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## **The importance of a room with a view for older people with limited mobility.**

### **Abstract**

- Purpose (mandatory)

This paper examines how older people who are almost entirely housebound use a view from their window to make sense of the world and stay connected to the outside space that they cannot physically inhabit.

- Design/methodology/approach (mandatory)

Semi-structured interviews with 42 individuals were carried out who were living at home, were relatively immobile and had an interesting view outside they liked from one or more of their windows.

- Findings (mandatory) .

The findings suggest immobile older people enjoy watching a motion-full, changing, world going on outside of their own mobility and interact and create meaning and sense, relating themselves to the outside world.

- Practical implications (if applicable)

Findings suggest those working in health and social care must realise the importance of older people observing the outdoors and create situations where that is enabled and maintained through improving vantage points and potentially using technology.

- Originality/value (mandatory)

This study builds, and updates work by Rowles (1981) showing that preference for views from the window involve the immediate surveillance zone but also further afield. The view can be rural or urban but should include a human element from which older people can interact through story-telling. The view often contains different flows, between mundane and mystery and intrigue, and between expected and random.

### **Keywords**

Immobility, environmental perception, environmental preference, independence, wellbeing, outdoors, older people, ageing, nature.

## **The importance of a room with a view for older people with limited mobility.**

### **Introduction**

The growing prevalence and desire of ageing in place has implications for enabling accessible, inhabitable and meaningful spaces for older people to reside (de Jonge, 2012; Iwarsson, 2004). The relationship between home, neighbourhood and community is dynamic and fluid, where the older person is continually reintegrating with places and renegotiating meanings and identity while social, political, cultural, and personal landscapes change (Andrews, Cutchin, McCracken, Phillips, and Wiles, 2007; Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, and Allen, 2011). Older people's sense of attachment to home and neighbourhood gives meaning and security, turning houses and neighbourhoods into homes, and space into place (Oswald and Wahl, 2005; Rowles, 1993; Rowles and Watkins, 1993; Rubenstein, 1990; Taylor, 2001). Often, the home is viewed at a very practical level, as something simply to house the older person, not taking into account how the home is constructed and maintained through connections, attachment and meaning by the older person themselves (see Haak, Fänge, Iwarsson, & Ivanoff, 2007; Sixsmith, Sixsmith, Fange, Naumann, Kucsera, Tomsone, Haak, Dahlin-Ivanoff, and Woolrych. 2014 for overviews).

Older people are more likely than other age groups to have to reduce mobility which can result in spending more time closer to the home and for some becoming 'housebound' in later life is a reality (Musselwhite and Shergold, 2013; Sixsmith et al., 2014). Rowles (1978) discusses how many older people become prisoners of space, where physiological decline and economic deprivation coupled with a rapidly changing society can result in older people physical, socially and psychological withdrawing. Older people then reconstruct their world and have deep attachment around a very local space which in many cases, for those very immobile, this is the immediate home environment. Connections to further away places become difficult to achieve in a physical and literal sense, often replaced through recollection, remembrance and imaginative connections (Herbert and Thomas, 1997; Parkhurst et al., 2014). This may be done through reminiscing, using objects, artefacts and photographs, for example (Rowles, 1978, 2000).

Immediately outside the home is a space which has been termed the surveillance zone, a space that parents can allow children to play on their own while observing their activities without physically being next to them, through for example a window or an open door (Jacobs, 1961). Rowles (1981) examined how older people use this space, examining both how they watch others or are watched by others in this space. Rowles (1978, 1981, 2000) states that this space grows in significance in later life as older people spend more time closet to home, highlighting how it fosters reciprocal social networks and generates a sense of personal identity. Looking out of the window is often cited as important to older people (Dowds et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2010). This paper builds on this work, examining how people who are almost entirely housebound observe this space through windows from their home, identifying why it is important to them to watch the space and how it helps them make sense of the world and stay somewhat connected to the outside space that they cannot physically inhabit. It is hoped the findings will be useful to health and social care staff working with older people in helping older people identify and engage with such spaces.

