

**OLDER WORKERS' TALK: DISCURSIVE  
REPRESENTATIONS OF AGE, WORK AND RETIREMENT  
IDENTITIES**

by

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## ABSTRACT

There is a growing trend for older people in the UK to keep working for longer. The percentage of 50-64 year-olds rose from 62% in 2001 to 69.4% in 2015; and for people over 65, from 5% to 10.5% in the same period (*Office for National Statistics (ONS)*, 2015). There are now over 8.5 million people aged over 50 in paid employment (*The Experts in Age and Employment (TAEN)*, 2012). In the context of this changing workforce demographic, it is important to examine how older people negotiate their age-related identities as older workers and represent their views on retirement.

This study takes a Discourse Analytic (DA) approach to examining how older age-identity is negotiated in talk, gathered from seven focus groups conducted in workplaces and twelve semi-structured interviews with older workers and retirees. Discourse Analytic research on identity has often neglected to address age-identity construction. The use of DA methodologies in this investigation has enabled discursive strategies, such as distancing strategy, to be identified during participants' older age-identity constructions; and Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), positioning theory (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006), and Membership Categorisation Analysis (Sacks, 1995; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002) have provided frameworks for a discourse analytic approach. Older age-identities were negotiated whilst participants were orienting to being older in the workplace and retirement. Previous qualitative studies [into this topic] have focused on a content analysis of *what* was said, not *how*. There is a discursive element to age-identity construction that requires a social constructionist, context dependent approach to how age is negotiated through language. In this study, a DA approach has allowed for a micro-level examination which extends previous research by demonstrating how participants use language to negotiate their age-identities as older workers and retirees by drawing on different aspects of ageing, such as chronological, physical and social dimensions [of age] in a specific social context relating to being older at work.

Findings indicate that many participants resisted negative perceptions of decrement and decline that may be associated with ageing and retirement when constructing their age-identities. This was achieved in several ways, for example, by discursively claiming membership of a younger age cohort, resisting the changes that accompany ageing, or by 'out-grouping' people who were perceived to display certain archetypal behaviours associated with older people.

Findings also demonstrate that older people who were still at work articulated negative views about retirement; however, people who had already retired demonstrated a positive orientation towards this life stage. Keeping busy and active after leaving work was said by both older workers and retirees to play a vital part in defraying the possible decline that accompanies old age and may help to achieve successful retirement and ageing. This study has demonstrated how an ideology of positive ageing has been discursively constructed during older age-identity negotiations.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The older worker

UK Government statistics show that more people are living longer than ever before (Gov.Uk, 2015). By 2020, it is estimated that people over 50 in Britain will comprise 32% of the UK working age population, which is resulting in a growing trend for people in this age cohort to be in paid work. To demonstrate this, the employment rate for 50 to 64-year-olds has increased from 62% in 2001 to 69.4% in 2015 (ONS, 2015), with over 8.5 million older people now being in work (The Experts in Age and Employment (TAEN), 2012). The employment rate for people aged 65 and over has also increased from 5% in 2001 to around 10.5% in 2015, resulting in a record number of over 1 million (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2015): over one in ten of over 65s are in paid work. The ONS suggests that this trend may be due to the fact that people are now living longer and are generally healthier; however in many cases this may be due to a financial necessity. The implications of a rising State Pension Age (SPA) may be a factor that affects this phenomenon. By 2020 the age at which people in the UK will receive their State Pension will increase to 66, with further proposed incremental increases to 68 by 2046 (Gov.Uk, 2015). The ONS argues that this rising trend can require big adjustments for individuals and employers who have a higher percentage of over 50s in their workforce.

In the context of a growing number of older people in the workforce, I suggest that it is important to investigate how older workers orient to work and retirement, specifically in relation to their age and lifespan identities. Schnurr (2009:1125) suggests that, as many



people spend most of their time at work, this environment is a “crucial site” in which identities can be negotiated and constructed. It has also been suggested (Williams, Ylänne and Wadleigh, 2007) that research into communication and ageing is currently not of major interest in the social sciences. My study, which explores how older workers discursively negotiate and construct their age-identities, will help to address this perceived ‘gap’, by providing a detailed examination of how age identity is negotiated in a work-related context.

For the purpose of this investigation [into the older worker], it is necessary to define the term ‘worker’. This label is applied to anyone who is in paid employment, whether female or male, full-time or part-time, working for an employer, or self-employed. While there are other forms of ‘work’ that play a useful role in society, these may be voluntary and unpaid. In this study, it is important to recognise the context of being in paid employment. The current SPA is reached when a person is in their 60s, but age may be viewed and constructed differently than in the voluntary sector where there is no age limit.

Findings from this study could be used to inform organisations about how their older employees view being older in the workplace, and could facilitate their ‘voice’ in management policy. This could provide management support to maximise older workers’ efficiency and potential. Results of data analysis could also raise awareness amongst older workers themselves to provide reciprocal support to reinforce their individual perceptions and challenge any possible negative ageist views held by younger managers or colleagues. As an ‘older worker’ myself, I also identify with this concept and hope that my study will reinforce the positive values of ageing.

This study will also include examining data from people who have already retired, which allows for their retrospective experiences to be compared against prospective conceptions [about retirement] of older people who are still at work. Price (2000) argues that many retirement studies have concentrated on men only, and that with an increase of women at work, it is also important to examine their retirement experiences. My study thus investigates identity work by both men and women who have retired.

In this chapter, I will briefly outline the chapters of my thesis. I also introduce the concepts of how the 'self' and identity may be discursively constructed and how an age-identity may be represented and negotiated through language. These topics are discussed in the next two sections.

## 1.2 'Self' and identity

The notion of 'self' would appear to connote a unique and distinctive identity. However, Erikson (1959: 102) contends that an identity connotes a "persistent sharing of some essential character" with other people. I suggest that an identity may be both unique to an individual and also possess some common traits with other people. This concept is discussed further during the analysis of identity construction by older workers and retirees in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Burr (2003:179) maintains that 'self' is a "humanist concept" which encompasses individualistic attitudes, motivations, personality traits and personal agency. She argues that personal identity is also a social and cultural phenomenon which is "produced" rather than being an existential psychological fact (ibid: 607). The 'production' of a personal identity may be accomplished through social action that is historically or culturally influenced, using a range of practices, for example, language. This social constructionist approach to

identity (Potter, 1996; Gubrium and Holstein, 1997; Burr, 2003; Wray, Evans, Coupland and Bishop, 2003; Bucholtz, 2005; Harris, 2008 and Schilling, 2013) is briefly explained below and will be further discussed in the next chapter (cf. 2.2) in the section on discursive identity construction.

