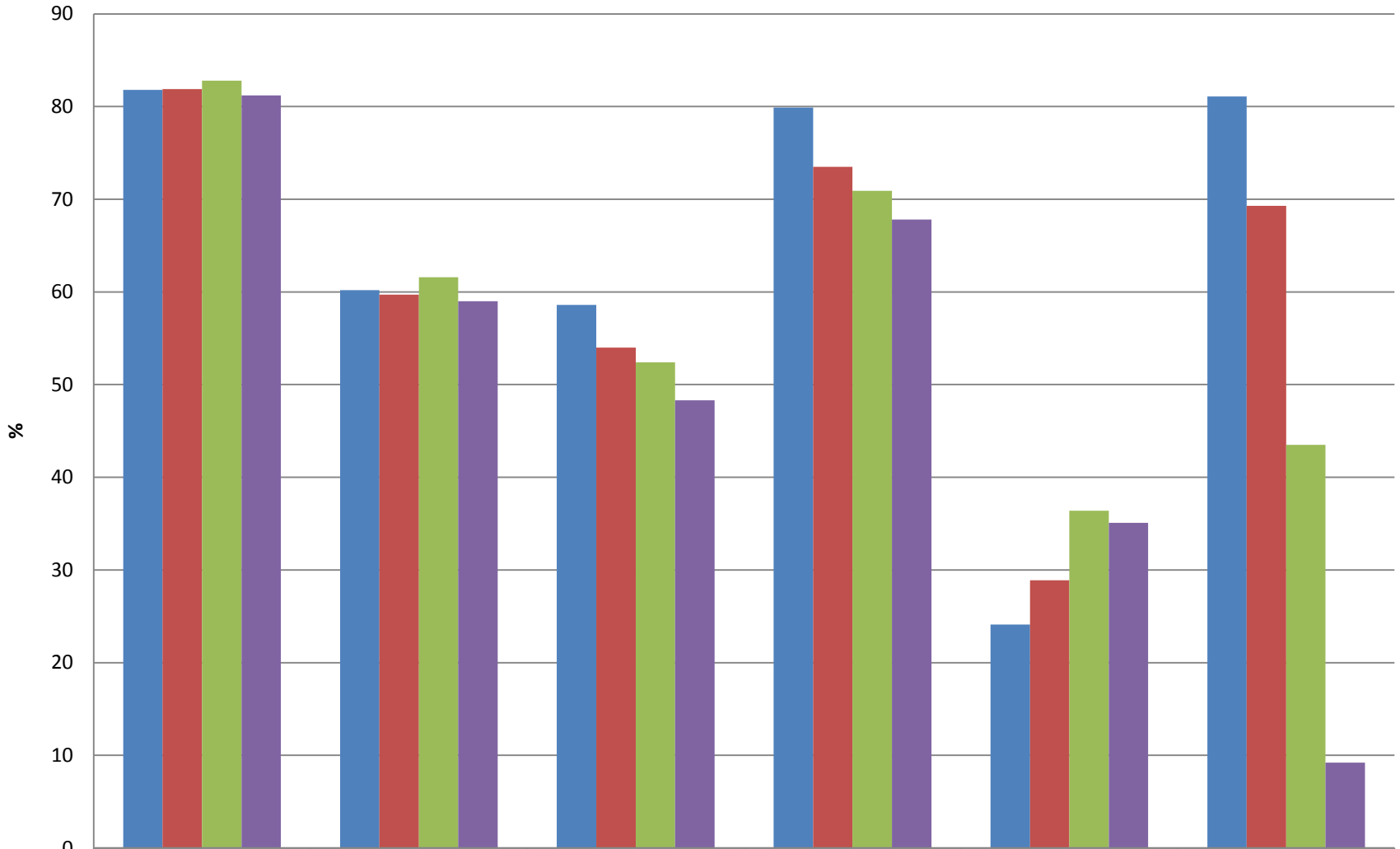
Importance of activism rather than disengagement

Carr

Carr, D, (2008) Redefining the Role of Older Adults in Society: Does the Third Age Promote a Successful Alternative to the Tripartitioned Life Course? Journal of Societal and Social Policy, Vol. 7/1-2: 37-51.