Previous research suggests housebound older people not only value social connections but also view connections with nature as being very important (Dowds, 2016; Dowds and Masthoff, 2015; Dowds et al., 2015, 2018). In Rowles (1981) work, the surveillance zone offers a connection between the

older person and the contemporary world, watching others doing activities they used to do and participating vicariously in jobs that are taking place. Sometimes the surveillance zone offers a mirror to the person's old self, especially if the person has lived in the community for a number of years, where objects enable reminiscence (Rowles, 1981). Rowles (1981) also notes the importance of setting up a space to enable the surveillance to take place. In this vein, being able to see the outside world, through good vision and a window that allow connections to the outside are therefore vitally important. A chair to sit in and other props to enable a comfortable position are vital (Rowles, 1981). Consequently, this paper will explore the importance of the view the person has from the window to the outside world to their sense of self and sense of home.

People tend to state preferences for views that have greenery, especially plants and trees, associated with them (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1983 Park and Mattson, 2008). Dowds et al (2018) note the importance of observing wildlife, changing colours of the sky and general views people could see from their window. Bringing that outdoors to people indoors has been examined experimentally, where people recover better from surgery if they had a view of trees outside their window compared to view of a brick wall (Ulrich, 1984). Similarly, reduction in stress symptoms arise when people have natural views compared to urban views, whether in reality or on videotape (e.g. Hartig et al., 2003; Ulrich et al., 1991). There is evidence that virtual reality scenes showing nature are better than still pictures (Valtchanov, Barton, & Ellard, 2010), and that accompanying the visuals with sounds enhanced stress recovery (Annerstedt et al., 2013). There is some tentative evidence too that virtual natural environments presented to older people living with dementia can reduce stress and negative emotions and increase pleasure (Reynolds et al, 2018).

The view of natural elements (garden or landscaped areas) from home contributes to residents' satisfaction and mental well-being (Kaplan, 2001). Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) suggest people prefer natural scenes that are coherent (unified as a organised whole), legible (extent to how far it can be read and explored without seemingly getting lost), complex (greater number of different elements) and contain mystery and intrigue (contains more information than is visible at present, so long as it does not pose a danger). These preferences are largely found across different contexts and with people with different backgrounds, though older people have been found to display relatively low preferences for very wild natural landscapes which it has been suggested is to do with their greater vulnerability to potential dangers of wilderness areas (Van den Berg and Koole, 2006). Gehl (2011) suggest that a view from a window in an urban or semi-urban area can enable people to feel a sense of belonging and participation, even at a distance, which naturally is very important for people who cannot physically engage. Hence in investigating the importance of views of the outdoors, the type of view and how the person narrates and structures the views are important.

## **Methodology**

### *Design*

Given the need to explore emotions and meanings that the view affords on older people's sense of place and attachment, an emergent Grounded Theory approach was used (Babchuk, 2010), following guidelines from Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Glaser (1978, 1992) where theory is derived from the data. It is a systematic process of discovery rather than verification. The emergent design chosen for

this study favours the original 'Glaserian' approach, with a stronger focus on the bottom-up extraction of themes, without predetermined frameworks favoured by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

To achieve the theory, a semi-structured interview took place with 42 older people from the United Kingdom who responded to a call through a number of older people's networks across South West England and South Wales asking for people who still lived independently at home, had mobility impairments that meant they did not leave the home more than once a week and had an outside view from home they enjoyed looking at regularly. The researcher is part of a research group that has over 650 older people and older people groups, charities and third sector organisations on a database and willing to be contacted about research opportunities. This enabled the researcher to reach people who ordinarily would be hard to reach, for example church groups, friendship groups and local community groups acted as gatekeepers to get hold of the participants needed. The interview took around an hour at the interviewee's home.