We also have social identities which may relate to a social category or group membership (Yläanne, 2012: 304). Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) argues that we may construct a personal or social identity by ‘in-grouping’ or ‘out-grouping’ ourselves in relation to other people: a process of claiming membership of a social or cultural group or ‘othering’ people who do not belong to this group. We identify with the perceived norms and attitudes of other people which are compatible with our own [‘in-group’] category, and make a self-reflexive comparison with people in an [‘out-group’] category (Stets and Burke, 2000: 224). It is possible to belong to more than one social group by self-categorisation and comparing our personal identity to that of other categories to create our social identity, which may add to our own positive sense of worth (Tajfel, 1981). SIT identifies identity construction as contextual. Personal identity may relate to a perceived position in the life-span, such as in family membership where grandparents may be over 80; and a socio-cultural identity, for example in the workplace, where the over 50s constitute a specific age-related social group. In this study, the discursive construction of ‘self’ by older workers has emerged as one of the over-arching themes and will also be discussed in the next section.

### 1.3 Language and age-identity

Potter and Wetherell (1987: 102) argue that language is both constructed and constructive: what we say and the way we say it helps create the social ‘norms’ that

influence the way we speak. Burr (2005: 47) contends that it is the “job” of language to find a way to communicate things to other people, and that, in this performative role, language is a form of social action (ibid: 8). She argues that we choose from a “bag of labels” (ibid: 47-48) to describe how we feel and think, including the use of interpretive repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 172) which comprise lexicon, metaphor, and other tropes. Personal and social identities negotiated during discursive interaction may be affected by the context in which they are constructed, for example, the roles people occupy and the groups to which they belong (Bucholtz, 2005:588; Angouri, 2012: 258). My study will analyse participants’ use of language and discourse to construct their older age identities relating to the workplace and retirement, as discussed later in this chapter (cf. 1.5).

Using language to construct an age-identity during discursive interaction may be said to be ‘performing’ age. Nikander (2002: 11) labels this process “identity in action”; McKinley and Dunnett (1998: 50) speak of “subtle negotiations” during collaborative participant discourses. Bucholtz (2005:504) argues that the identity which may be relationally constructed during discursive interaction may be influenced by other people’s perceptions of ourselves and how we respond to these perceptions. I suggest that constructing an age-identity may also be subjected to the perceptions of how we view ourselves compared to how others perceive us. In this study, I will demonstrate how, as we grow older, our perceptions of Chronological Life-stage Categories (CLCs) may ‘shift’, with specific age-related labels being attributed to a certain age cohort changing according to how old we are. For example, ‘old’ may be perceived by someone in their 20’s as being 70, whereas someone who is 50 may apply this label to someone who is over 80.

Previous Discourse Analytic (DA) studies on age and identity have focused on identity construction in a variety of contexts, but not in workplace settings, as will be discussed in the next Chapter. My study will examine how older workers use discursive strategies, such as distancing, and the use of Membership Categorisation Devices ((MCD) (Sacks, 1995; Nikander, 2002) to make age salient and manifest their age identities during focus group interaction in their workplaces and during semi-structured interviews in their own homes.

#### 1.4 Review of other studies

In Chapter 2, I review examples of other studies that have focused on older workers and older age-identity construction. At the time of writing this thesis, I am not aware of any other published research into the topic of age-identity construction by the over 50s in the workplace that has used DA methodologies. There are other qualitative investigations into older people at work, as exemplified below, but these have focused solely on the content of participants' utterances. DA allows for a more rigorous examination of *how* people represent their attitudes and identities, rather than just *what* they say. This is not to devalue the importance of the findings of other social research into older workers, but to examine their articulations using DA methodologies relates to language as social action, identity and age. Other authors, for example Coupland (2009: 853), have also suggested that there is a paucity of studies that adopt a discursive approach to age-related life-style studies, such as older workers and post-retirement activity. My study will help to bridge the gap between investigations that focus solely on what the over 50s have said about work and retirement and research into discourse analytic work on ageing and identity.

I firstly examine a small selection of studies on age identity that have been conducted using DA methodologies in non-workplace contexts. These look at discursive strategies that participants use during talk to make age salient, such as ‘Disclosure of Chronological Age’ (Coupland, Coupland and Giles, 1991: 134-136) which is one of three discursive age categorisation processes whereby older age-identity is constructed by giving one’s actual age in chronological years. Another age categorisation process relates to ‘Temporal Framing’ (ibid: 62-64) which locates current situations with a ‘time past’ perspective or by associating one’s self in the past during time-related narratives to construct an age-identity. Jones (2006) contends that ‘positioning’, (a concept derived from ‘Positioning Theory’, Harré and van Langenhove, 1999), is demonstrated by older people who claim membership of an age cohort to manifest their ‘social age’ by discursively positioning themselves against people of another age group. In another study by Charalambidou (2011), older people were found to construct an age-identity by distancing themselves from other older people who were perceived to have negative attributes associated with ageing.

The use of age-related linguistic repertoires to manifest age identity includes examples of stage-of-life devices (Sacks, 1995) such as ‘elderly woman’ and ‘old man’. According to Sacks, these terms are used as Membership Categorisation Devices (MCD) with which we identify ourselves according to whom we are talking with at the time. Other age-related labels include terms such as ‘pensioner’ (Coupland *et al*, 1991), where an older age-identity is constructed by self-categorisation. Analysis of data in my study that relates to age-identity construction includes an examination of the above discursive strategies and devices.