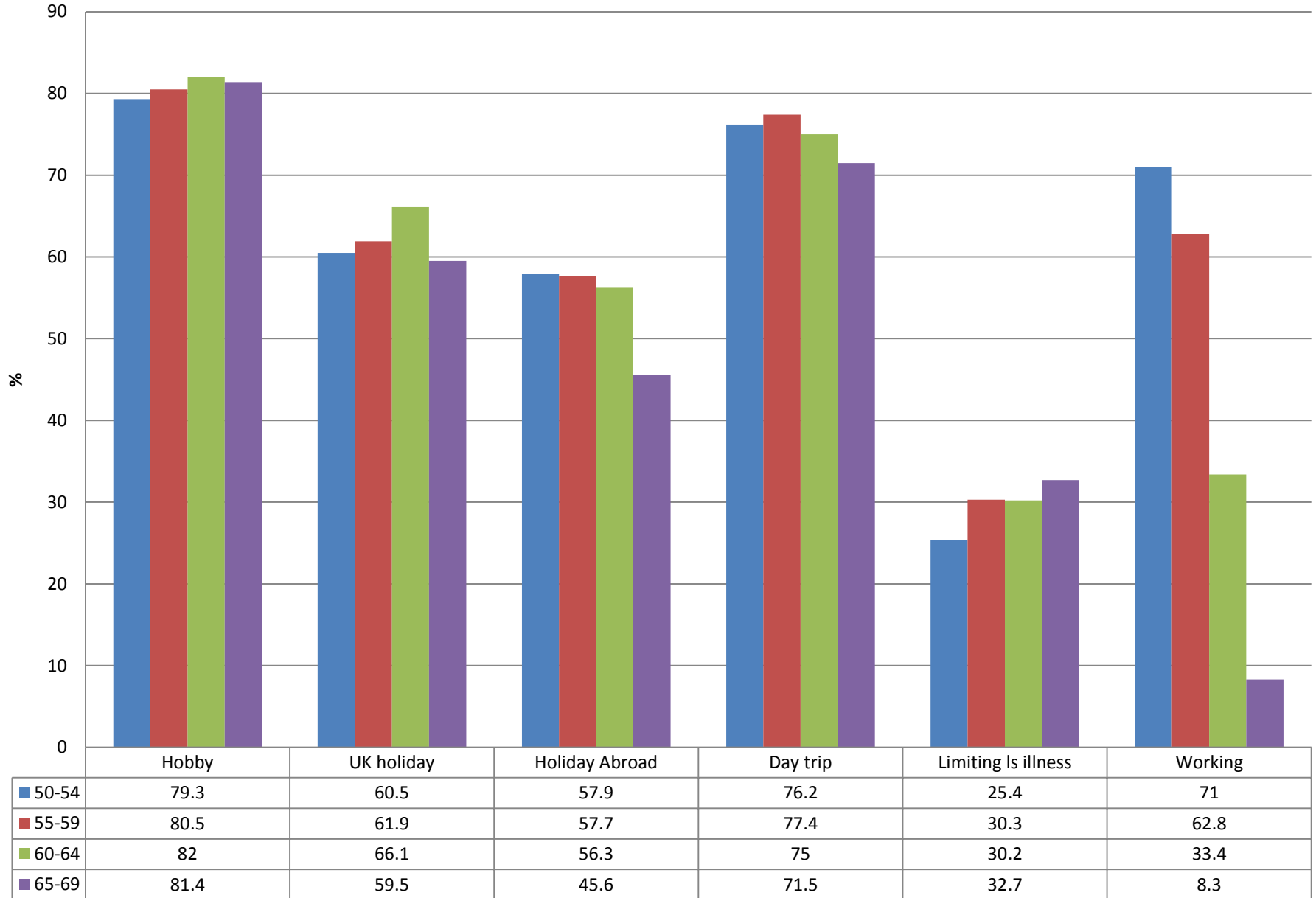
- **Important to examine carefully the rhetoric about the third age**
- **Can promote higher quality of life but not a panacea**
- **Heterogeneity of resources for retired individuals**
- **The third age is not only dependent on individual agency but also on societal structures and access to resources**
- **Need to avoid a work and consumer dominated view of societal engagement**
- **the third age is not a reflection of individual decisions it is more a reflection of a particular type of society**

Men- ELSA 2002



	Hobby	UK holiday	Holiday Abroad	Day trip	Limiting Is illness	Working
■ 50-54	81.8	60.2	58.6	79.9	24.1	81.1
■ 55-59	81.9	59.7	54	73.5	28.9	69.3
■ 60-64	82.8	61.6	52.4	70.9	36.4	43.5
■ 65-69	81.2	59	48.3	67.8	35.1	9.2

Women - ELSA 2002



Overview of current empirical work

- **Data from the 1958 cohort study provides empirical material with which to interrogate the notion/concept of the third age**
- **Heterogeneity of sample is an advantage here i.e. Not only focussed on a well-educated, well-resourced subgroup**
- **Existing quantitative data provides very rich information about the individuals who have written about their imagined life at 60**
- **Large body of material enables us to understand something about the ‘rhetoric’ of the third age as well as looking at differences between individuals and subgroups**

Age 50 self-completion questionnaire

At age 50, in 2008 NCDS Cohort members completed a 16-page paper self-completion questionnaire, including questions about health and well being and a personality inventory.