### *Participants*

The 42 individuals were aged between 70 and 90 years of age and 26 were female and 16 male. All had mobility impairments. In total 16 lived in urban areas (4 lived in a city), 14 lived in rural areas and 12 suburban locations as defined by the local authority based on ONS (2011) data (and these are indicated in verbatim speech given to illustrate the quotes in the findings section). Most had lived in the home for a long time (18 had lived there over 40 years, 8 between 30 and 40 years, 6 between 20 and 30 years, 6 between 10 and 20 years and 4 within the last 10 years), 26 were living alone, 22 of them having been widowed or a widower within the last three years, 2 having never married or cohabited and 2 being long time widowers (over 10 years). A variety of health conditions were noted among the participants with most in poor health, for example although exact illnesses and conditions were not kept, almost all suffered some form of chronic conditions that restricted mobility, half had respiratory and/or heart problems and all had hearing or sight problems that were difficult to correct. Forty participants received regular visitors (once a week at least, 26 at least every other day and 10 of these every day), 2 saw people less than once every two weeks. All but two (who were completely housebound) left the home around once a week, 33 received lifts from family and friends, 5 walked themselves if they were feeling fit enough and 4 used community cars, buses or taxis. Exclusion criteria included older people with a formal diagnosis of dementia and those with severe health conditions, with the motivation for this being not to create additional distress to the participants. However, it is noted now this research has been carried out, these groups could have quite easily take part .

### *Procedure*

People who responded were interviewed at a convenient time in their own home by an interviewer with experience of working with older people on similar topics previously. Ethical permission was sought and granted prior to the research taking place. Informed consent was gained from each participant who had the right to withdraw at any stage up to data analysis and were aware their findings would remain confidential and anonymous, with verbatim speech used to illustrate the findings but with nothing identifiable being reported publicly. Only one interviewer was involved in the data collection and analysis due to time constraints, but it would be recommended for future research to involve more than one as discussions on the findings and analysis would have been beneficial to shaping the discussion and conclusions. The interview involved collecting background

data on age, gender, health, residential background, background of family and friends. Participants were then asked to describe the view they liked in-situ with the interviewer also observing. The participant themselves picked the view to be discussed based on being asked by the researcher to be shown the window they spend most time looking out from. In some cases (see findings) there was more than one window, the interview took place split between the different windows. Hence, the interviewer would sit with the older person for 30 minutes or so, while the older person explained the view. Discussion was free-flowing, but the interviewer made sure certain topics were covered including the personal importance of the view to them including discussion of links to health and wellbeing, highlighting the salient parts of the view and discussing whether they tell other people about the view or not.

### *Analysis*

Each interview was recorded with permission of the interviewee and was transcribed verbatim. In each case original transcripts were read and a thematic analysis took place in light of searching for elements, nodes and distinctions that describe expressive and affective notions of the view and relationships to health and wellbeing. Rowles (1981) paper has been used as a basis for contextualising the findings, for example the analysis looked for how people set-up their space, the surveillance zone as a space of meaning, in terms of vicarious participation in contemporary world and the connections to past events. A process of detection of units of meaning into areas of distinction: general; essential; and relevant and of recurring themes using axial coding was then established and further reduction occurred by selective coding which places the axial coded responses into discrete categories. The analysis lead to reporting as a narrative which represents the knowledge acquired in a human and cultural context. Thus, actual examples of knowledge were included in the form of speech narrative and dialogue highlighting the main outcomes. Of equal importance to the themes is the context within which the themes are being discussed. The themes are presented in terms of visual scene quality, representations of life, story and narratives and in relationship to the changing self.

### **Findings**

The findings suggest that what people pick as an important view from their home does not have to be a traditionally assumed aesthetically pleasing view. Indeed 26 of the 42 participants chose viewpoints with very little greenery, mainly consisting of more urban environments, including factories, schools, hospitals and shops. Thirty of the views included some element of observing neighbouring properties' and their behaviour. Most views were accessed at home through a single window in the house, though five did mention they had two or more windows they looked out, with one of these having three windows, two on the same side and one on an alternate side and one having four windows, offering an all-round panoramic view of the neighbourhood. Three participants mentioned having the best view from their garden and one from the balcony, both of which observed from behind the window if the weather was inclement. Length of time at the viewpoint varied between people and varied between different days and could be anything from a few seconds check-up to three or four hours. There was also a difference for some participants about total immersion in the view, where it became the sole focus and took up almost entire concentration for

the individual, whereas for others it was more of a backdrop while doing something else, listening to music, to the radio, ironing or preparing food, for example.

