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'As long as it's good': An intergenerational family perspective of bridging gaps between reality and ideality of second couplehood as a problem and as a solution

CHAYA KOREN* and SHIRAN SIMHI*

ABSTRACT
Second couplehood in old age following widowhood or divorce is a phenomenon developing with the increase in life expectancy and is yet to be accepted as part of the normative ageing process. The aim of this paper is to examine how family members of three generations perceive second couplehood in old age as a new phenomenon within a changing society and a dynamic family structure. The multigenerational families of 19 second-couplehood dyads (a total of 38 multigenerational families) were recruited using criterion sampling. The second-couplehood dyads were composed of men who repartnered at age 65+ and women at 60+, with children and grandchildren from a lifelong marriage. We tape recorded and transcribed verbatim 107 semi-structured qualitative interviews with older partners, their adult children and grandchildren. Analysis was based on grounded theory and dyadic-analysis principles adapted to families. Two main themes were found that presented gaps between reality and ideality experienced by the participants regarding second couplehood: as a problem through its disadvantages, and as a solution through its advantages. The gaps in both themes were bridged by the account: 'as long as it's good'. Findings are discussed in the context of modernisation theory, the lifecourse and the family lifecycle perspectives relating to changes in family structure and ambivalence and how to deal with them on the macro, mezzo and micro levels.

KEY WORDS– repartnering, second couplehood, old age, family lifecycle, lifecourse perspective, modernisation theory.

Introduction

The increased life expectancy accompanying modernisation has led to older persons' segregation from younger generations (Cowgill 1974) as

* The School of Social Work and The Center for the Study of Society, University of Haifa, Israel.

well as older persons' loss of influence in the family and society (Aboderin 2004), creating a vacuum in their lives. Recent research has found differences in the influences of modernisation in Eastern and Western countries. Despite the traditional custom of respect for elders in Eastern societies, Western countries were found to demonstrate more knowledge and positive attitudes towards ageing. Furthermore, devaluation of older persons was found only in Eastern countries. The reason for this might be that, in Eastern countries, industrialisation and the rapid increase in life expectancy began simultaneously followed by an adjustment period that resulted in a lowering of older persons' status. In Western countries, however, industrialisation had begun earlier, allowing society to adjust better to the rapidly increasing ageing rates. The accumulated knowledge on ageing helped reduce the negative influences of modernisation and enhanced positive attitudes towards the older population (Huang 2013). According to Huang (2013), these findings coincide with Palmore's (2005) observation of a curvilinear relationship between modernisation and older people's status.

Israel is considered a young country that has dramatically developed industrially since its establishment in 1948. Since 1955, the older population of Israel has increased by twice as much as its general population (Brodsky, Shneor and Beer 2013), a fact that aligns it with Eastern countries regarding modernisation. In these rapidly modernising societies, with increased life expectancy and segregation of the older generation, the termination of a lifelong marital relationship might trigger alternative ways of coping with the consequences of ageing. According to the lifecourse principle of agency (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006), second couplehood in old age is one of these alternatives.

In this paper, second couplehood in old age refers to older persons with adult children and grandchildren, who entered the relationship after termination of their lifelong marriage; men aged 65 and above and women aged 60 and above. The phenomenon has been studied from the perspective of partners as individuals (*e.g.* Davidson 2002) and as a dyad (Koren 2014). This paper focuses on perspectives of three generations: the partners, their children and grandchildren.

Three forms of second couplehood in old age were identified in the literature; remarriage, co-habitation and living apart together (LAT) (de Jong Gierveld 2004). Cultural diversities regarding what was emphasised in the literature as well as preferences by gender were also identified. Studies in the United States of America (USA) emphasised remarriage and co-habitation (Brown and Kawamura 2010) whereas studies in Western Europe (de Jong Gierveld 2004) and Scandinavia (Duncan and Phillips 2010) addressed these as well as LAT. Men were found to prefer co-habitation because they sought partnership for intimacy and household services,

whereas women preferred LAT to have someone to go out with while preserving their autonomy (Davidson 2002).

The phenomenon is more common in modern than traditional societies (Mehta 2002) and its acceptability varies among cultures. Collectivistic societies are characterised by co-dependency among family members, high commitment of individuals to their family group and submission to family goals. Individualistic societies are characterised by independence, in which individuals live separately and autonomously, enhancing their personal goals (Coleman, Ganong and Rothrauff 2006). A study of attitudes towards second couplehood among older persons in the traditional society of Singapore revealed mainly negative attitudes to the phenomenon. Reasons presented included loyalty to the deceased and that marriage is for life. In the less religious and more modern society of Malaysia, participants expressed more favourable attitudes towards repartnering in old age (Mehta 2002). Thus, second couplehood in old age is more prevalent and more accepted in modern societies (Koren and Eisikovits 2011). This coincides with the lifecourse principle of time and place within different cultural contexts (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006) and with modernisation theory, which emphasises individualism and secularity. These concepts have changed society in recent decades, by weakening the value of family, family structure and its functions (Aboderin 2004).

Israel as a society of immigration is located between tradition and modernity (Lavee and Katz 2003). Israeli policy regarding family issues from birth to death, such as care-giving, draws mainly on the value of familial obligation to undertake most of the burden rather than providing adequate state assistance (Cohen 2003). Modern influences within a changing society are also reflected in changes in the family lifecycle to include heterogeneous family forms (Carter and McGoldrick 2005). Second couplehood in old age represents such a change. However, it is yet to be recognised as a normative option within the family lifecycle perspective. As such, the phenomenon is still considered off-time according to the lifecourse principle of timing (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006), which is likely to influence how family members accept repartnering in old age. Thus, family members experiencing the phenomenon feel the need to justify it (Koren and Eisikovits 2011).