Secondly, I examine [qualitative] studies into older workers and retirement that look at content rather than take a DA approach. Focus groups and interviews to gather data

were used in an investigation by Brooke and Taylor (2005) into the management of age-related interaction between younger and older people in the workplace. A study by Trethewey (2001) examined how mid-life professional women spoke about their work-related experiences; and research by Maier (2009) looked at how older unemployed people constructed their age-identities during work-related counselling sessions. I also examine work that focuses on retirement issues, as my own research into the older worker investigates how they speak about this life stage. Vickerstaff and Cox (2005) studied how much control people believed they had over the manner and timing of their retirement; Loretto and White (2006) explored older workers' retirement preferences and expectations; Parry and Taylor (2007) examined older workers' views about retirement; and Sargent, Bataille, Vough and Lee (2011) studied the use of metaphor to describe the meanings of retirement as envisaged by professional and executive retirees. A critical investigation into how newspaper discourses that target older people may influence the attitudes of retirees pertaining to their retirement was conducted by Rudman (2006): I examine and discuss her conclusions as my informants may be similarly affected.

## 1.5 Discourse Analysis and other methodologies

One central Research Question (RQ) guides my study: How is older age-identity constructed through discourse? Three more specific RQs then focus on the main theme of this study, namely how the over 50s speak about their age relating to work and retirement:

- 1 What discursive strategies do older workers use to construct their age-identities?

- 2 What discursive strategies do older workers use to represent their views about retirement?
- 3 How is the social identity of a retiree discursively constructed?

Chapter 3 outlines the methodologies used in my study and explains why these were chosen. I will discuss the qualitative research approach I have adopted, which will allow me to examine *how* people use discursive strategies and formulations to represent their views and opinions, rather than only focusing on the *content* of what is said, such as in a quantitative or qualitative content analysis. Qualitative methodologies are more appropriate for this study as they allow for an in-depth, inductive investigation that identifies discursive strategies within the data (Bryman, 2001: 284-285; Angouri, 2010: 33; Rasinger, 2010: 51-52), and which may allow for participants to orient to the topic being investigated in differing social contexts and settings.

In this study, focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit participant data. The advantages and disadvantages of employing these methods will be discussed. I will summarise the historical use of focus groups (Schensul, 1999; Pole and Lampard, 2002; Markova, Linell, Grossen and Orvig, 2007), and examine the current usage of this social science method as suggested by Morgan (1997); Stoll-Kleeman; O’Riordan and Jaeger (2001); Cook (2004); and Wray and Bloomer (2006). Interviews will be discussed grounded in the work of other researchers who have written about this method, such as Holstein and Gubrium (1997); Saville-Troike (2003); Opdenakker (2006) and Wray and Bloomer (2006).

Seven focus groups were held in a range of organisations comprising female and male blue and white-collar workers to reflect a broad demographic. Details of focus group participants and interview respondents will be provided, together with operational



processes relating to contacting organisations for volunteer participants, presentational material used in focus group sessions, and questions used to facilitate interactive discussion. The methods used for thematic coding and data extract selection used during the discourse analysis will be explained. A short section on the ethical issues surrounding volunteer participation in research will discuss the concept of research benefiting those participants.

Themes identified during the analysis of focus group material were used to guide the interviews, with discourse analytic methods being applied to resulting data. I will discuss why I chose to use Discourse Analysis (DA), grounding my arguments in some of the work of other experts in qualitative research methods, for example, Tajfel and Turner (1979); Potter and Wetherell (1987); Johnstone (2000); Wood and Kroger (2000) and Nikander (2008). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is also briefly overviewed as a method of examining how reality is discursively constructed which may influence how older people think and behave.

At the end of the chapter, I will conduct a self-reflective appraisal of the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of how well the methodologies worked within the contextualised framework of the study.

## 1.6 Being older at work

As previously mentioned, one of the over-arching themes that runs through this study is the discursive construction of ‘self’, as it relates to an ageing identity (cf. 1.2). Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will address the analysis of participant data that focuses on this theme.

Chapter 4, 'Being Older in the Workplace', investigates how the over 50s speak about being older and the relevance of age in a workplace setting. Data analysis will be grounded in discursive [age] identity construction theories and micro-level strategies that were outlined in the section on previous studies (cf. 1.4), for example, positioning theory (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006), and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA), (Sacks, 1995; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002). Social Identity Theory (SIT), (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), which helps to identify how people discursively use 'in-grouping' and 'out-grouping' strategies as a method of self-categorisation, and age-related symbolic interactionism (Sherman, 1994) will also be drawn upon to interpret how participants construct their age identities.

Data will also be examined for examples of micro-level age-identification strategies such as the Disclosure of Chronological Age (DCA) and Temporal Framing Processes (Coupland, Coupland and Giles, 1991). Discursive devices, such as the use of an age-related linguistic repertoire which encompasses labelling and self-categorisation processes will be identified, together with examples of how participants relate to age-salient themes of ageing and change, both cognitive and physical, whilst constructing their age-identities as older people. Discursive representations of the perceived attributes of being older in the workplace relating to reliability and experience will also be examined.

## 1.7 Orienting to retirement

Chapter 5, 'Orienting to Retirement', examines how participants negotiate and define their transition from being older workers to retirees, and how they construct their

changing statuses of 'self'. The 'pros and cons' of retirement, that may be perceived to influence participants' decisions to stay on at work or retire, will be investigated. These factors include issues such as health and well-being: keeping busy and being active in retirement may be perceived by older workers to be key factors in ensuring a progression to successful ageing. This perception has also emerged as the second main theme of this study.

'Continuity Theory' (Atchley, 1989; Nimrod and Kleiber, 2007), which contends that continuity of purpose and patterns of activity in retirement may lead to a positive sense of 'self', can be linked to participant data in this chapter. The influence of negative perceptions of retirement (Walker, 1999; Warnes, 2006) together with ageist attitudes and their possible influence on older workers will also be examined.

The analysis of data focuses on two sub-themes: a) how retirement is prospectively envisaged, and b) how a decision is made regarding becoming retired or staying on at work after SPA. Results of this analysis will be compared with the findings of studies that have been conducted by other researchers.

## 1.8 Being retired

Chapter 6 focuses on 'Being Retired'. It is useful to examine the views of people who have already retired as well as people over 50 who are still working, so that comparisons can be made. Data was elicited from interviews from five retirees, two of whom had only recently retired and three who had been retired for a number of years. Discursive representations of their social identities as retirees and how they have adapted to retirement will be examined. Interestingly, although the interviewees

formulated identity constructions as retirees, there was only one example of explicit age-identity construction in the data: the possible reasons for the lack of age-related talk will accompany the analysis.