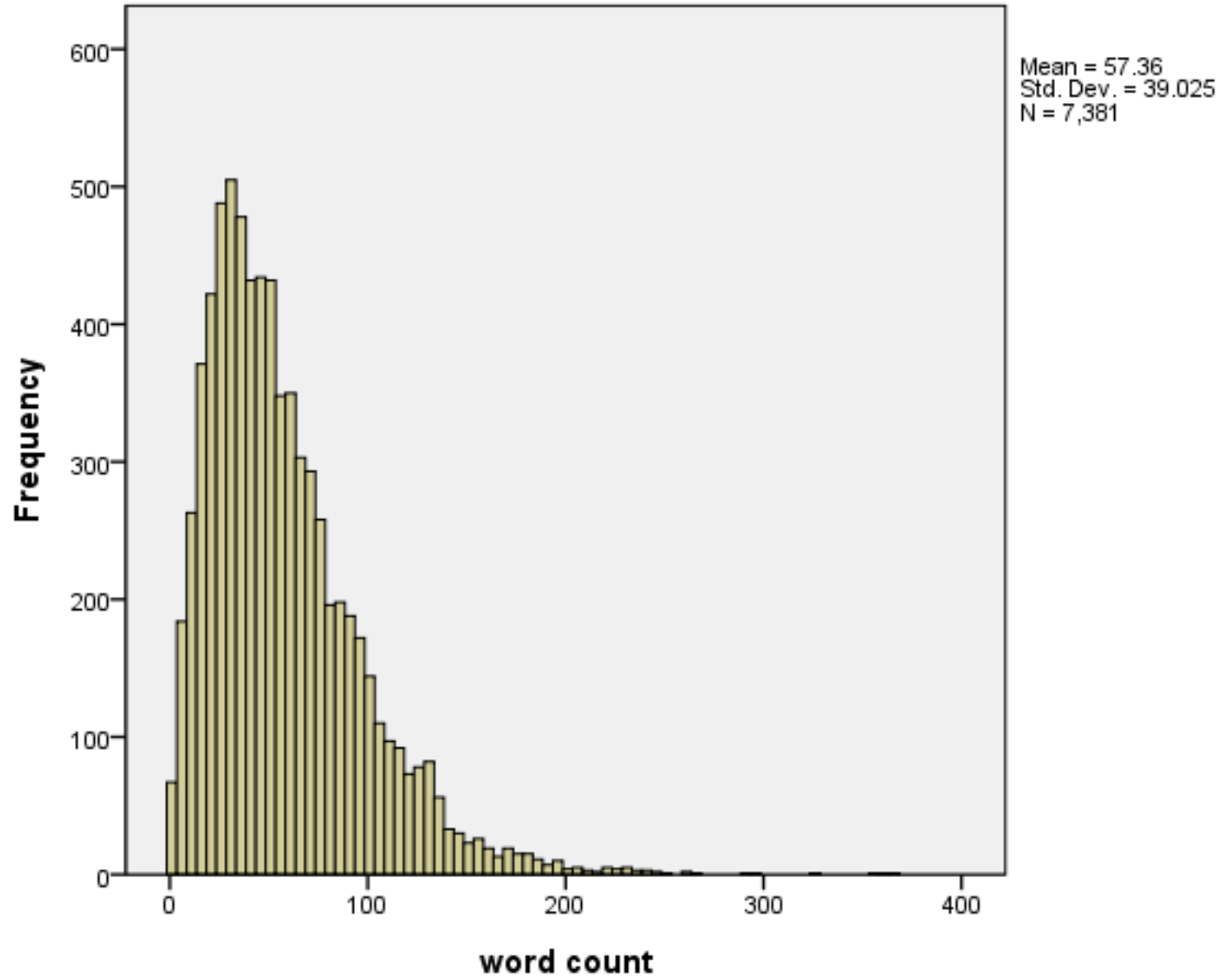
The final question stated:

Imagine that you are now 60 years old...please write a few lines about the life you are leading (your interests, your home life, your health and well-being and any work you may be doing).

Mean length of 7383 responses: 57 words

All of the 7383 responses have been transcribed and documented and are now deposited at the data archive.

Histogram



10 % of responses are under 17 words in length e.g.

ASK ME AGAIN WHEN I AM 60.

I hope at 60 years I AM About the SAME AS NOW. Running a business.

@Re-married. @Knackered & worn our.

@Reasonably happy. @OR DEAD!! who knows?

Median length of response is 49 words for example:

All 3 children have finished education. @Retired. @Healthy @Sufficient income to travel abroad. Prepared to work part-time to supplement income and keep mind active. @Physically active - running, working out, swimming, hill walking, golf. @Looking forward to extending 35 year married. Visiting grandchildren! (If we have any.)

Apart from less hair and more weight, I would imagine my life being pretty much the same, maybe taking things a little easier, and looking forward to retirement. But on a day to day basis doing the same work, having the same home life, following my footy team etc . . .

Approaches to coding qualitative material

- **Creating dichotomous variables to summarise the topics mentioned e.g. work, family, health, time, travel, interests and leisure (each qualitative response can have multiple codes)**
- **Creating a set of dichotomous variables to indicate whether particular words appear in the response (each response can have multiple codes)**
- **Creating a typology and assigning a single code to each response**

Issues around asking about aspirations?

How realistic are people's aspirations?

How far do aspirations reflect current circumstances or dreams for the future?

How far are individuals constrained by social norms?

Are gender and social class shaping responses to the question – or do individuals provide a response that displays their gender and/or social class?