Second couplehood in old age is more common among older persons characterised by middle to high socio-economic status (SES) (Davidson 2002). It was found to strengthen the partners' self-esteem, expand their social capital and social networks, and increase sources of support (Spalter 2010). Disadvantages were also found, however. On the personal and dyadic levels, entering second couplehood in old age was perceived as a stressful life event requiring adjustment of lifelong habits to those of

the partner (de Jong Gierveld 2002). On the familial level, social capital was perceived negatively. Repartnering in old age can lead to anger and hostility, through weakening family ties and creating intergenerational conflicts surrounding inheritance, envy of the new relationship and perceiving repartnering as violation of the deceased parent/grandparent (Spalter 2010). Sanctification of the dead is also relevant on the spousal level (Bennett, Arnott and Soulsby 2013). This coincides with the lifecourse principle of linked lives, which refers to the influence of events in the life of one family member on other family members (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006).

Intergenerational relationships within the family and second couplehood

Psychological and practical roles within the family create a system of expectations, rights and obligations among family members at all stages of the family lifecycle (Carter and McGoldrick 2005). Israeli parents to adult children experience intergenerational ambivalence (Levitzki 2009) because Israeli society is culturally located between tradition and modernity (Lavee and Katz 2003). Intergenerational ambivalence includes adopting familial norms and intergenerational co-dependence along with supporting individualistic norms that promote intergenerational autonomy. Thus, these parents face the necessity of examining how they wish to balance between personal growth and parental duties to adult children (Levitzki 2009).

In spite of individualistic values emphasised by modernisation (Aboderin 2004), the prevailing social consensus is that adult children are obligated to support their older parents (Hans, Ganong and Coleman 2009). However, reduced birth rates and longer life expectancy have changed the multigenerational form within society from pyramid to pole (Hans, Ganong and Coleman 2009), thus increasing the ratio of older to younger people (Stuifbergen, van Delden and Dykstra 2008). These demographic changes might mean that fewer adult children and grandchildren will be available to support their older family members (Stuifbergen, van Delden and Dykstra 2008).

Increase in divorce rates and remarriages (Carter and McGoldrick 2005) in general and changes in marital status of parents such as late-life widowhood and divorce in particular, challenge the motivation of offspring to provide support and re-evaluate the situation. Motivation is influenced by adult child–older parent relationship quality (Coleman, Ganong and Rothrauff 2006; Hans, Ganong and Coleman 2009; Stuifbergen, van Delden and Dykstra 2008), family-based obligations and reciprocity norms (Coleman, Ganong and Rothrauff 2006). The consequences are that the older repartnered parents are likely to encounter a decrease in

support by their offspring (Hans, Ganong and Coleman 2009). More recent research on repartnered couples in which one of the partners has become demented found a lack of support from children of both sides, with most of the care-giving burden falling on the healthy partner (Sherman 2012).

Filial commitment, including expectations and actual support provided, was found to be more similar than different among different cultures (Coleman, Ganong and Rothrauff 2006). Ethnic groups characterised by individualistic values were found to have lower expectations of family assistance in comparison to offspring of ethnic groups who grew up according to collectivistic values of the importance of family (Coleman, Ganong and Rothrauff 2006). Thus, although groups might differ in the actual assistance they receive, satisfaction levels are similar because each group receives according to its expectations.

Theoretical frameworks: modernisation theory, the family lifecycle and the lifecourse

Modernisation theory refers to the lowered status of older persons due to processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, secularity and intergenerational education gaps (Cowgill 1974). The family lifecycle (Carter and McGoldrick 2005) presents a normative family model within the modern society. Similar to social expectations (Aboderin 2004), the roles of the older person within the family are to step aside, support the middle generation's more central role and deal with loss of significant others such as the lifelong spouse (Carter and McGoldrick 2005). This is opposed to the traditional structure of family and society in which older persons play a dominant role (Aboderin 2004). The family lifecycle (Carter and McGoldrick 2005) does not consider spousal needs of older widowed and divorced persons. However, second couplehood in old age is a phenomenon that occurs in practice. It coincides with the agency principle that refers to choice within limitations and to the lifecourse development principle that perceives human development and ageing as an ongoing lifelong process (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006).

The aim of this paper is to examine how family members of each generation—the older partners, their children and their grandchildren—perceive second couplehood in old age as a new developing phenomenon within a changing society and a dynamic family structure.

The following research questions were asked: How do family members, including the older persons living in second couplehood, experience repartnering in old age in their family? How do they perceive second couplehood as a social phenomenon?

Method

This paper is based on data from a larger qualitative study that addressed the meaning of second couplehood in old age from an intergenerational and multicultural perspective. The study was designed and carried out according to the qualitative research paradigm for understanding the meanings attributed to the phenomenon using grounded theory methods (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and dyadic analysis principles (Eisikovits and Koren 2010) adapted for families in qualitative research.

Participants and sample

The chosen definition of 'older person' was based on objective criteria of chronological age for retirement according to *Mashab – Elderly in Israel Yearly Statistics* (Brodsky, Shneor and Beer 2013). When the participants in this study retired, the age of retirement was 65 for men and 60 for women. Criterion-based sampling (Patton 2002) was used based on the following criteria: families with at least three generations in which the man was 65 or above and the woman 60 or above when entering second couplehood. This had to follow a lifelong marital relationship, in which they had raised a family including adult children and teenage or young adult grandchildren, who were sufficiently articulate to respond to a semi-structured interview.