Continuity of purpose, as was discussed in Chapter 5 (Orienting to Retirement) is again identified as a salient theme in this chapter. Data will also be discussed in the context of Ekerdt's (1986) 'busy ethic' notion and how this relates to the concept of 'good' or 'bad' retirement.

## 1.9 Discussion

Chapter 7 draws on the findings of the analysis chapters, discussing how they relate to the discourse analytic approach that was used, and how they are situated in the previous body of qualitative research into older workers and retirement. I also explain how the results of my study may be used for practical and theoretical applications, addressing the 'so what?' factor; and demonstrating how the social constructionist approach extends the theoretical perspective of existing investigations into discursive older age-identity construction.

The use of older workers' discursive strategies to construct their age-identities as outlined above (cf. 1.6) is discussed, including Membership Categorisation Devices (MCD) (Sacks, 1995) used for self-categorisation within certain age cohorts; the application of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), whereby a comparison is made between 'in-group' and 'out-group' membership; and positioning theory (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; and Jones, 2006) used to align with, or distance oneself from, other people of similar chronological age. I will

also discuss how participants constructed their shifting perceptions of ageing and represented their prospective identities in retirement. These perceptions will be measured against retrospective identity constructions by people who have already retired.

How older people spoke about orienting to retirement appears to suggest that keeping active after leaving work is perceived as being important for 'successful ageing'. This chapter examines negative perceptions about retirement that were represented by some older workers whilst constructing their social and personal age-identities, and discusses why these views diverge from the positive views of retiree testimonies. Influences that may affect decisions about when to retire and the experiences of being retired provide a background from which conclusions relating to being older in the workplace may be drawn.

#### 1.10 Conclusion

Chapter 8 outlines the conclusions of this study. The potential benefits and possible disadvantages of being older in the workplace that were discursively represented suggest that this topic warrants further investigation using a discourse analytic approach. In my study, the people over 50 who participated comprised only a very small sample of older workers and retirees, and a wider sample of participants in terms of gender, marital status, health issues, and financial considerations could produce different results in other studies that use the same methodologies.

Newspaper texts and articles which promote ideologies of positive retirement are overviewed briefly in this study. Further investigation into the phenomenon of how

older and younger people may be influenced by media publications and other advertising could also be conducted.

In this concluding chapter, I also suggest practical applications for my findings that I hope will help to produce a more positive perception of older people in the workplace and views of retirement.

## CHAPTER 2

### REPRESENTATIONS OF AGEING, WORK AND RETIREMENT

#### 2.1 Introduction

To contextualise my study within the existing body of research, this chapter presents an overview of the work of other authors on the theme of how older people construct their age-identities and speak about work and retirement. As previously explained, I am not aware of any other discourse analytic work that has been published about this topic (cf. 1.4); therefore, I am reviewing samples of previous studies that have investigated older-age identity constructions in non-workplace settings using Discourse Analysis (DA), together with qualitative research that has focused on older workers and retirees.

The chapter has three sections. I firstly review examples of DA studies that focus on age-identity construction in non-workplace settings: Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1991); Nikander (2002); and Jones (2006). The second section examines some qualitative studies relating to older people and work that use focus groups and interviews, which mirror my own data-gathering methodologies, as detailed in more depth in Chapter 3. Brooke and Taylor (2005) examined how age-related interactions were managed in organisations in the UK and Australia; Trethewey (2001) conducted a US study into how mid-life professional women articulated their experiences of ageing at work; and Maier (2009) studied how older unemployed people constructed their age-identities during interviews in Austrian counselling sessions.

The third section looks at qualitative studies which examined why people chose to retire or stay on at work after State Pension Age (SPA), and the experiences of those who had

already retired: Vickerstaff and Cox (2005); Loretto and White (2006); Parry and Taylor (2007); and Sargent, Bataille, Vough and Lee (2011). I also discuss work by Rudman (2006), who employed critical discourse analytic methods to examine articles about retirement that were published in a Canadian newspaper.

## 2.2 Discursive identity construction

There are two main conflicting sociolinguistic approaches to social identity: essentialism and social constructionism (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997; Wray *et al*, 2003; Harris, 2008; Schilling, 2013). The social constructionist approach argues that social identity arises during interaction and is “dynamic and contextualised” (Wray *et al*, 2003: 50). Gubrium and Holstein (1997: 114-115) illustrate this concept by metaphorically speaking of “interactional scaffolding” that is used to construct social reality. Within the social constructionist perspective, Harris (2008: 232-235) suggests that there are two further distinctions: Interpretive Social Constructionism (ISC) and Objective Social Constructionism (OSC). According to Harris, ISC supports the general social constructionist view, which is grounded in such meaning-making practices as pragmatics and ethnomethodology, and maintains that meanings are “created, learned, used and revised” (*ibid*: 233) during social interaction. By contrast, OSC aligns with a more essentialist view; that meaning is not created during social interaction. OSC focuses on meaning that is constrained by “social forces” (Harris, 2008: 234), such as class, race and gender, and it views a social identity is an inherent quality that endures throughout the life cycle: it is “static and decontextualized” (Wray *et al*, 2003: 50). This approach maintains that certain biological characteristics, such as



gender, race and sexuality, are ‘fixed’ and that an individual belongs to one of these categories.

Social constructionist theory argues that society has more influence over social identity than biological characteristics, and that identities are fluid and interactionally achieved. My study into how the over 50s construct their age identities and speak about work and retirement is framed by an interpretive social constructionist approach which focuses on contextualised meaning-making and identification strategies. This approach allows for other personal, social and cultural factors to affect how older workers and retirees speak about growing older and making age manifest.

Schilling (2013: 134) contends that during the construction of a social identity, talk can be influenced by perceived cultural and social norms relating to certain categories that people may identify with or disassociate themselves from (such as an age cohort); and that this talk may itself help to shape the way those social norms are created. Thus language is both constructed and constructive (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:102). Ylännö (2012: 3) supports the view that identity, (which reflects the notion of ‘self’), may be “socially and culturally constituted” during collaborative interaction.

