Author's response to reviews

Title: Home: The place the older adult can not imagine living without

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Cover letter to revised manuscript MS 1967917546397023, “Home: The place the older adult can not imagine living without.”

Thank you for your interest in the manuscript and the valuable feedback. We carefully reviewed each of the comments from the associate editor and the reviewers and revised the manuscript accordingly.

This study was built on a comprehensive literature review of the home as a scientific concept and a summary of the literature is presented in the introduction with reference to a more detailed review by Gillsjö and Schwartz-Barcott (2010). However, we have extended the introduction as recommended by the associate editor and the reviewers. This extension is also aimed at responding to reviewer AA’s request to put the study into its context.

p.3-5

Home is a value laden [1] everyday term [2-5] that easily can be taken for granted [6] even though it often is the most central place in one’s life [7-11]. Numerous authors have noted that for older adults, home is especially important and central to daily life as it becomes a major base of activity as many grow old [12-14]. The passing of time and past memories embedded in the home tend to deepen the older adult’s sense of rootedness and the desire to stay and grow old in one’s present home often becomes strong [14-16].

Over the last 30 years, there has been increased interest among scholars about the notion of home and a distinctive body of scholarly literature around the topic has emerged. The focus on home as an important area for scientific inquiry began to appear in the mid 1970s as did a seminal article on the concept of home by an architect named Hayward [2]. Between 1989 and 1992 a series of international conferences took place in Sweden, New York, Norway and Denmark and included scholars from diverse disciplines ranging from architecture and geography to social sciences and philosophy [17]. The dialogue about the topic continued in a book edited by Rowles and Chaudhury’s [18] on the home and aging. Issues of concept clarification have continued to be central
in these discussions. However, less progress has been made in defining the concept, than in identifying the personal meanings of home and how these have been influenced by historical, social, cultural factors as well as demographic characteristics [17].

In nursing, home is a well established arena for nurses working in home health care. In fact, in early Roman writings the home appeared as a setting where health promotion and care were given by nurses [19]. In the late 1800s, it became linked with organized community health care nursing and the initiation of home visiting [19-21]. Byrd [21] investigated the concept of home visiting since it has become a central nursing intervention within home health care. Over the last 30 years, home as an arena where health care is given and received has increased enormously due to a rapidly aging population and a desire to remain at home [8, 22] as well as change in health policy with a transfer of care from formal places such as hospitals and institutions to more informal settings such as home [10, 11, 23-25].

The need to look more closely at home has also been raised cogently by Williams and a group of colleagues in medical geography. These authors have begun to conceptualize the home as a therapeutic environment and to examine the impact, both positive and negative, of home care services on the relationship between the client and the home environment. They acknowledged the possibility of intruding and violating the client in the home [10]. Also, within occupational therapy there has been increasing recognition of the home as a central place in the lives of older adults and the potential disruptive impact of health care providers in this setting [14]. As Hawkins & Stewart [23] point out, there tends to be an assumption that the home is a neutral territory where new relationships, occupational roles and functions are expected to be incorporated without problems. Yet, Steward [26] has argued that the mere presence of health care providers in the home changes it from a private space to a public arena and may in turn disrupt the boundaries and the older adults sense of home. Additionally, research by Roush & Cox [27] and Swenson. [9] showed that older adults experiences of home health care have an impact on their notion of health and well-being.

However in spite of the increased interest and voluminous literature, Gillsjö and Schwartz-Barcott [28] found in a recent and extensive cross-disciplinary review that there is no single comprehensive and measurable definition of the concept of home.

Deleted the following since we found that this content wasn’t necessary in the changed introduction. (We refer in the article to Gillsjö&Barcott, 2010 to a concept analysis of home where the content below can be read.)

p.3

Historically, the ancient root for the word home meant to lie, as being a place where one has settled down. The word home originally in the Scandinavian
languages referred to one’s dwelling, the village or country where one lived or the world [29-31]. Today, the most common reference in dictionaries is to the place where one lives, a place associated with affection [29]. Additionally, home has been used to refer to church or heaven [32, 33].