Almost all sat down to enjoy their view, although ten did stand, sometimes for quite considerable time (an hour or more). There were mixed views about opening the window. Two always opened the window when sitting at it, even in winter, but most kept the window closed unless very warm in which case they only opened slightly. They had often arranged their space, with the chair positioned in a place for maximum view. However, five did mention that they placed their chair slightly back so that they were not seen staring out and hence did not look like “curtain twitchers” and when people had been noticed there was some anxiety as to how they would be perceived,

“You can see, they can see if I look out here. I’ve caught them staring at me. They must think mad old bat” (female, aged 82, suburban)

The motivation for those that stood was so that they could change their position to move between gaining better views of activities and hiding slightly from being observed. Three of the people that stood said they did so as they had been advised to move and stand for health reasons and used the viewing outside as a way of completing this physical exercise. Some people were far less worried about being observed, with two even having binoculars that they used regularly quite openly. Barriers to the view were noted by participants, including in four cases a tree that when fully leaved in the summer obstructed the desired view. In three of these cases, the viewer changed the position of the chair which overcame that slightly, though not perfectly. Almost all participants noted having to keep the window clean and practiced this themselves on the inside, with three also opening the window and leaning out to clean the outside from the inside. In all three cases this was the only window they did this to, showing the importance of keeping that view clear and unobstructed. Participants noted keeping the window sills free from obstructions too to maximise the view. One participant noted that when they had their windows replaced they had changed the design from one with lead-lighting (where there are small panes of glass separated by lead to give a grid pattern on the window) to a single pane of glass which aided viewing.

The themes that emerged through the analysis are now discussed in more detail including where it was found the quality of the visual scene is important, that the view presents a snapshot or benchmark of real life for older people to compare and contrast, that it enables stories to be developed and constructed and finally, is thought of in relation to the participants’ own changing bodies.

#### *Visual scene quality*

The views usually contain movement and change within scene. Differing scales, involving differing heights and proximity are also important elements of the view. In relation to this, the human scale is an important anchor in the preferred visual scene.

*Change and movement within the scene is important.* In every view from the window discussed, movement within the scene is of vital importance and one of the elements that sets it apart from a photograph or picture. The movement could involve natural elements such as the sky, clouds, birds, trees and greenery, wildlife and people but also built environment facets like vehicles. It was

especially noted when movement was out of the ordinary, a change in rhythm is noted, such as on very windy days,

“I love the way the trees begin to move, the branches, when the wind gets up” (female, aged 78, suburban view)

Also, changes are enjoyed such as when roadworks or building works take place, so long as the work is not overly intrusive in terms of sound, vibration.

“I like it when they’re digging. They’re always digging it up here. Mains, water, electricity, gas, telephone, all come here. I don’t mind it, so long as there’s no dust which is no good for my breathing. Interesting it is to watch, mind” (male, aged 84, urban view)

When something unexpected happens that changes the typical scene the length of time looking at the view increased,

“They were lopping trees the other week. I was there 24/7 well not quite but I watched a great deal of it.” (male, aged 85, suburban view)

Linked to movement was the importance of change in the scene. Again this set it apart from photos and pictures and even videos. People reported the scene being interesting to observe in different weathers, at different times of the day and in different seasons,

“I never get bored of it. I’ve never taken it for granted. It’s always changing, different weathers, in summer it’s so different with the trees full and grass goes yellow sometimes you know” (female, aged 88, rural)