The actual sample included 19 second couplehood multigenerational family units composed of six individuals, three from each side. Each unit included two multigenerational families—the man's and the woman's family, composed of three individuals from three generations: the older person in second couplehood, one of his/her children and one grandchild (offspring of the adult child who participated in the study). In 13 of the second couplehood multigenerational family units, all six family members participated in the study. In five of the family units, only five family members participated because the grandchildren were too young to be interviewed. In one of the family units, only four family members participated—the woman's three-generation family and her partner, whose children and grandchildren resided abroad. Thus, the study included 38 older persons in second couplehood in old age, 37 adult children and 32 grandchildren, making a total of 107 participants.

Nine couples were co-habiting, nine were LAT and one was remarried due to religious observance. The age of the older generation ranged from 66 to 89 for the men and from 65 to 82 for the women. Most were widowed and only seven were divorced. Most were secular, in good to very good perceived health, had 12 or more years of education, and middle to high perceived financial status. The SES of the repartnered participants

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in our study was similar to Davidson's (2002) findings regarding SES levels of repartnering persons in old age. The age of the adult children ranged from 29 to 60 and the age of the grandchildren ranged from ten to 34. Most of the grandchildren were older than 18. Nine were younger. Most of the grandchildren were single. All other demographic characteristics of children and grandchildren were similar to those of the older generation besides education level of grandchildren younger than 18 and country of birth. The majority of the offspring generations were born in Israel (32 children out of 37 and 31 grandchildren out of 32), whereas while nearly 50 per cent (16 out of 38) of the older generation were not born in Israel. Their birth countries include Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Romania), the Former Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine), Western Europe (Germany, The Netherlands, France, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland), South America (Uruguay) and the USA. However, residing in Israel for several decades has given the older generation the opportunity to absorb the interplay between tradition and modernity (Cohen 2003; Lavee and Katz 2003) within a multicultural country which in turn influenced behaviour and attitudes.

Recruitment

We located participants through professional acquaintances throughout the country. The families recruited through welfare agencies did not belong to their clientele; they participated in activities offered by social clubs run by the municipality under the supervision of the unit of care for older persons.

After being located, the older persons living in second couplehood were contacted by phone, by the principal investigator (PI) (the first author) or by one of the research assistants, who explained about the study. Demographic questions were asked for screening purposes to ensure that potential participants met the study criteria. After both older partners agreed to participate, they each contacted one of their children. The criteria for choosing their children were willingness and ability to participate, and having young adult children who were the older persons' grandchildren, who were able and willing to participate. After receiving consent from all six participants, interviews were scheduled separately for each participant at a convenient time and location, which was usually in their home.

Research instruments and analysis

Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with each participant separately to enable each family member to express his/her personal perceptions of the phenomenon (Eisikovits and Koren

2010). Interviews with the older generation lasted about one and a half hours, about one hour with the children, and about 50 minutes with the grandchildren. A semi-structured interview guide was used for each generation based on the purpose of the study.

Interview guide

The relevant content areas of the interview guide were second couplehood in old age and intergenerational relationships in the family. Each of the three versions included the same opening question (Spradley 1979), asking participants to tell their own/their parent's/their grandparent's story of second couplehood in old age from an intergenerational family perspective. For each content area within each of the three versions, probing questions were used to receive the relevant information (Patton 2002). One example of a question in the content area of second couplehood in old age in the couple version was: 'How did your children and grandchildren react to your repartnering?' In the adult child and grandchild versions, an example in the content area of intergenerational relationships was: 'Tell me about your relationship with your parent/grandparent and with his/her partner'. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

The unit of analysis was the second couplehood multigenerational family unit. Data analysis was based on the method developed for dyadic units (Eisikovits and Koren 2010). We used a software program entitled Dedoose Version 4.5 (SocioCultural Research Consultants 2013), which enables multiusers to work on the same project simultaneously.

The first stage of the analysis process was identical to qualitative analysis of individual units (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The first step included simultaneous reading and listening to the interview, and writing general impressions. The second step was open coding of the interview content (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The third step was writing a second couplehood intergenerational family unit summary, which included the relationship between the couplehood partners, the relationship between the generations within each family (three participants) and the relationship between the members of both families (six participants), based on the open coding. The issues presented were illustrated with interview excerpts from all family members who referred to a particular issue.

A research team meeting was held periodically by the PI, to discuss the process of analysis and content issues raised during data analysis, such as the content of the codes, while changes were made accordingly. After this

process was completed for nine out of the 19 second-couplehood multigenerational family units, each of the assistants and the PI read all nine summaries to identify units of meaning (Patton 2002) and to categorise them into themes (Strauss and Corbin 1990). In a meeting held for this purpose, we discussed the units of meaning, from which the topic of this paper, 'as long as it's good', was derived. Further analysis resulted in identifying and analysing overlaps and contrasts between each family member's individual versions. These led to reconstruction of the themes that emerged in the initial stages of analysis, thus creating unique new themes (Eisikovits and Koren 2010). Analysis of contrasts and overlaps referred to various levels, descriptive, interpretive, text and subtext, to reach intergenerational versions including three perspectives for each partner: older person, adult child and grandchild. The aim was to reach second-couplehood intergenerational family versions.

After identifying the themes and sub-themes of 'as long as it's good', the remaining ten stepfamilies were analysed using the same procedure as for the first nine second-couplehood multigenerational family units, with the addition of examining how, if at all, they addressed these specific themes and sub-themes. Results are reported in the Findings section of this paper.