In his work on ‘impression management’, Goffman (1971) maintains that people ‘perform’ in a certain way to project a particular image of themselves for the “benefit of other people” (ibid: 28), and that during the ‘performance’, certain “cues” are accepted or rejected by the audience to [help determine this particular image] (ibid: 58). Nikander (2002: 11) suggests that constructing an identity through discursive interaction may be said to be one way of ‘performing’ our identities, such as during narratives or conversations with other people. She labels this process “identity in action”; a process that Angouri (2012: 258) argues is influenced by the roles people

occupy or the groups they belong to. McKinlay and Dunnett (1998:50) further suggest that constructing an identity may involve “subtle negotiations” in a “collaborative enterprise” that involves all participants.

The social constructionist argument, as discussed above, suggests that the notion of ‘self’ may be negotiated allowing for different personal or socio-cultural identities in different contexts. Van Langenhove and Harré (1993: 81) suggest that these types of identity can be manifested through talk. I suggest that age may be both socio-cultural and personal when relating to work and retirement: an older person may construct an age-identity by positioning themselves in relation to their colleagues in a workplace context where ‘old’ may be considered to be nearing the State Pension Age (SPA) in their 60s. Personal age-identity may also relate to how a person perceives themselves during the ageing process in the life-span. For example, someone in their 60s may still have a parent living and therefore be considered ‘young’ relating to their family position. In my study, I will be examining how older people speak about age in a work-related context.

### 2.3 Older people and age-identity

This section examines studies that used Discourse Analysis (DA) to investigate how age identities are discursively constructed in non-workplace contexts. My own work on older workers’ age-identity, which bridges DA with other qualitative and quantitative research on this topic, is grounded in the theories and discursive strategies that are discussed below.

Arber and Ginn (1995: 5) suggest that there are three meanings of age that can be drawn upon when we discursively construct our identities: chronological age, social age and psychological age. Chronological age is determined by the year of birth; social age pertains to how we perceive we should behave in respect of chronological age to be socially acceptable; psychological age relates to how 'old' or how 'young' we feel which may not correlate to our chronological age at all. Laslett (1989) maintains that there are in fact five 'dimensions' of age. In addition to chronological and social age, he adds biological, personal and subjective age. I suggest that biological and chronological age relate to the existential aspects of identity, that is to say the characteristics that are 'fixed' from birth, whereas personal and subjective age may reflect a psychological perspective.

An example of how chronological age is used in age-identity construction was demonstrated by Coupland *et al* (1991:59). They argue that disclosure of chronological age (DCA) was the discursive age-categorisation strategy identified in a study to investigate how elderly women constructed their age identities during spoken interaction with their peers and younger women by examining a corpus of 40 video-taped "first-acquaintance" conversations between women aged 70-87 who were mostly widows, and younger married women aged 30-40 (ibid: 57). Twenty of the interactions were intergenerational between the 30-40 year olds and 70-80s year olds; ten interactions were between "peer-young"; and ten interactions were between "peer-elderly" (ibid: 57-58). The authors wanted to examine how the context affected the identity construction strategies employed by the participants. They concluded that the discursive strategies that were used by the older women were influenced by the social context of the intergenerational communication, including the younger women's expectations of the lifestyles of the older women.

The following exchange is an example of age-identity construction through disclosure of chronological age which, Coupland *et al* suggest, is quite unusual during a first encounter with a stranger, especially for a woman (ibid: 59). A younger woman has complimented the older woman with whom she was speaking, on how ‘good’ she looked for her age. They have been speaking about a friend of the younger woman’s mother:

Old woman:            “how old is she?  
Young woman:        she’s seventy two  
Old woman:            I’m seventy eight  
Young woman:        [astonished] are you?  
Old woman:            yes  
Young woman         [gasps] gosh you’re marvellous aren’t you? (ibid: 144).

The authors suggest the older woman’s disclosure of her chronological age might have been designed to elicit a compliment from the younger woman: a “physiognomic observation” (ibid: 145) that she looked younger than her “age-in-years” (Charalambidou, 2011). This exchange exemplifies incongruence between chronological and social age.

Discursively constructing an age-identity through the disclosure of chronological age is also suggested by Nikander (2002:75) to be a “quantifiable” process, whereby numbers are used to describe someone. In a sociolinguistic study of interview talk of Finnish women and men, she investigated how people manifested their identities at a mid-life stage in their lifespan, specifically when nearing their 50<sup>th</sup> birthdays. She argues however, that using numbers alone as a discursive strategy when constructing an age-identity may be problematic from the point of view of how a person is perceived. Culturally shared images and expectations of someone at a specific age may be invoked

that do not provide a true representation of that person, and may connote negative attributions associated with old age and vulnerability. This may be especially true when relating to how ‘old’ a person ‘looks’ as indicated by the example below from Sacks (1992a : 44) relating to a patient in an emergency psychiatric hospital:

“A: How old are you Mr. Bergstein?

B: I’m 48, I look much younger. I look about 35, and I’m quite ambitious and quite idealistic and very inventive and conscientious and responsible.”

Nikander (2002: 75-76) suggests that the string of characteristics self-attributed by Mr Bergstein when asked how old he is, indicates that he believes his age (48) to have negative connotations associated with decline. Hence his assertion that he looks “about 35”: the age which he associates with the positive attributions as indicated in his response. Sacks (1992a:44) argues that Mr Bergstein is using a ‘modifier’: a discursive strategy designed to disassociate himself from the negative attributes he perceives to relate to the category of people who are past their prime. Charalambidou (2011: 158) supports the concept of older people disassociating themselves from perceived negative attributes of ageing. In an investigation into how Greek Cypriot women aged 62-79 constructed their age-identities during conversation, she concluded that whilst participants accepted their “age-in-years” (ibid: 118), they distanced themselves from perceived negative attributes associated with old age. These examples of constructing an age-identity by disassociating oneself from the [perceived] negative attributes of ageing support Arber and Ginn’s (1995) concept of a psychological meaning of age (cf. this chapter, 2.3).