The following content was added in response to the associate editor´s suggestion to insert text about qualitative research in general (its purpose, perhaps contrast to quantitative research or more structured interviewing)

p.7-8

Qualitative research as a serious mode of scientific inquiry in the area of health care emerged in 1980s. Findings from qualitative research have contributed to an increase in practical knowledge in health care and have been incorporated in standard hierarchies of evidence used for establishing evidence-based practices [39, 40].

The qualitative interview is theme oriented in which an interaction takes place in the conversation between the interviewee and the researcher about a specific subject. The interviewee gives a description with emphasize on what is considered to be important and the researcher is able to obtain confirmation of interpretations of both verbal and non verbal expressions during the interview. In contrast with the highly structured questionnaire, the qualitative interview is not focused on objective, reproducible and quantified data. However, this type of open extensive interview provides an opportunity to gain a broader and deeper understanding that goes beyond the interviewee´s self-understanding of the central theme [41, 42]

The following clarification is made to address comments 1 and 3 from reviewer AA and the comment raised by MB regarding the need for further clarification about the importance of pre-understanding.

p.9

The opening question allowed time to develop some level of trust in the conversation and gave the older adults time to think about what they wanted to say about their experience of home. It also allowed the first author time to reflect upon and decide about subsequent questions based upon what had or hadn´t been expressed or needed to be confirmed or clarified to achieve a rich description of the older adult´s experience of home. Subsequently, during …

p.10-11

Through an open dialog the reader (researcher) seeks to interpret and understand the meaning of the text and not the underlying purpose behind the interviewees´ responses. According to Gadamer [38], it is extremely important that the researcher describe the circumstances, most notably one´s pre-understandings, under which the interpretation of the text is made. It is this awareness of one’s pre-understandings during the interpretation of the text that helps the researcher in recognizing, interpreting and understanding themes that emerge out of the text [43].
For clarification

p.12
The existential and professional pre-understanding had to be brought into
awareness and taken into account again in relation to the reading of the text [41].

p.13
Made one sentence instead of two. … philosophy, in which...

The following was deleted to address the comment from MB about the statement
“none of the data were unexplained”

p.20
This sentence is deleted since there is a limitation in the hermeneutical approach
that the authors’ pre-understanding can cloud or enhance the understanding.

The following extension is made to address the comment from MB about the role
of other people

p.22
In the interviews, the older adults initially talked much about when and how they
started to build their home with their spouses. However, as time passed by the
circumstances in life changed and in the older adults’ current experience of
home the reference to others had changed. The relationship with family and
friends were still important in life but the experience of home developed and
became the older adults’ stronghold and freedom which allowed them to decide
on whom to keep in contact with and welcome and to whom they would open the
doors.

The following extensions are made to address the comments from reviewers on
expansion of methodological limitations and comment from AA about attempts to
enhance trustworthiness.

p.23
The hermeneutical approach made it possible to capture, give expression to and
make explicit an understanding [38] of the older adults’ experience of home.
However, (this study has not produced knowledge that can be generalized to all
older adults living in Sweden, although it can be reflected upon and considered in
other settings where older adults live, such as residential facility for older adults.
– this text is already in the manuscript)

p.23-24
As noted by von Post and Eriksson [37] and Gadamer [38], the origin of the text
is not of primary importance but it is the text itself and the reader’s dialogue with
the text that is the focus of attention. The primary author, with the existential and
professional pre-understandings [37] was familiar with what the older adults were
saying and saw it as valid. The professional pre-understanding may also have
prevented the primary author from seeing what was hidden behind the words, because what was heard seemed obvious and something over which there seemed to be no need to reflect further. In qualitative research, content validity is one of the standards to validate that the chosen method investigates the intended content. The validity of the themes in this study was strengthened since both co-authors acted as co-judges examining the themes separately [42].