Family members were labelled as follows: man, CM; man's daughter, DM; man's son, SM; man's granddaughter, GDM; man's grandson, GSM; woman, CW; woman's daughter, DW; woman's son, SW; woman's granddaughter, GDW; woman's grandson, GSW. For example, woman's granddaughter of Family 4 is labelled: Family4GDW. Second-couplehood multigenerational families refer to the man's and woman's families together. Multigenerational families refer to either the man's or the woman's family.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was achieved first by establishing credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985). We documented all stages starting from memos including thoughts, emotions and ideas that arose, tape-recordings of interviews and verbatim transcriptions. We used Dedoose Version 4.5 software (SocioCultural Research Consultants 2013) to organise and assist data analysis. Second, peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba 1985) was performed in the discussions at the PI's periodical research team meetings with the research assistants. Third, the use of dyadic analysis principles adapted to families was another way of ensuring trustworthiness (Thompson and Walker 1982), by simultaneously enriching and limiting the perception of the phenomenon. It was enriching by combining six perspectives within an expanded family unit of analysis, and it was limiting because of the

need to consider each individual family member's interpretations (Eisikovits and Koren 2010).

Ethical considerations

The study received approval from the ethics committee for experiments on humans of the University of Haifa research authority (approval number 224/11). Each participant signed a letter of consent explaining the purpose of the study and ensuring confidentiality. When the grandchild was a minor, parental consent was received. Several unique ethical considerations are relevant to a family research unit in which each participant is interviewed separately (Forbat and Henderson 2003). For example, it is important to avoid favouring one family member's version over another's, or to disclose to one family member information provided by another. In addition, presentation of the research findings includes family members' interview excerpts placed alongside each other, which might threaten confidentiality. However, this problem can be overcome by indicating that the chosen excerpts are representative, to demonstrate a theme or part of a theme, and that they might belong to several participants who expressed the same idea in different ways. In addition, personal details such as names, places and occupation were changed, to maintain confidentiality.

Findings

Two main themes were found. In the first theme, second couplehood in old age has disadvantages that cause problems for family members. In the second theme, the advantages of second couplehood in old age provide a solution to problematic situations in the family. When second couplehood is the *problem*, two sub-themes emerged. The first related to personal-familial issues in a specific second couplehood relationship. This theme emerged in two second couplehood multigenerational families and in seven multigenerational families of either the man or the woman. The second sub-theme related to second couplehood in old age as a social-cultural phenomenon. This theme emerged in two second couplehood multigenerational families and in 18 multigenerational families of either the man or the woman. When second couplehood was the *solution*, the first sub-theme was bridging the gaps between family attitudes and reality prior to repartnering. This sub-theme emerged in six second-couplehood multigenerational families and in 22 multigenerational families of either the man or the woman. The second sub-theme was family members' ambivalence to second couplehood, while family dynamics that were felt prior to

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repartnering were simultaneously deepened and bridged. This sub-theme emerged in four multigenerational families. In both themes, the statement 'as long as it's good' was used by members of 37 out of the 38 multigenerational families as the account that bridges between the real and the ideal. The remaining second-couplehood multigenerational family perceived the repartnered relationship as good on both the personal and social levels. Due to the vast number of participants and the large number of quotes that addressed each sub-theme, we were unable to present them all here. Thus, our criteria for choosing participants' quotes that illustrate each sub-theme were data richness and the number of multigenerational family members who addressed the sub-themes.

Second couplehood in old age: the problem

In this theme, the reality of second couplehood in old age is considered a problem for family members for two main reasons. One relates to personal-familial aspects. The other relates to family members' social-cultural attitudes to the phenomenon. The following section presents how using the account 'as long as it's good' bridges the gaps between second couplehood in old age and each of the reasons that creates the problem.

Bridging gaps between second couplehood and personal-familial aspects. Families' difficulties with their parent's/grandparent's second couplehood for personal-familial reasons creates the need to bridge between these reasons and the reality of the couplehood. Family1 is an example. The son's and granddaughter's perspectives express personal reasons why they see a problem with the second couplehood:

> I can't stand her … It's OK, it happens in the best of families. (Family1SM, age 51)

> It is her specifically that we do not like; we don't admire her. It's as if she controls him … I think she is a bad influence on him. As far as we are concerned, she distances him from his family. (Family1GDM, age 24)

Both son and granddaughter dislike the father's/grandfather's partner. The son realises that his father's couplehood takes priority over the family and that they have to learn to live with this. He copes by stating that 'it happens in the best of families', thus normalising the situation. The granddaughter copes by blaming the partner.

The man reacts to his family's difficulties:

> My son told me to come alone. I won't come without my partner. I have to come with her. I will not go alone, but not going is not an option, either. (Family1CM, widowed, age 81, co-habitation, 16 years)

The man raises the dilemma in which he is torn between his partner and his family. This dilemma has not yet been solved within the 16 years of couplehood. In practice, he visits his family alone, but feels bad about it. The following excerpts present the perspectives of his son and granddaughter.

> He comes, but he comes alone; if I were in her position I wouldn't come, either … he expects everyone to sit around her, and that she be the star of the evening … So I say she can come but I don't plan to talk to her, she doesn't interest me, so my dad says: 'You won't say hello to her?' I said to him: 'Dad, just listen to me; I don't have patience…' (Son, Family1SM, age 51)

> My grandfather is full of himself because of who she is. She's everything to him, there's nothing else besides her, and he can't accept it that we don't worship her like he does. He's the one who actually creates all the problems. I don't think she minds that he is in touch with us, and that she doesn't have to be part of it, and we don't mind that he is in a relationship with her and that we aren't part of that. He can't accept that it isn't working out … The situation is quite clear to everyone by now that we don't invite her and that she won't come. (Granddaughter, Family1GDM, age 24)

The son describes a power struggle regarding whose wish will be fulfilled, whereas the granddaughter blames her grandfather for perpetuating conflict. Her suggested solution is to exclude the relationship from the family, to win her grandfather back without having to deal with his partner. The granddaughter has realised that both the family and her father's partner understand and have to accept the situation.