Nikander (2002) maintains that we construct our age-identity according to the particular stage-of-life membership we ascribe to, which may fluctuate according to the situation

in which we find ourselves. This view is supported by Sacks (1992a, in Nikander, 2002:68), who argues that we categorise ourselves as ‘young’ or ‘old’ depending on whom we are talking to at that time. So a female of 60 in the workplace may perceive herself to be ‘old’, as the current UK retirement age for a woman starts at about 60. Conversely, the same female attending a day centre for the elderly, where the age-range may vary from people in their 70s, 80s or 90s, may perceive herself to be ‘young’. Sacks (1992a), who analysed audio-taped conversations obtained from a suicide counselling hotline in Los Angeles, suggests the notion of “category sets” (ibid: 40), whereby a ‘membership categorisation device’ (MCD) (ibid: 44-45) is used by drawing on a specific discursive repertoire as a strategy to claim membership of a social group. For example, ‘family’ may be a membership device, and ‘grandmother’ may be a sub-category within this device. A person wishing to construct her age within the membership of a family, may thus describe herself as a grandmother. A stage-of-life ‘device’ may also relate to an age cohort membership: ‘elderly woman’ or ‘old man’ may be labels used by people to self-categorise themselves, or categorise others in this way. These age-related terms are also suggested by Charalambidou (2011: 96) to be “explicit” old-age categories. She contends that these categories may not necessarily be linked to an older person’s chronological age, but may be used as a generic, homogenising terms for any older person, irrespective of age. I suggest that this concept supports Nikander’s (2002) and Sacks’ (1992a) argument that age-identities are influenced by the context in which they are constructed.

Another discursive ‘age-categorisation process’ (Coupland *et al*, 1991: 69, 81) involves using self-identifying age-related labels, such as ‘pensioner’, to construct an age-identity. The concept that people manifest their ages by using self-attributed [age-related] labels pertaining to life-stage categories was supported by Hendricks (1995):

“Self-perceived age identification is a major component of one’s self concept over the life course. Age identity is a personal assessment of one’s relative position in an age-graded system” (Hendricks, 1995: cited in Nikander (2002: 12).

The notion of constructing contextual age-identity is developed by Jones (2006), who theorises that people ‘position’ themselves by discursively claiming membership of a certain age-group category (Sacks, 1992a: 40-48; Nikander, 2002: 45), and by relating themselves to their “socially constructed” chronological age (Jones, 2006: 83). This view supports Arber and Ginn’s (1995: 40-48) proposal of age-identity construction by drawing upon ‘social age’ and ‘chronological age’.

Jones (2006) explored the way in which women over 60 positioned themselves as older people during interviews to discuss sex and intimate relationships in later life, focussing on the discursive ways in which they represented their views on whether sexual activity in later life was appropriate or inappropriate for their age cohort. Age-identity construction was evidenced in the analysis of data that were elicited during 23 interviews with women aged from 61 – 90. Jones identified that the word ‘older’ was used by the respondents in preference to the word ‘old’. She concluded that this positioned the respondents in a way that was relative to their age with no modification, (ibid: 89): “‘older’ is relative but ‘old’ is absolute”, which, she suggests, explains why people do not usually refer to themselves as ‘old’. She further argued that the linguistic repertoire for older age included several terms such as ‘old’, ‘older’ and ‘senior’ (ibid: 81), and that the meanings and implications of these terms were contextual, and dependent on the discourse that was being analysed. Thus, positioning a retiree as ‘old’ may be dependent on the chronological ages of other retirees who are younger. Jones (2006: 83) stated that she only reveals the chronological ages of her respondents [in this

study] in order to demonstrate whether or not they position themselves as older, as exemplified below:

A female volunteer aged 75 positioned herself as not being ‘older’ during a discussion about the publication of a book on the sexual needs of older people by a [volunteer] group, to which she belonged:

“What the group is doing. Well I think basically it’s trying to alleviate a lot of the anxiety that *older people* have over sexual issues. And it’s worth doing because the anxiety *they* suffer so often can destroy a relationship at a time of life when it’s the most important thing *they* can have.” (my italics) (ibid: 83).

This respondent speaks about the ‘older people’ in the group belonging to an age cohort to which she does not claim membership, thereby ‘othering’ older people, and reinforces this stance by using the word ‘they’ twice. Jones argues that the respondent is distancing herself from the perceived sexual problems that may be experienced by other people in the group in addition to their age.

Another perspective on age-identity construction was proposed by Coupland *et al* (1991: 62). They suggest that a ‘temporal framing process’ which relates to a “time past” perspective may be used to inform about current or recent situations, whereby an event is located by reference to past events (Boden and Bielby (1983), in Coupland *et al*, 1991:63). One example they cite was an elderly woman who positioned herself as an older person by stating that she had been a widow for over thirty years. Within the temporal framing process she used the time-past perspective when locating her widowhood to construct her identity as an older woman.



A further process that uses temporal framing to function as a marker of an elderly identity is by associating oneself with the past, independently of any recent or present-time frame reference (Coupland *et al*, *ibid*: 64). This may occur during discursive strategies relating to past events, such as during reminiscing, when elderly people may disassociate themselves from the present. Other narratives that make reference to the social, cultural and historical changes that have occurred over the years are the third temporal framing process identified by Coupland *et al* (1991). This process may be used by elderly people when referring to the past in relation to the present, such as the observation that “times are so different aren’t they? Everything’s fast isn’t it? You’ve got to sort of run with it” (*ibid*: 65). Such utterances signal acceptance of a changing world in which people have to accommodate to post-modern developments. Change over time is also suggested by Nikander (2002: 69-74; 2009: 870-872) to be a process of “provisional continuity”, a notion which was evidenced when people (in their 50s) referred to present-day situations that they perceived will change over time in relation to ageing, and that this manifested itself in talk about age-related changes, such as illness and decrement. An example of this is given below where a female respondent (L) was speaking to the interviewer (PN) about the impending changes that will accompany ageing:

L        “So there’s like nothing (.) that would’ve clearly marked (.) that now your age comes in the way

PN        yeah

L        I mean it will surely sta(h)rt little by little when you start to ache here and there but not like (2.0) I can’t say that yet at least” (Nikander, 2009: 872).

Nikander suggests that the respondent is marking that “nothing (has changed)” describing this as an example of Extreme Case Formulation (ECF) (Edwards and Potter,

1992, in Edwards 2000:348) to deny the widely held perception that [things] do change as we get older and “age comes in the way”. However, the impending possibility of change, such as illness and decrement, is acknowledged by the respondent: “little by little when you start to ache here and there”; mitigated by the utterance: “but...I can’t say that yet”. The interviewee is actively negotiating her lifespan identity within the context of change and ageing. This theme will be followed up in my own data analysis.