*Differing scales.* People’s favourite view tended to have a variety of different scales to it, that moved it from beyond the surveillance zone the focus of Rowless (1981) research. Almost all of the scenes had a distant and usually a middle ground, as well as a more immediate close-up area, resembling the surveillance zone, and all these elements were included in the appreciation of the view. Thirty-one of the 42 participants had all three zones that they could see, with only five having distant and surveillance zones but no middle ground and six having no distant views, All participants had immediate surveillance zone to view. For two older people where the distant view could not be seen they talked about what they would be able to see if houses were not in the way. The distant view might include hills, the sea or tall buildings that stood out or other identifiable points, which often were utilitarian or traditionally would be viewed as non-places like television masts or electricity pylons. The middle view contained the main focus points, often neighbouring houses or roads, with the surveillance zone being the near-point of the garden or the immediate street or in some case adjoining or very close neighbouring properties and buildings,

“I like the way I can see the distant things. There care cars over there, a road, must be the motorway I think, and here the houses, I know people who have lived in them and right here, my street.” (female, aged 82, suburban)

*Humanness.* The view should often involve some form of human element. Almost exclusively a favourite view from the home included a view that contained people. Even rural views had some

element of human action taking place, whether it was maintenance or work of the local farmer or landowner, or people walking dogs in woods.

“Right here I can see everyone walking on their way to the town” (female, aged 82, suburban)

“I enjoy watching the farmers and what they do to the land, I’m lucky to live right here to see that” (male, aged 89, rural)

*Vision is most prominent.* The scene was described in almost totally visual terms, though occasionally sound and especially wind was mentioned and the importance of fresh air also added, but this was less common, with only ten of the 42 participants mentioning these elements,

“It’s the view. All of it. Sounds and they change, you can hear the clear evenings as much as hear the rain if you listen closely” (male, aged 84, suburban)

“I like to open the window too and get the fresh air in and the smells” (Female, aged 78, rural)

### *Representation of life*

Participants noted that the view served as a way of creating representations of life and help them engage and reflect on changes in lifestyles and situations, it kept them part of society.

*New and emerging trends amongst society.* From the window, they could observe the socio-technical world in action, how people used their smart phones and music players on the go,

“I saw a man talking to himself. Quite animated. I was alarmed but realised it must be a phone” (female, aged 75, urban)

They noted new technologies used in road works or rubbish collection, for example,

“They’ve got a new cleaning machine. Comes round after the bins been collected and cleans the streets, amazing technology, water splashes out the front and sucked up behind, definitely cleans, when they drive them carefully” (male, aged 80, urban)

*Comparisons with their own younger selves.* Participants commented on what people were up to, especially with the younger generation which caused some intrigue, which could be disdainful,

“There’s more people running or jogging. More the fools. We didn’t do that. Maybe we had more physical jobs and lives. But they do this running. It won’t do them any good I tell you.” (female, aged 71, suburban)

“the youngsters don’t talk anymore, not to each other, not properly. Families too, they just walk down the road, often on their phones. I don’t think people communicate right anymore.” (female, aged 75, urban)

Participants noted that what they saw, backed up their intuitions or things they had heard on the radio or TV or read in the papers about society, often negative things,

“You hear them say in the news, the traffic round here is awful, well you can see it from here, backing up here and up there, especially in rush hour around 4 onwards, and especially in the winter at night” (male, aged 80, suburban)

### *Narratives and stories*

People create narratives and stories about their view. This can be passive, for example making stories about the people in the scene and relating these to themselves. In addition, the narrative and stories might be shared more actively, for example people like to talk to the people they see, not that they expect an answer, to offer advice or to pass the time of day. Some share these stories with others, sometimes with people who are not there, sometimes with others they meet. Some people keep the interaction with the view completely secret.

*Passive 1 - Stories.* People liked to develop stories about the scene. They narrate them, giving people in the scene names, sometimes linked to their past,

Someone comes past on a motorbike every day at the same time, I call him Bob, our friend Bob had a ‘bike back in the day, he love it, cherished it” (female, aged 80, urban)

“I see the same people going to work every morning and coming home again in the evening. I wonder what they get up to. I call this one here, Frank, he looks tough, look at his suit, bet he’s a mean business man, probably a manager of some kind” (male, aged 80, urban)

“the same people walk their dogs. Some are kinder with them than others, and some play games, same with parents and kids, how many sit and look at their phones while their kids play” (female, aged 78, rural)