The woman's perspective helps to clarify the situation:

> When they started to ostracise me, I just sat there, I was like air; it was all very well-organised … as if they wanted to educate me. I call it the price tag[1] system; I got the price tag all the time. At first he [my partner] blamed me. Now he sees things differently. I tried to tell him: 'I need you to back me up' … We stayed together because when we're alone, without his children, we are good together… (Family1CW, divorced, age 75, co-habitation, 16 years)

The woman's description strengthens the man's and his offspring's perspective, illustrating common issues and family dynamics that cause conflict in stepfamilies, such as the relationship between the new partner and his family. Unlike remarriages at younger ages when parents are still responsible for their children who are minors, repartnering in old age provides the option of separation between family members and partners. Therefore, although the conflict has not been resolved, the couple can continue their relationship alongside the man's relationship with his family. This strategy is used in the case of Family1.

Thus, the son and granddaughter suggest separating the man's relationship with his partner from the man's relationship with his family in order to preserve their relationship with him. The woman also chooses this

separation and sees no other alternative. The man has the most difficulty accepting the solution chosen by the others, but also has difficulty changing it. As the couplehood relationship continues despite the family members' inability to get on well with the new partner, they need to find a way to accept the unwelcome situation. Gaps between ideality and reality call for bridging, which is accomplished by using verbal accounts that make excuses for or justify the situation (Scott and Lyman 1968). In this case, they use the account 'as long as it's good'. The granddaughter's and son's perspectives are presented below:

> As a family, we are very happy that it's good for him, he is really thriving. He travels, he is healthy, it's good for him. (Family1GDM, age 24)

> I can guarantee that if he were not in a couplehood relationship, he would have left this world long ago. He's simply unable to live alone. It's good for him … he really looks a million dollars; she looks good, too. (Family1SM, age 51)

Similar to the granddaughter, the son justifies the situation by acknowledging how good the couplehood relationship is for his father. Stating that the couplehood might even be instrumental in keeping him alive helps the son to accept it; to what would he not agree to keep his father alive? Stating that his father's partner also looks good emphasises the mutual benefits from the relationship, diminishing the notion that he, his family and his father might feel obligated towards her. The man uses the same account:

> …I think the couplehood is good. Except for the problems with the children, it's a good relationship. I think it's good for me and it's good for her; most of our problems are fighting with the children and then with the grandchildren. (Family1CM, widowed, age 81, co-habitation, 16 years)

The man and his partner agree that the problem in their relationship is the man's offspring. His conflict with his family has not caused the termination of the relationship, however. His family realises that they have no choice but to accept the situation against their will, presenting couplehood as stronger than intergenerational ties in this case.

Bridging gaps between second couplehood and social-cultural attitudes of family members towards the phenomenon. The following relates to how the account 'as long as it's good' bridges gaps between family members' attitudes towards how second couplehood in old age should be managed according to culturally traditional family structures and/or religious attitudes and the reality of their parent/grandparent living in such a relationship. In these cases, the difficulty is with the phenomenon rather than with a specific relationship or partner. This is illustrated through two main socio-

cultural issues: the normative lifecycle and loyalty to the deceased. The granddaughter in Family4CW illustrates difficulty that stems from second couplehood not being part of the normative family lifecycle:

> Partners have to spend a lifetime together but they [older persons] don't have that life to be together; perhaps that's why my opinion is negative … I haven't yet seen second couplehood in very old age, it's not someone remarrying who can give birth to children … it's the exception because grandmothers don't marry. (Family4GDW, age 27)

The granddaughter expresses the problem of second couplehood in old age as contradicting the perceived normative reasons for constructing a new marital relationship. She mentions the accepted family lifecycle that views raising a family to be the purpose of couplehood. As a result, she comes to the ageist conclusion that 'grandmothers don't marry'.

Another social-cultural issue relates to families who perceive second couplehood as a betrayal of the deceased and have to bridge between the two. In contrast, other families state that, culturally, they do not believe in loyalty to the deceased and therefore do not experience a gap. Both types of families are presented below to illustrate the differences between them. The man's side of Family8 illustrates perspectives of betraying the deceased. The man's perspective is as follows:

> …we [lifelong marriage] were together our whole life; we were not just a couple but were very good friends, so after more than 40 years, when you find another partner, you have this feeling as if something is wrong, it follows me … On the other hand, my life changed drastically from being full to being empty. I was functioning like a machine. Now that she [my present partner] is here, my heart is somewhat full, I feel like a human being. Before, I felt in transition, waiting to leave [this world]. Now, I feel like a whole person. (Family8CM, widowed, age 67, co-habitation, two years)

To bridge the gap between his second couplehood and the belief that he is betraying his deceased wife, the man uses the justification that couplehood saved him from a life of emptiness after his wife's death. His son reinforces this, as follows:

> I think that if my mother would have known that he'd have someone else, it would have been very difficult for her, but we don't concern ourselves with the dead; I prefer one parent who is alive. I told him more than once that he should find someone; I remember how difficult it was for me, personally; the thought that he'd be with someone else … I didn't want to lose him, too. He was just withering away, and the worst thing was when he sent us pictures of a dead rose, a rose that had withered along with him. (Family8SM, age 41)

The son reinforces the family belief that entering a new relationship after a spouse has died constitutes a betrayal. However, it is legitimate for the sake of the wellbeing of the remaining spouse, who is on the verge of feeling that

his life has terminated. The second couplehood is justified as a lifesaver, thus bridging the gap between accepting second couplehood and the belief that it is a betrayal. The granddaughter's perspective strengthens this justification:

> Before he got to know his girlfriend, he was not only unhappy, he was sad … but now, he's happy. (Family8GDM, age 12)

The granddaughter's dual expression of her grandfather's distress emphasises the magnitude of his difficulty before repartnering.