The studies in this section have investigated how identities are discursively constructed through negotiation with other participants during interaction and in response to differing social contexts. My study will investigate older age-identity construction and its related conversational strategies relating to workplace identities. In the next section, to bridge the DA aspect of my work with other qualitative research into older workers, I will examine a small set of studies that were conducted in a workplace setting with people over 50.

#### 2.4 Older people in the workplace

From April 2011 the UK government started phasing out a mandatory retirement age: by 2020 it is estimated that almost one third of the working population will be aged over 50 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2011). This legislation extends the 2005 European Commission’s recommendation that all Member States raise retirement ages to address the problematic economic situation that could result from falling birth rates and rising life expectancy (McNair, 2006). Concurrent with the increasing numbers of older people in employment is a growth of research into topics relating to older workers and retirement transitions (Phillipson, 2004; Loretto, Vickerstaff and White, 2006; McNair, 2006). However, it should be mentioned that many of these studies focus on

pension provision and financial management after leaving work. The following three studies that I have chosen to exemplify represent a small sample of studies that focus on workplace issues other than those which are financially related.

#### 2.4.1 Brooke and Taylor (2005)

Brooke and Taylor (2005) explored the dynamics of age-interaction in the workplace to examine the perceived challenges and barriers to the employment of older workers, and the possible benefits to businesses and older workers themselves of age-awareness in management and HR policies. They concluded that there was evidence of ageist attitudes towards older employees, especially relating to the provision of training in new technologies and career progression.

As a result of management receptiveness to their research objectives, Brooke and Taylor selected four organisations in the UK and Australia which employed blue and white-collar workers: a despatch subsidiary of a large retail chain, a glass manufacturer, a retail distribution centre, and a further education college which provided vocational training. The age of older participants was not specified, however, the data evidences that age was made salient during the interactions. The methodology used in the study of the two distribution centres was a three-part process. An initial quantitative analysis of data extrapolated from HR records; a qualitative analysis of data from face-to-face semi-structured interviews; and via focus groups. Participants included managers and operatives with equal numbers of men and women aged from 20 to people in their 60s. Interview topics included training and career progression, adaptability to new technologies, age stereotypes, and retirement options.

The authors established that new technologies had just been introduced in both the Australian and UK distribution centres to modernise and improve despatch processes, which had resulted in a substantial reduction in the workforce. Younger members of staff had been trained successfully on the use of the new technology and rewarded financially. The study found that this had produced age-related tensions in the workplace between younger and older employees, and that older workers felt that they had been overlooked for training in the new systems. One male employee asserted that he was nervous about being trained, which he ascribed to being older, and suggested that some people learnt more quickly than others. He felt that some older people would have benefitted from a longer period of training:

“I was unsure, uncomfortable and a bit nervous about learning something different. *It was because of our age. I’ve never done it before. If someone worked with us on the job for another month until we got the hang of it. Some catch on quick, others not*” (ibid: 420) (my italics).

However, other older workers stated that they were uncomfortable with the idea of having to be trained in the new system of working and there was a perception by them that the younger people would adapt more readily. One older female commented:

“People who have been here a while are threatened by the new scanning system ... *I’m just an old cow, leave it to the young ones*” (Brooke and Taylor, 2005:420): (my italics).

No contextual details were given for this example, such as the chronological age of the participant; therefore it is difficult to interpret whether or not this was an ironic comment. However, the use of the age-salient label ‘old cow’ suggests that the female is positioning

herself as an older member of the workforce who is not as competent as her younger colleagues, and is also demonstrating a self-perceived incompetence based on her age. Coupland *et al* (1991: 140) contend that using age as an excuse for negative behaviour and perceptions of 'self' is an example of an "accounting pattern", whereby older people try to mitigate their actions by viewing age as a form of "self-handicapping". I suggest that the participant in my study may also have been constructing an self-assessment of how she is viewed by other people.

In the glass manufacturing company, many older members of staff were rarely selected for training in new technologies, which resulted in some opting to accept the early retirement package that was offered by the company. One older employee who had elected to stay on at work argued that the organisation had lost the skills and experience of his retired colleagues, constructing a positive stance about the attributes of older workers:

"They have let all the *good ones* go" and "[the company has] lost the *best staff, experience-wise*" (ibid: 423): (my italics).

Coupland *et al* (1991: 140) argue that taking a positive view of achievements despite being older is a 'disjunctive' strategy whereby a person may "claim credit against normative expectations" that may not be actualised. This formulation contrasts with the example above of the 'accounting pattern' which is used to offer age as a reason for perceived negative behaviour.

Brooke and Taylor conclude that the older employees in these three organisations were perceived by managers to be less able than younger people to adapt to the new technologies and ways of working. They argue that this perception could have resulted in

a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (ibid: 421), whereby the older workers themselves believed that they could not learn the new methods. Lack of training in these new technologies may also have led to lack of career progression for the older workers, and may have accounted for some people taking early retirement.

The authors’ findings from the UK further education college were very briefly reported. No interview data were exemplified by the authors. However, many older people stated that, even though they had more teaching experience, they did not perceive themselves to be as effective in managing large classes and difficult students as their younger counterparts. Nevertheless, one older lecturer gave a positive evaluation: he observed that his experience more than compensated for any age-related loss of vitality.

#### 2.4.2 Trethewey (2001)

Research into age identity construction in the workplace by middle-class, mid-life professional women in the US was conducted by Trethewey (2001), who investigated how, through their narratives, women reproduced and resisted the “discourse of decline” (ibid: 188) that they experienced at work. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with 15 women aged from 40 to 65, who described themselves as “professional” (ibid: 190), with the resulting narratives being analysed using qualitative coding. Questions included: “What does ageing mean to you?”, “What is your experience of growing older at work?”, and “When are you made aware of your age?”(ibid: 100).