Main topics in responses

**Five hundred cohort members' responses were coded for topics
Of these, 442 had completed the questionnaire and 370 had written a
response**

Key topics written about were:

Work	267 (60%)
Health	261 (59%)
Family	240 (54%)
Interests and leisure	217 (49%)

**Over half of cohort members wrote about work, health, or family and just
under a half wrote about interests and leisure**

Key themes: Positive and optimistic, stability.

Exploring the concept of the third age

Coding scheme:

- 1) No response or avoids the question**
- 2) Expectation of stability**
- 3) Expectation of decline**
- 4) Leisure and enjoyment**
- 5) Elements of the third age**
- 6) Clear third age**
- 7) Other**

The third age includes:

- Voluntary work
- making a contribution to society (e.g. political activism)
- working (probably part time)
- helping other family members e.g. caring for grandchildren
- good quality of life
- learning new things 'self-actualisation'
- taking on new hobbies
- freedom from responsibility (e.g. children left home)
- still being fit and healthy i.e. not yet in the 'fourth age' of dependence
- planning for the future

No response or avoids the question (27%)

I HAVE NEVER EVEN CONSIDERED LOOKING TEN YEARS AHEAD SO I WOULD SAY THAT THE ABOVE FEW LINES IN THE QUESTION WOULD NOT APPLY TO MY WAY OF THINKING.

I would rather not think about being 60, I take each day as it comes + make the most of each day.

Expectation of stability (26%)

If I was about 60yrs I would like to carry on the way I am, to see grandchildren & there mom and dads have a nice home and help with gardening when I could health permitting then take whatever happens.

Doing Much the same as when I was fifty. @children have their own children (Grandchildren) These will probably keep me occupied. still in full time Employment looking forward to a Comfy Retirement

My life will be more or less the same as it is now.

Expectation of decline (5%)

SAME JOB, NO CHANGE IN MY LIFE EXCEPT MY HEALTH GOING DOWN HILL.

I WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE 10 YEARS (60 BACK TO 50) I DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE CHANGED MUCH I THINK LIFE WOULD BE MUCH HARDER I WOULD THINK A FEW MORE PROBLEMS. MAKING THE MOST OF EVERYDAY.

Expectation of enjoyment (10%)

HOPEFULLY NOW I AM 60 I WILL HAVE MORE TIME TO PLAY SNOOKER/POOL AND HAVE HOLS. WITH MY WIFE AND I HOPE MY DAUGHTER FULFILS HER LIFE AMBITIONS WITH HER DANCE

I am retired now. My health is not too bad. I am reading a lot more and I go on walks. My Granddaughter is at University and my daughter has a good job at a School.

I would like to think that my life will not change much. @Probably two new Knee joints and maybe a hip joint. Still working. But cutting down the days per week. @Having plenty of holidays & short breaks. Hope all the family stay fit and healthy. Living life to the full, and generally enjoying my life.

Elements of the third age (20%)

Probably living with a new partner. Babysitting any grandchildren I'd have, + playing a big part in their lives. Hopefully retired, if not then working part-time, in a busy people environment. Health I'd like to think no worse, as I am more conscious about it, + work towards improving it all the time.

@Interests would have to be pictures + socialising with friends

Hopefully I will be retired, do a little voluntary work. Socialising with friends, shopping and enjoy lots of holidays in the sun! enjoying my grandchildren.

I'm hopefully retired but probably involved in some sort of voluntary work (probably still a school governor) Children have left home and we've either moved or are looking to move somewhere out of the commuter belt. I'm keeping fit & keeping up my hobbies. Hopefully I'm still in good health and taking advantage of the extra leisure time to travel