*Passive 2 -Past histories.* People often compare the view to the past, this was very true for people who had lived a long time in the same home, it was common for them to move between then and now and often with a sense of overarching knowledge

“Well I always thinking back to what it used to look like here. They moved in over the road when the house was new, but they didn’t next door, but I knew who bought the house new and the trouble they had selling it and why!” (female, aged 80, urban)

“I know why there is that bump on the land there. Why the farmer has such a problem with his tractor there. I wonder if he knows. Doubt it. It was once a barn that collapsed in the winds of 87 and has since grown over, there’s rubble under there and goodness knows what” (Female, aged 80, rural)

*Active 1 -Talking to who they see.* People often talk to the people they observe, that might be generic and can be more of a telling off,

“I do shout at people through the glass at people who park in front of here. It’s double yellow. They’ll be in trouble. They never hear me though, maybe that’s good. Makes me feel better” (male, aged 82, suburban)

“I sometimes comment out loud, ‘very smart’ I’ll say or ‘tuck your shirt in’ or ‘pull up your trousers’ especially to the young’uns, the teens” (female, aged 84, suburban)

Some talk very specifically to characters they see often,

“It may be crazy, but I do say, oh how has your day been to the regulars I see walking home, I wonder if anyone does ask them that when they get where they’re going. I hope so.” (female, aged 88, urban)

*Active 2 - Talking people not there.* Occasionally for the people that lived alone in particular, participants would talk about the scene to an empty home, sometimes addressing people who once lived there,

“I tell my late husband about it. About the things he’d be interested in seeing. I expect it seems a bit mad, but it isn’t really is it, if I’m aware it might be, then I know I’m OK” (female, aged 82, suburban)

*Active 3 - Talking to others, socialising about the scene.* The degree to which the participants shared their views with others varied. Naturally those that lived together discussed their view, and some shared wider. Those living alone, around half of them shared stories they had seen via their view with others, while others kept their view a secret (to which the interviewer was honoured to be part),

“Oh well, yes, I tell my grandsons, and when they come over they want to see it too. I look forward to telling them all about it and they seem to like it too!” (female, aged 78, rural)

“no. No. I don’t tell others about it. They’d think I’d lost it. Well it’s all a bit sad isn’t it” (male, aged 84, urban)

### *Relationship to changing self*

Changes in eyesight and mobility have affected the way the view is important to individuals. Yet, individuals still noted the fact that they felt lucky to have such a view.

*Eyesight.* Almost all participants mentioned detriments in the eyesight which affect their view. Some felt this really began to hamper their enjoyment of the space, others could still see the elements important to them,

“I can’t see it all so well now, mind. I can’t see round the edges, it’s fuzzy or has some halo, I have to see just the middle, it’s a shame but it’s OK, I can still see the main bits of what I want to see” (female, aged 88, rural)

*Other sensory issues.* Hearing loss was also noted as detrimental to the scene and how noises had become something just assumed would always be there,

“My hearing is getting worse, so I rely on vision mostly, so I don’t really know what noise is coming from the road which is a pity” (male, aged 80, urban)

“The road was noisy. Now I can hardly hear it, I miss it! I can lie awake at night and hear nothing and that disturbs me. Disorientates me still now” (male, aged 84, urban)

Sometimes this was mixed with technology changes, like double glazing,

“I miss hearing the wind and the rain against the window pain. I can no longer detect that at all and that is really something I miss” (female, aged 88, rural)

“I miss bird song. You can still hear them sometimes but since they did the windows it’s far less often” (female, aged 82, suburban)

*Importance now mobility is stopped.* It was explored whether the importance of the view had grown since the decline of literal mobility beyond the home,

“I can’t get out and about as well as before, watching others that can might be seen as torture, but it’s not really, it’s my way of dealing and I’m still there really”

Some people felt it was as much about having the time to observe than not going out, of reducing boredom,

“What not being able to go out has done is give me time. That seems to happen as you age, you get more and more time. No work, less able to go out and let’s face it, less people to go out with, I’m left with time. This is my way of dealing with that” (male, aged 80, urban)

It could make you feel better, by taking your mind of problems, a point only noted in those in rural areas,

“I actually feel better. I’m not thinking about my aches and I feel better. They come back, but just for a while” (female, aged 88, rural).

