This chapter looks at our interviewees’ orientations towards repartnering. It examines whether they want new couple relationships, when they want them (assuming that they do) and whether they are currently looking for a new partner.1 It also discusses the kinds of relationships and partners for which they express a preference, and those they intend to avoid. In addition, it brings into consideration remarks made by the interviewees that are of relevance to the repartnering process. Some of these relate to their repartnering behaviour, if any, during their time as a formerly married person or former cohabitee. Others relate to aspects of their lives and situations that they perceive as having, or anticipate as being likely to have, an impact on their likelihood of repartnering or on the repartnering process more generally.

The approach taken to the discussions and analyses of interview material is broadly consistent with the Grounded Theory approach advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Hence there is an emphasis on providing an account of our results derived from and consistent with our interviewees’ viewpoints as expressed in the interview transcripts. More specifically, an attempt is made to generate a ‘repartnering typology’, based on the interviewees’ orientations and behaviour. Inevitably, such a typology reflects our analytical frame of reference as well as the interviewees’ viewpoints, which is also the case for the analyses in this chapter more generally.

Is repartnering on the agenda?

For a minority of our interviewees, repartnering is not viewed as a relevant consideration, at least not at present. Some do not currently want a couple relationship of any sort and can envisage never wanting one again. For a minority this reflects specific past experiences such as domestic
violence, but for many it seems to reflect a more general fear of being hurt again:

I felt as though I was nothing. I just felt like nothing and completely worthless. I don't want to end up in that position again.

(Carl, divorced and in her mid-forties)

... I just wouldn't want to risk being hurt that much again and the only way that you can make sure you're not is to never, ever get involved with anybody. ... I prefer loneliness to the prospect of maybe being let down again.

(Ellen, divorced and in her early fifties)

Some of the interviewees who have this outlook have been separated from their most recent partner for a relatively short period of time, leaving open the possibility that their views may change:

But, I mean I can't look into the future and that, you know I can't say that if I sort of came into contact with somebody next week or next year or whatever I might feel totally different but, umm, I'm not the same person that I was before and I don't know that I could be easy with somebody else ...

(Samantha, separated and in her early forties)

Some of the interviewees who do not view repartnering as a relevant consideration have experienced more than one problematic marriage or cohabiting relationship. While their viewpoint may consequently be less likely to change, their past experiences do not necessarily mean that they do not view a couple relationship as their ideal situation, albeit one that they view as 'impossible' to achieve:

So, ideally now, I would want to be sharing my life with somebody, but I don't see that as a possibility. So I suppose I try to separate wants from my needs ...

(Claire, separated and in her mid-thirties)

In addition to those interviewees who do not currently want a relationship, there are others who have not been sufficiently motivated by any attractive features of having a new relationship to seek one actively. Sometimes this reflects a degree of scepticism regarding the prospects of finding someone appropriate or 'worth having':

I suppose theoretically I'm open to the idea of having another relationship, but I don't know how it [would] work practically and I don't feel like