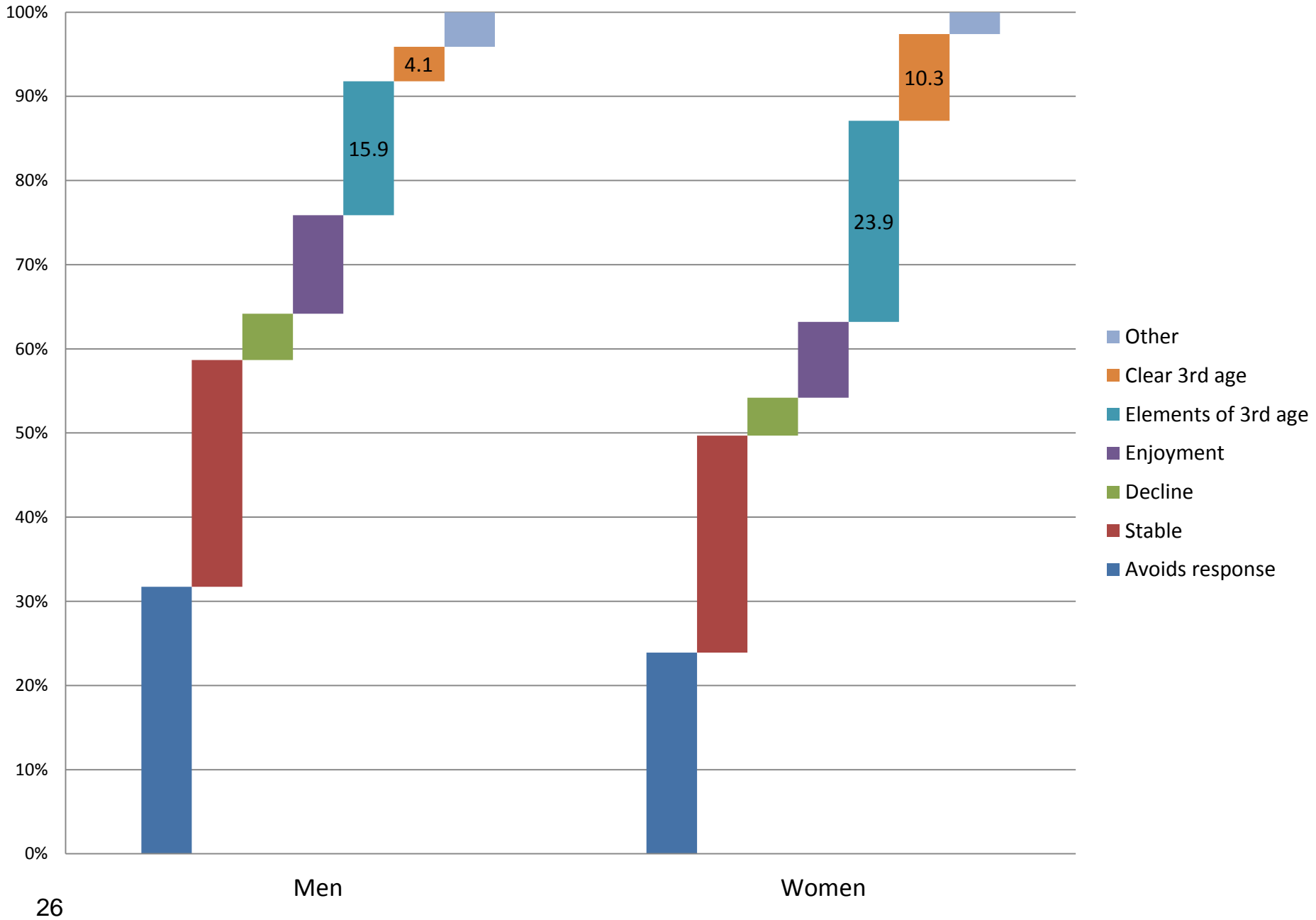
Clearly third age (7.5 %)

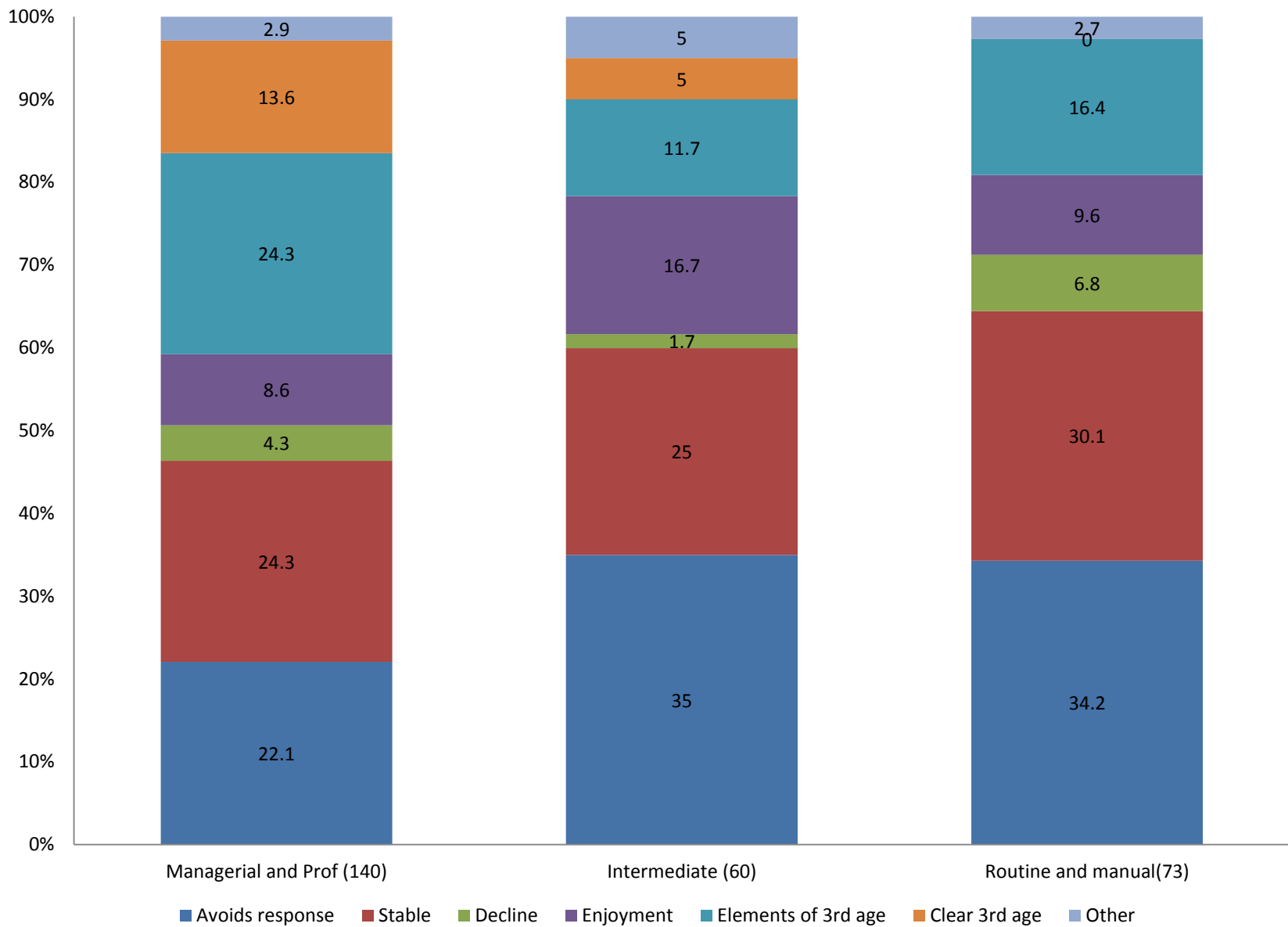
I have just taken retirement and I am still fit and active, enjoying my time with my husband and taking some pleasure of pottering in the garden and doing odd jobs within the home. We are in the process of planning a four week holiday across Africa as finally there are no holiday restrictions at work. Home and families are an important factor in our lives and we help out on a regular basis, worries for the future for our children and grandchildren will always remain. I attend a weekly yoga and aerobic session to maintain fitness and I have also agree to help out in the local infant and Junior school once a fortnight in order to maintain contact within the local community N10311Z