The father and son describe their guilt feelings towards their deceased wife/mother for entering a second couplehood relationship. All three generations justify the act by perceiving it as a lifesaver, which is even stronger than 'as long as it's good'. As such, they bridge between their beliefs of remaining loyal to the deceased partner and to the man's couplehood.

The opposite perspective is illustrated by the son on the man's side of Family15:

> I told my wife that I expect her to find someone else when I'm gone; we don't expect loyalty after death. This doesn't fit our culture. We have to learn to accept death as natural, especially at an older age … Some people have preconceived ideas about some kind of obligation or loyalty, so it seems like a betrayal, but it isn't … If we belonged to a conservative culture that buries the living wife with the dead husband, then of course things would be different. In Western culture, I am not going against the majority; it even seems positive. It's not something he invented. (Family15SM, age 53)

The son is aware that he lives in a culturally diverse society and feels the need to justify his father's second couplehood to people not living according to modern cultural values. He refers to the belief of loyalty to the deceased as a cultural issue. By identifying himself as belonging to the modern culture, he justifies his father's second couplehood. Although both Family8M and Family15M live in the same society, they differ culturally in their attitudes of loyalty towards the deceased spouse.

Second couplehood in old age: the solution

In this theme, second couplehood in old age is considered a solution to problematic situations for family members derived from gaps between reality and ideality. Two types of gaps were identified: one was experienced by the family prior to repartnering and the other refers to family members' experience of ambivalence. The following section presents how second couplehood in old age bridges these gaps using the account 'as long as it's good'.

Second couplehood bridging gaps experienced by the family prior to repartnering. In this theme, family members experience couplehood as bridging the

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gaps between the real and the ideal that existed prior to second couplehood. The partner in the second couplehood relationship, who fulfils emotional and physical needs, assists the family to bridge between the ideal state of assistance that they wished for their parent/grandparent and the real state that existed prior to second couplehood. The statement 'as long as it's good' is used as an expression of relief because of the advantages of repartnering.

In the following section, we present the findings according to generations rather than to families, to emphasise the varied experiences of intergenerational relational and role issues and how they are affected by repartnering. One example is the grandchildren's changed experience of grandparenthood following second couplehood, as illustrated by the man's 11-year-old grandson in Family19:

> …When I ask either of them [my grandfather and his partner], it refers to both of them because they are together … Once [before his grandfather's repartnering], when I asked my grandfather for a present, he found it difficult to get it on his own and he'd give my mother money and she'd buy it. Now that he has his partner, it's easier … also, when he asks me about a book I'm reading, it's fun. I stay at home to talk to him, and now when he asks me, there's someone else … it's nice that there is another person who feels and knows what I feel … it's good. (Family19GSM, age 11)

The grandson emphasises how his grandfather's repartnering serves him well by filling a lack and has strengthened their grandson–grandfather relationship. He receives double the attention as well as presents directly from his grandfather, just as he had always wanted. This second couplehood provides a solution to previous problems. The children refer to issues concerning their beliefs regarding filial obligations, as illustrated by the man's daughter in Family5:

> It could be that the way I see it has to do with my emotions, with my position, with my responsibility as the eldest child to take care of my father's needs. I see that the relationship is good for the family in the sense that it enables continuity of life. I think that without this relationship, life would be broken; life has been broken and interrupted anyway. If he'd have remained lonely, it would have kept the wound open … you know, at family gatherings, it's always more comfortable when you come with a partner, there's something more whole to it, he's not the poor guy who is alone. I think that it enables healing and that there is continuity; life continues. (F_5DM, age 44)

It seems that for adult children also, the end of their parents' couplehood breaks the parenthood frame in which they grew up. The daughter mentions three main reasons why repartnering is good: it reduces her responsibility as the eldest daughter who does not always have time, it helps the parent cope with loneliness and it creates a sense of continuity not only

for the parent but also for the family. She justifies the couplehood by the social norm that modern society prefers couples over singles. Couplehood makes it easier for all involved; the family does not feel guilty that father is alone and father is not lonely. The following excerpt from the interview with the woman in Family5 illustrates the older generation's perspective:

> An older parent alone, it's always good to have someone there. The children don't have to entertain the parents and take care of them. I feel as though it calms the system. (Family5CW, divorced, age 69, co-habitation, three years)

Second couplehood in old age assists in relieving the younger generation from the burden of caring for their parents. The older generation's concern for the younger ones by helping to stabilise the family and prevent role reversal could be interpreted as a continuation of their parental role.

Ambivalence of family members. Some families expressed ambivalent feelings towards the second couplehood in old age. On the one hand, it caused problems with intergenerational relationships in the family, but on the other hand, provided a solution for the older person's difficulties.