Personal importance to self-reported health and wellbeing and meaning of life was highly stated,

“I don’t know what I’d do without it though. My life would be even more empty” (male, aged 80, urban)

“The view, it keeps me going, you know. I’d be a gonner without it. I’m sure!” (female, aged 78, rural)

*Luck.* A pervasive theme running throughout conversations was how lucky individuals were with having such a view,

“I do count my blessings every day for this. I would be lost without such a wonderful view” (female, aged 88, rural)

“I am lucky to still be at home and have this view that I’m used to seeing. I know, I’ve got friends and family, my brother for example, who can’t or don’t get to see this or any view” (female, aged 85, suburban)

## **Discussion**

The findings confirm that having a view is important to older people, it engages them with nature and can connect them with society and culture. It offers them a way of observing without recourse to literally having to be there. Interaction with the environment is not necessarily directly found, though people do find a way of engaging, of creating and interacting, through narration, storytelling and even shouting to participants within their view.

As in Rowles (1981) study, some participants spent considerable time setting up their observation place. For some this was to gain maximum viewpoints, for some this was to gain maximum comfort, while for a smaller minority it was to mask themselves from others seeing them looking out. Being able to see others in the neighbourhood was an important choice of position and which window was chosen to look out, which was similar in Rowles (1981). Some also stood to help with aches and pains and for some physical exercise, as was found with Rowles (1981).

The view is important and different from other observations and interactions. It was not a replacement for, but a useful addition to television, reading and other hobbies and can be done simultaneously with them. It offers something different to those more structured pastimes. It was often admitted that watching a view was about passing time, to move away from boredom and to alleviate aches and pains. It may have some restorative and stress reducing properties, especially those in rural areas, and especially those observing natural scenes, which is synonymous with previous research (e.g. Hartig et al., 2003; Ulrich et al., 1991). That said, urban views, as noted by Gehl (2011) can also be beneficial as found in this research where people spoke highly of how the view was vital for them regardless of whether the view was urban, suburban or rural.

Similar to Rowles (1981), the movement element of a view compared to a still-picture, creates a series of rhythms of interaction, between the ordinary and everyday. In relation to the Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) model, views do not necessarily have to be complex but they do have to have a variety of levels and proximities. The findings here suggest that not just the immediate surveillance zone is important as was the focus in Rowles (1981) work, but expands that to also a mid and a distant vista being important too. The view does not have to be especially aesthetically pleasing and can contain very ordinary or mundane non-place type structures that actually gain significance, such as tv or telephone masts. All the scenes here are very legible for the viewers and it could be argued that many juxtapose the mundane with some form of mystery and intrigue for the viewer, not least in the changing nature of the scenes at different times of day, but also in the far horizons of view where not all parts can be made out. Urban and suburban views can be seen as just as important as rural views for older people. However, further research on this would be useful to address how far benefits to mental and physical health might occur from urban and suburban views beyond self-report found here. It could be argued that it is the choice over the view that is important, rather than the view itself. Having some choice over the way home furnishings are set up has been suggested to benefit health and wellbeing (e.g. Langer and Rodin, 1976) and a lack of control over one's life has been well documented to lead to learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). It would seem to be no difference to the ability to choose a view to look at, though there is an interesting juxtaposition here. There is a great deal of enjoyment of the view when a certain level of randomness occurs, when, for example it could be argued there is less control, for example. Hence, perhaps the view is set-up to balance control and randomness in the view. The interaction with the view seems to stem from individual agency and control over immersion and the associated narrative. Such independence is good for health and wellbeing. It complements reading a book,

watching television or listening to the radio in that it doesn't follow a strict narrative and has elements of continuity beyond what can be observed.