Other responses (3%)

10 years' time who knows, in the current economic climate my concerns are only for the youngsters and the mess we have Made of things

Gender by aspirations for life at 60





Examples of those in intermediate occupations whose aspirations clearly fit with the concept of the third age

- **All three are women**
- **Two have children but no partner/husband**
- **All have clerical occupations, and one has a degree**
- **Travel a major theme in two responses**
- **Family a theme in all three**

N10054B – female – living comfortably-good O-levels- financial clerk (4.122) – no partner

When I am 60, I hope to be still fit and well, able to continue my interests. @I like to scuba Dive so will have visited many of the places on my list by now and still go diving when I can. Travel will still be very important to me, visiting places & seeing things, cultures and experiences while I am still able to and have visited many of the places on my 'to go' list. My two sons have settled down and I am now a grandmother and see my family often. @I still work part time as I won't be collecting my state pension until I am 65! @My life is full and I am well and happy and am now living in a rural home rather than in the city.

N10334G – female – living comfortably-degree- pensions clerk (4.132) – husband is an IT professional

Probably still working if not full time - at least part-time. @Hopefully a grandmother - spending time with children and grandchildren. @Doing some voluntary work - if not working full-time still in good health and together with husband. Finding time for some leisure activities - keep fit, yoga, Spanish. @No children living at home. @Making plans for future.

N10424H – female – just about getting by- A-levels- financial clerk (4.122) – no partner

I have just returned home from my round the world trip - my sole ambition in life was to be a 'grown up back-packer', having missed that opportunity as a teenager. @I am now settling back into work. My health is good and to improve it I have joined the local health club; I am able to do this now as there is more money available now that my daughter has left home and the mortgage is repaid. @For a few hours a week I am able to do volunteer work, something I have not done since my twenties - this gives me the feeling I am contributing. @I feel much happier now there is less money worries and more to spend on myself. @Generally life is good!

Examples of men whose aspirations clearly fit with the concept of the third age

All six are married/have partners

Four have a degree or a higher degree

All are in managerial or professional occupations

Two are actively involved in church activities

N10155F

When I am 60 I hope to be living in the same house with my wife. We would spend some of our time with our children and their families. We would still enjoy our main hobby which is dancing and I would have time to research a local history project I started a long time ago. @I would like to be thinking about retirement so perhaps be working part-time or in a post with less responsibility. @I would like to have the garden looking wonderful all year round and perhaps work an allotment. I would like to attend concerts and the theatre and enjoy going to gigs where family members are playing. @I would like to be able to pass my specialist dance knowledge on to young people.

N10260F

Same interest I had when I was 30, living in same house, retired with a decent pension, good health, MORE active as not doing a sedentary job, so lots more walking. Travelling in UK very regularly, My wife enjoying as good health as is possible bearing in mind existing lifetime ailments. Still watching hardly any T.V. - listening to loads of music, playing more sport, keeping mind active. Doing volunteer driving for local community Having a really good enjoyable time!

N10308E

I'd like to have been accepted for ordination into the Western Buddhist Order.