The man's side of Family10 is an example of such ambivalence. Three illustrative quotes are presented below. The first illustrates pain as difficulty, the second shows how family members justify this difficulty and the third demonstrates integration between the two. First:

> She [my sister] has difficulty with her [my father's partner]. I can understand her because sometimes I also find her a difficult person … But what bothered her more was that she wanted to be in touch with our father but he immediately turned it into 'us'. He can't go alone. When my mother was the partner, it was OK, but … now he's 80 and we planned for my sister to come to Israel to spend a weekend together at a resort, and it was difficult for my sister that [my father's partner] would be there. She said: 'Dad and I are fine; why do I need her?…' It was difficult for her. I told him that he probably won't like it, but that she's his daughter and he has to decide what he prefers; keeping in touch and making the effort, or risking that [my sister] won't come… (Family10SM, age 56)

The problem is presented on two levels: emotional and practical. On the personal, emotional level, the children's difficulty is with their father's partner's character and with his need to have a partner by his side. On the practical level, the father has to choose between his partner and his daughter; he apparently cannot have both.

As background to the next quote, the man and his lifelong spouse were involved in a car accident together. The wife died and he spent a long time recovering in hospital. During this period, several women came to support him, and he finally left the hospital with his current partner. The son justifies his father's couplehood as follows:

It's clear to me that it [the couplehood] is keeping him alive; otherwise, he'd fall apart. My mother is dead, and we can't change that. Life has to go on, and my father is not cut out to be alone. He had to leave the hospital in the arms of a woman. It's obvious that it's not something he can live without… (Family10SM, age 56)

The son realises that his father has no choice; he must either be in a couplehood relationship or he would cease to exist. The final quote illustrates ambivalence by integrating between the previous two:

…it [second couplehood in old age] doesn't always contribute to a close relationship with the children and grandchildren; there is almost no contact with my sister. It's easier for me to accept; I can understand how hard it is for him to change. I understand that, at his age, he will not get into intensive psychotherapy that will solve this problem. He has to find a situation that he can deal with and he's found it. It's obvious that our relationship would be different if he weren't in a couplehood relationship. Just like when he was hospitalised and in great distress, I was there for him all the time. Actually, I think that, emotionally, his world begins and ends with his partner. The children are secondary, unlike most Jews or Israelis for whom the children are everything. For my father, couplehood is everything and the children are secondary. It's completely obvious that if he weren't in a couplehood relationship, he'd be in distress, and I would be there, of course. I'd make an effort for him, which would no doubt create closeness. On the other hand, I don't see my father being able to live without a partner, which means that if it wasn't her, it would be someone else. (Family10SM, age 56)

The ambivalence is illustrated on three levels: the personal, the familial and the social. On the personal level, the son is sorry that his father does not have more need of him, both emotionally and practically, but has found a different solution for his needs. On the familial level, couplehood interferes with the man's intergenerational family relations with his offspring. The social level refers to two issues: one belongs to the problem while the other serves as the solution. The problem relates to the man's priorities of who comes first: offspring or partner. This is opposed to the Jewish Israeli norm. The son uses two ways of bridging between his ideal of how a parent–child relationship should be, and the actual reality due to their father's repartnering. One way is by stereotypically referring to old age as a period in which change through psychological therapy is no longer relevant. This is expressed by the statement: 'if it wasn't her, it would be someone else'. The other way is by using another norm of placing his father's wellbeing before his own, indicating that his priority is 'as long as it's good for his father'.

Discussion

We described and analysed two main themes presenting gaps between the real and the ideal experienced by the participants regarding second

couplehood in old age: as a problem through its disadvantages and as a solution through its advantages. The gaps in both themes are bridged by the account 'as long as it's good'. The disadvantages present second couplehoood as a problem stemming from family members' personal-familial experiences or from their difficulty with second couplehood as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Hence, they need to bridge the gaps created between reality and ideality. The family's bridging mechanism is based on 'as long as it's good for the parent/grandparent'. The repartnered older person who has to deal with his family's difficulties uses the account of 'as long as it's good for me'.

The advantages present second couplehood as a solution for difficulties faced by all the generations prior to repartnering. Thus, second couplehood in old age itself is the bridging mechanism. The offspring use the account of 'as long as it's good for us', and the older repartnered person uses 'as long as it's good for them'. Hence, second couplehood in old age reduces the gap between reality and ideality among all three generations.

These findings are discussed via two issues. One refers to changes in the family structure and the other to ambivalent perspectives and how to deal with them. Each issue is discussed on the macro, mezzo and micro levels. The macro level refers to socio-cultural contexts in which second couplehood is constructed. The mezzo level refers to the familial setting and its internal relationships. The micro level refers to personal views that concern the individual.

Changes in family structure

The macro level. Findings indicated family members' sense of relief following second couplehood, which liberated them from attending to the older person's needs. This demonstrates the consequences of demographic changes in the family from pyramid to pole, a reality in which family members are faced with priority dilemmas regarding energy and resource distribution (Hans, Ganong and Coleman 2009).

The mezzo level. The partner's characteristics can be the cause of the family's difficulty accepting the repartnering, as in Family1M. Family members' mutual experiences of past events are a stabilising aspect of the family system (Carter and McGoldrick 2005). A new family member, who neither shares the family history nor is familiar with its dynamics, can potentially shake the equilibrium (Schmeeckle *et al.* 2006). The need to deal with this coincides with the lifecourse principle of linked lives (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006) and confronts the offspring with the dynamic

characteristics of a changing family structure in a society located between tradition and modernity (Lavee and Katz 2003).