There is a feeling amongst the participants that they might not be seen by others to be normal for what they do, especially those that look out onto a more ordinary urban view, where others are present in the scene, as also found by Rowles (1981). There is a need for many of those to keep it secret from others. Perhaps there are negative connotations with being nosy or a peeping-tom or it being sad that someone has nothing better to do than to just look. Nevertheless, the importance of this is seen here as crucial to older people's lives and as such a change in society is perhaps needed. After all, the cafe culture and 'people watching' at a younger age is acceptable, so why not at an older age? Making health and care professionals, that work with this age group, aware of this importance and aware of the negative stereotype is obviously vital in order to allow it to happen.

How far such findings might be seen in different contexts would be interesting to study. Are the same concepts of a view important across different countries, or different cultures where different values might be placed on different environmental factors? Further examination of the relationship of the view to the home and whether a lifecourse perspective examining individual history might make a difference needs further work. Rowles (1981) notes that the surveillance zone has different importance at different stages of life, for example, it is important for children allowing them to play independently and for parents in observing children's play. As the child grows and ventures farther afield, this space becomes progressively less important. Older children and adults spend more time in activity zones away from the immediate home and neighbourhood (Rowles, 1981). It could be argued that it again becomes an important zone for older people who may spend more time close to home yet wanting to connect to the outside space, as has been found in this and in Rowles (1981) study. If the person has lived a long time at the address and the surveillance zone has been used previously at different stages of life this may have become "thick" with rich meaning and hence a place of significance for the observer (Highmore, 2005). This may be a reason why the narratives and stories are strong and how people use the view in relation to their past selves. A next stage maybe to quantify some of the elements of importance found here to understand the perceptions of those from a wider sample of participants. A further stage would be to involve people who may help set-up and maintain the scene with older people, so family, friends, neighbours, as in Rowles (1981) study, but also wider health and social care staff too.

Implications from the research for practice involve allowing older people to have a view which they enjoy. It enables older people to see and observe mobility and movement through visual scenes without recourse to literal mobility and gain some psychosocial and aesthetic pleasure from it. Hence, in line with previous research, the findings suggest views out of the window are important to older people (Farmer et al., 2010; Dowds et al., 2018) and in line with Rowles (1981) this paper suggests older people should be encouraged to adopt this practice and maintain it where necessary. Vision is vital to doing this, so allowing windows to be cleaned, making sure older people's vision is good and helping to set-up the scene for maximum comfort is necessary. The importance of the whole of the 'view', including other sensory inputs such as sounds and smells, are also important. It is important not to have the view obscured by trees, temporary structures or other street furniture such as bins, skips and similar on the outside or placing items obscuring access to the window on the inside. These elements get lost in more technological or clinical settings, as they are seen as peripheral. It must be remembered that it is important to keep these in mind when

designing homes. Older people are not passive in setting up their views and care professionals working with older people need to make sure they encourage older people to do this whether they live independently at home or in a care home or clinical setting. Technology could be a solution, with webcams re-presenting outdoor scenes or virtual reality or alternative worlds to inhabit. There are examples: Dowds (2016), Dowds and Masthoff (2015), Dowds et al (2015, 2018) research shows benefit for developing tablet-based technology bringing the outdoors to housebound people and Reynolds et al (2018) discuss virtual representations of the outdoor scene to help people living with dementia. Hence, encouraging interaction with such technology could help, could webcams help maintain health and wellbeing for immobile older people, but they lack the complete immersion and additional sensory inputs.

## Conclusion

People enjoy a view where they can watch a motion-full, changing, world outside of their home and interact and create meaning and sense, relating themselves to this outside world. The findings suggest that the view does not necessarily have to be rural to be important or purposeful to the individual. It suggests that health and care practitioners must realise the importance of older people observing the outdoors and create situations where that is enabled and maintained through improving vantage points and potentially using technology, and allowing older people the space and time to set up their viewing. Attention should be paid to scenes where there is movement and change, with an element of mystery and intrigue, created at different perspectives, with a layer of human interaction and people. It must be remembered that older people may not discuss this pastime, despite its importance and it may remain hidden from social discourse.

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