@I'd like to have achieved a much better state of mental and emotional equilibrium after a difficult ten years of being a carer (for my mother, who died in November, with Alzheimers). @I'd like to maintain a healthy outdoor life style including cycling, walking, and overseas trips to remote regions on foot and by bike. @I'd like to have taken up rock climbing and to have finished my Munro's (hills over 3000') @I'd like to be able to ski a series of good telemark tours even on steep ground.

N10437N

I WILL RETIRE AT 60 AND WILL BE PREPARING TO GO WITH MY WIFE ON A VOLUNTARY CHURCH SERVICE MISSION - PROBABLY OVERSEAS. @THE MORTGAGE WILL BE PAID OFF AND CHILDREN SELF SUFFICIENT SO FINANCES SHOULD BE OK. I HOPE TO BE HEALTHY AND FIT ENOUGH TO ENJOY AN ACTIVE LIFE

N10440H

It's just my wife and I at home now. Our daughter has left after getting married. I have more time for tending the garden as I now work part-time as a clerical officer in a local firm based in {PLACE East of England} about two miles away. I need the extra income to top-up my pension. My wife and I are involved in the church that we've attended for some years now although I only preach once a year these days. My main role there is still a Homegroup leader caring and mentoring a small number of the other church members. My health is still good enough to carry out these aforementioned activities. I have again taken up "geriatric" badminton on a weekly basis. It's a full life!

N10458T

I'LL BE RETIRED, GRANDPARENT, MORTGAGE / DEBT FREE HELPING OUT WITH CHILDRENS FAMILIES, GRAND CHILDREN I DO NOT THINK I WILL BE WORKING, PERHAPS VERY OCCASSIONAL CONSULTANCY AND ATTENDANCE AT PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTION MEETING/ SEMINARS, OF MY CHOICE. @WOULD LIKE TO TRAVEL THE WORLD WITH {WIFE}, 36 YEARS OF MARRIAGE. I WILL PROBABLY NOT BE AS ACTIVE AS I AM TODAY, BUT WILL CONTINUE DIY, CAR, GARDENING GROWING OWN VEGETABLES AND AIM TO BE AS ENVIORNMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE AS POSSIBLE, ENERGY SELF SUFFICIENT I HOPE WITH THE NEW TECHNOLOGY PLAYING BOWLS / GOLF, READING, INTERNET, COMPUTING, CONTINUE LEARNING AND IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE AND CARRY OUT SOME VOLUNTARY WORK. DO MORE COOKING, SOUPMAKING. BE AS HEALTHY AS POSSIBLE TO ACCOMPLISH ALL ABOVE.

Routine Manual occupations – men with some elements of the third age

N1008V - (Chemical process operative)

MY INTERESTS ARE HOME WINE & BEER BREWING, WHEN I GET AN ALLOTMENT, GROWING MY OWN VEGETABLES. @HOME LIFE WILL BE THE SAME AS IT WAS TEN YEARS AGO. @HEALTH WILL BE OKAY EXCEPT MY KNEE'S PLAYING UP A BIT MORE AND MY HEARING WILL NOT BE AS GOOD. @HOPEFULLY I WILL NOT BE STILL WORKING IN A FACTORY, BUT OUT AND ABOUT IN A DIFFERENT JOB.

Routine Manual occupations – men with some elements of the third age

N10564U (taxi driver)

I hope to be living in a warmer climate, to benefit my health and to have changed from working full time to a more self sufficient lifestyle of 'working' to grow vegetables, fruits & rearing livestock to provide a better quality and balance of life - with the benefit also of a healthy diet and lifestyle.

Routine Manual occupations – women with some elements of the third age

N10068H (Chef)

At the age of 60 I would hope to be retired living in nice house in quiet area, enjoying good health taking short walks, looking after grandchildren occasionally. @I will still be helping with my local scout group and enjoying yearly camps and pack holidays.

Routine Manual occupations – women with some elements of the third age

N10412D (Cleaner)

Hopefully at 60. I will still be in good health. My children and grandchildren will still be demanding as much from me and I will thriving on that. My home will still be as full as ever. If I am not working by 60 I would be doing some kind of voluntary work as I like to keep on the go.

Discussion/reflections

Key themes among those in routine manual occupations with some elements of the third age in their responses:

- grandchildren & voluntary work with children (women)**
- DIY, gardening, sport and music (men)**

Conclusions

Generally very positive and optimistic responses

Clear evidence of the third age but only among a minority of respondents

Those showing clearest signs of third age aspirations are either in managerial and professional occupations or women

Little evidence of consumerism in these responses

Identity performed through hobbies, travel and importance of the family

Relatively little evidence of gender in these responses

Useful references

Castro, Felipe González, Joshua G Kellison, Stephen J Boyd, and Albert Kopak. 'A Methodology for Conducting Integrative Mixed Methods Research and Data Analyses'. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 4, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 342–360.

Sandelowski, Margarete, Corrine I Voils, and George Knafl. 'On Quantitizing'. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 3, no. 3 (July 1, 2009): 208–222.