The micro level. Findings revealed traditional families' difficulties in accepting second couplehood in old age because of inconsistency with the traditional perception of raising a family as the primary goal of marriage (Carter and McGoldrick 2005), as illustrated by Family4GDW. However, previous findings indicated that the reasons for repartnering are for enrichment, personal convenience and to have fun, and not for raising a family (Koren 2011). This demonstrates that human development is an ongoing process throughout the entire lifecourse (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006).

Ambivalent perspectives

The macro level. Ambivalence is created when behaviour contradicts familial and societal norms and values (Lowenstein 2007), leading to the need to resolve gaps (Scott and Lyman 1968). In this study, we identified several gaps between norms and the reality of repartnering, such as surprise, anger and embarrassment at the grandparent's remarriage, as expressed in the statement 'grandmothers don't marry' (Family4GDW). This statement can be explained by modernisation (Cowgill 1974), which has constructed older persons as inferior, creating an experience of meaninglessness (Aboderin 2004). Repartnering served to fill this vacuum. Another issue is sanctification of the deceased as a cultural issue (Family8M). The older persons and their offspring bridged the gap between living in second couplehood and loyalty to the deceased by perceiving lifelong marriage and second couplehood as two distinct phenomena that neither threaten nor disregard each other. They achieved this by viewing the older person's improved quality of life through repartnering. Hence, the value of life as experienced through second couplehood is more important than familial and social norms and values. We interpreted the statement 'as long as it's good for him/her' as a bridging mechanism between the reality of second couplehood and the norms according to which family members live. This coincides with the lifecourse principle of time and place in a cultural context (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006).

The mezzo level. Ambivalence is expressed by family members' perceptions of having been pushed aside in favour of second couplehood while acknowledging the parent's inevitable need to be in a partner relationship (*e.g.* Family10M). In most of the families (*e.g.* Family5DM), children and grandchildren noted the gap between the care they had wished to provide before the second couplehood and what they had been able to provide in practice.

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However, family members who were satisfied with how they cared for their parent/grandparent expressed the burden of responsibility for two generations, their children and their parents (Malach Pines *et al.* 2011), because of demographic family changes (Hans, Ganong and Coleman 2009). Thus, second couplehood in old age serves as a bridging mechanism between the real care that family members are able to provide and their wished-for ideal. This bridging mechanism illustrates the challenges of adult children–older parent relationships in modern society coinciding with the lifecourse principle of timing as influencing family life (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006).

The bridging mechanism 'as long as it's good for us' means that second couplehood releases the family from filial responsibility tasks. Decrease in filial commitment (Coleman, Ganong and Rothrauff 2006; Hans, Ganong and Coleman 2009; Stuifbergen, van Delden and Dykstra 2008) due to difficulties or unwillingness invites second couplehood to fill the gaps, serving both the repartnered older persons and their offspring to reduce their involvement in their parent's/grandparent's lives (Hans, Ganong and Coleman 2009). Thus, second couplehood in old age lifts some of the burden and releases the family from some of the intergenerational moral obligations.

The micro level. Older persons living in second couplehood despite their families' difficulties with the situation indicates an element of choice (*e.g.* Family1CM). This illustrates their ambivalent position of having to choose between family or couplehood and self-fulfilment. Older persons' choice of couplehood over family is consistent with previous findings pointing to changing perceptions of the nature of parenthood in relation to adult children (Levitzki 2009). This coincides with the lifecourse principle of agency (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2006) and individualistic values, according to which individuals run their lives by their own wish to meet their interests, reducing their dependency on the family collective (Aboderin 2004). This idea is described in modernisation theory as a developing social trend that re-forms the family unit. In the strongly familial Israeli society (Cohen 2003), choices such as these manifest the complexities of societies that are located between tradition and modernity (Lavee and Katz 2003) and are torn between the contrasting norms of individualism and collectivism.

Limitations and implications

One limitation of this study is that, although we collected and analysed the perspectives of three generations, the findings are derived from children and grandchildren who were chosen by the older persons and who were

willing to participate. Their perspectives are not necessarily the same as those of their siblings who did not participate. Another limitation is that the findings did not include couples in which one of the partners was physically dependent, or in which the offspring were financially dependent on the repartnered older persons.

Our sample is homogenous regarding perceived SES and perceived health status. This might be considered a limitation. However, a comparison of our sample characteristics with samples of other studies conducted in Israel (*e.g.* Koren 2011) and abroad (*e.g.* Davidson 2002) reveals similar levels of these variables. Another possible explanation for such homogeneity is related to the findings referring to perceived rather than objective SES and health status. It is possible that persons who are satisfied with their SES and health status are more open, available and willing to consider the option of second coupehood in old age.

Conclusions

The statement by older repartnered persons, 'as long as it's good for me', reflects an action that coincides with modernisation as a means of dealing with the losses of old age by constructing second couplehood. Couplehood at any age, and in old age in particular, has advantages that enhance well-being (de Jong Gierveld 2002; Spalter 2010; Stevens 2002). This improvement in quality of life is what assists family members of older persons who chose second couplehood in old age to accept the phenomenon, as expressed in the statement 'as long as it's good'. The study findings might help family members and the older repartnered persons to understand the dynamics of second couplehood in old age and its implications for them. Finally, our findings suggest a turn of the tables. Instead of older persons reacting to family members and society's policy makers, society is forced to react to second couplehood in old age initiated by its older members.

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NOTE

1 A term used originally to describe retaliation by radical Jewish settlers on the West Bank against Palestinians and the Israeli security forces.

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Address for correspondence:
Chaya Koren,
The School of Social Work and The Center for the Study of Society,
University of Haifa,
199 Abba Hushi Blv.,
Mount Carmel,
Haifa 3498838, Israel

E-mail: salsterk@gmail.com

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