Hsieh, Hsiu-Fang, and Sarah E Shannon. 'Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis'. *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (November 1, 2005): 1277–1288.

Power, Chris, and Jane Elliott. 'Cohort Profile: 1958 British Birth Cohort (National Child Development Study)'. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35, no. 1 (February 2006): 34 –41.

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Results: themes in boys' and girls' essays

Gender differences in themes and topics included in children's essays		
	Boys (N=243)	Girls (N=252)
Mother	19%	37%
Siblings	7%	20%
Friends	18%	29%
Domestic labour (Child care etc)	22%	55%
Cars	41%	18%
Money/earnings/savings etc	42%	25%
Occupational skills/nature of work	46%	32%
Working hours	27%	35%
Husband/Wife's occupation	10%	23%
Football	39%	2%

Examples of cohort members writing about health behaviour

Two dominant themes were cohort members stating that they would be 'fit and healthy' or 'in good health' at age 60 (161 responses) and secondly cohort members writing about health behaviour (58 responses). Almost two thirds of those who wrote about health behaviour also wrote about being in good health, for example:

I have an active life with interests such as yoga, line dancing, swimming, gym, ...My health is good and I hope to maintain an active life for as long as possible. (N10331D)

And

My physical health is excellent, regular gym, pilates & yoga sessions (several per week) have led to this. (N10665Y)

...can also use data from the quantitative survey to look at patterns in the topics written about by cohort members



CM self-assessment of health by Health behaviour Crosstabulation

			Health behaviour		Total
			.00	1.00	
CM self-assessment of health	1 Excellent	Count	55	16	71
		%	77.5%	22.5%	100.0%
	2 Very good	Count	88	16	104
		%	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
	3 Good	Count	87	20	107
		%	81.3%	18.7%	100.0%
	4 Fair	Count	38	6	44
		%	86.4%	13.6%	100.0%
	5 Poor	Count	10	0	10
		%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	278	58	336	
	%	82.7%	17.3%	100.0%	

Examples of those with poor health

HOPEFULLY I SHOULD STILL BE WORKING IN THE CIVIL SERVICE, AND CONTINUING TO LEAD A RELATIVELY A NORMAL LIFE ALTHOUGH MY MOBILITY WOULD HAVE DETERIORATED. I SHOULD IMAGINE I WOULD LIVE ALONE AS MY SON WOULD HAVE LEFT HOME

My life is very pleasant. Although my health could be better, my family, home life and friends make my life very happy.

AT AGE OF 60, FIRSTLY I FEEL I AM NOT LIVING TILL THAT AGE, DUE TO HEALTH PROBLEMS. @IF I REACHED AGE OF 60, I MOST PROBABLY WILL BE FEELING VERY ILL & UNABLE TO COPE MYSELF, MOBILITY PROBLEMS, UNABLE TO WORK, FINANCIAL STRESS & FEELING VERY WORRIED FOR THE FUTURE.

Case study

N10125Z – 'Sue'

My grandchildren will then be seventeen and twelve. As I have always luckily been involved in their upbringing and care. I see myself as being as 'advice giver' and hopefully their 'rock' in the future. @I expect to still be quite a stronge sort of person as I have always worked hard. Although I know I will suffer from shortness of breath and probably arthritis. I don't think I will look 60 in appearance. I will still be doing a lot in the garden and home, and probably other peoples too. I don't mean a bit of weeding - but larger projects, like now. I always take on big jobs. And feel happy when I have achieved something. I will still be trying to look after everybody.

Case study – based on longitudinal quantitative data

Sue was born in the South East of England and her family had moved to the North Midlands by the time she was 11 yrs old.

She was 6lb and 14 oz when she was born and it was an assisted breech delivery. She has one older brother and no other siblings.

At age seven she was living with her parents in a privately rented house and her mother and father read to her once a week. It was recorded by the interviewer that the family had housing difficulties, financial difficulties and health difficulties.

When she was 16 Sue's parents were uncertain about her educational future.

Case study – based on longitudinal quantitative data (Contd.)

At age 11 she wrote in her essay that she wanted to be a housewife and at age 16 her aspirations were for her first job to be a manual job, and she wanted to have two children.

At age 50, Sue has no qualifications either academic or vocational, has a high 'malaise' score, doesn't live with a spouse or partner and doesn't have any children living at home. Lives in rented accommodation. Not registered disabled but does report that her health limits everyday activities.

10 per cent of responses are over 109 words in length e.g.

With my husband having retired 6 yrs previously,

I hope that our plans & dreams have been met.

(we have planned to live between south africa, france & here)

I would pray that our health is excellent & that we are able to still drive ,

do the gardening DIY & housework & some sport activities:

That our children are happy & healthy & perhaps have given us some grandchildren which I would love.

That we still have our immediate friends around us, who being of similar age I would hope are well & healthy.

That all my sisters are happy & in excellent health,

& if possible that my mum will still be with us,

(perhaps she will be living with me by this time.)

[126 words]