The findings indicated that many of the women felt they had suffered economic and material loss, and had been victims of ageism (ibid: 192-194). They had also experienced difficulties with reducing their hours of work, being under-utilised for their

level of ability, and feeling a sense of isolation (ibid: 199-200). However, Trethewey adds that many women resisted this negative discourse by articulating positive benefits of ageing, such as an increasing acceptance of their ageing bodies (ibid: 197-199), less concern about the opinions of others (ibid: 209), and the confidence accrued through life experience, as articulated by an administrator in higher education who was in the 55-60 age bracket:

“Because of my age, I exude confidence and knowing and maturity, and I’ve gained respect from that ... And it’s nice, very nice.” (ibid: 201).

Positive age identities were also constructed by participants through associations with other interests outside of work. This may indicate that there are divergences between work-related and non-work related identities, and supports the suggestion earlier in this chapter of contextual identity construction (cf. 2.3). However, one kindergarten teacher in her early 50s in Trethewey’s study appears to relate her non-work identity to her personal identity:

“I do take a lot of my identity from my nonwork activities, you know music, gardening, travel, languages. Those are all really important to me. I think I define my work by who I am... A lot of my interests define my work more than my work defines me” (ibid:212).

#### 2.4.3 Maier (2009)

A further study into work-related older age identity construction was conducted by Maier (2009), who examined “unemployment in old age and old age in unemployment” (ibid: 13) by analysing data elicited during counselling interviews with older

unemployed Austrian men and women (ibid: 56-57). The study focused on the operational policy of the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS), examining how the participants' age identity constructions related to understandings and consequences of unemployment for the policy makers.

The ages of the participants are not specified, but as Maier herself argues, "unemployed people find themselves in the category 'old' at an age that would be considered rather young in other contexts" (2009: 13), suggesting that it is difficult for unemployed middle-aged or older people to find work, whereas in a familial or other non-work related environment, they would not be regarded as old. This appears to indicate ageism in the workplace that is not reflected in other social contexts. Maier states that references to being older by the participants themselves were made in 80 out of 118 counselling sessions (ibid: 100), which may reinforce a perception that employers are ageist. Definitions of what it meant to be 'older' were divergent: self-categorisation of positive attributes were exemplified by participants who spoke of their social competencies, knowledge gained through life experience and senior privileges (ibid: 100); other, more negative views were associated with possible cognitive and physical decline, age discrimination, and the fear of "running out of time" [in respect of finding employment] (ibid: 100). Maier found that the negative view of being older was perceived as an "obstacle" (ibid: 135): this was discursively constructed by respondents in 34 of the 69 interviews (almost 50%), whilst the perception of older age as an "asset" was manifested in only 12 interviews (23%).

Maier concluded that the most widely held perception by participants was that being older was a disadvantage to obtaining employment. She conceptualised this life stage as one of decline and decrement and thus positioning the older unemployed as being disadvantaged when seeking work.



In this section, studies concluded that the older participants had represented both positive and negative age-related views in a range of work-related contexts. It is difficult to assess how the context of their employment roles may have influenced some participants' views about their employers' perceived ageist attitudes. It would have been helpful to have been provided with in-depth details of the older workers' employment histories and other variables that could have influenced these perceptions.

Older unemployed people constructed more negative age-identities than positive ones when speaking about seeking work. However, these constructions were in the context of being out of work. All participants engaged in self-appraisal about their identities as older workers, demonstrating consistent themes about the advantages and disadvantages of being older in the workplace. This indicates that age is a relevant factor on older workers' self-identification. My study will focus on older people who are still working or who have retired, examining how similar themes may be discursively represented. Results of my analysis will be compared to the findings of the research in this section. Studies that relate to the perceived positive and negative aspects of being retired will be examined in the next section.

## 2.5 Older people and retirement

It has been argued that it is difficult to define the concept of retirement (Vickerstaff and Cox, 2005: 77). However, other researchers and authors have submitted several, often conflicting definitions of this post-work life-stage. I suggest that the various definitions relate to the findings of the studies in which they are situated. Each person's retirement, whether a transitional process or an immediate cessation, will reflect each individual's circumstances, as will be exemplified by the review of studies in this

section. Many of the issues that were addressed in these studies relate to themes that I will explore in my research, such as reasons for retirement and the experiences of being retired.

Before examining other studies in detail, it is pertinent to cite the observations of other authors relating to retirement. A positive stance is taken by Hockey and James (2003: 102), who speak of the “crumbling” of traditional age-appropriate traditions with retirement being “re-invented” as a time of “transitions to a new life, rather than simply the end of an old one”. This view is supported by Vickerstaff and Cox (2005: 78), who conceptualise retirement as the “dawning of a new golden age”. Rudman (2006: 181) argues that retirement is an “institutionally created marker of old age”, suggesting that withdrawal from the labour market and being in receipt of a pension signifies the entry into our final years, a concept extended by Weiss and Bass (2002) and Gilleard and Higgs (2005) who describe retirement as the ‘third age’ of the lifespan, which precedes the ‘fourth age’ of disability and decline. Ekerdt (2010: 69) suggests that retirement marks the “boundary” between being at work and “afterward”; and Bernard and Phillipson (2004: 353) speak of the “social institution” of retirement, whereby the social interaction and integration of leisure time and activities are substituted for a working environment. Retirement as a gradual transitional process of withdrawal from work is proposed by Savishinsky (2002: 18), who speaks of a “new life stage”. However, Weiss (2005: 40) disagrees, arguing that you are either at work or you are retired; there is no “blurred” transition. This view is supported by Sargent, Bataille, Vough, and Lee (2011: 323), who also speak of the “instantaneous flash cut” of retirement, with no gradual transition. A similar idea is expressed by “cliff edge” retirement (Loretto and White: 2006:504). I suggest that these numerous definitions of retirement do not allow for the many differing circumstances in which people leave work, and which may affect

the way in which they represent their personal age-identities. For example, psychological identity may be affected by the financial changes that can result from a reduction in income resulting in a lowering of living standards. Retirement could thus also be defined as a time of new challenges, and possibly new opportunities.

### 2.5.1 Vickerstaff and Cox (2005)

An investigation into the factors that influenced people's decisions to retire was conducted by Vickerstaff and Cox (2005), who examined how much control individuals had over how and when they chose to retire. The research focused on how much employees knew and understood about their employers' retirement policies and pension fund arrangements which could affect their decisions to retire. Much of the data that was gathered is salient to my own work on discursive representations of reasons for, and experiences of, retirement.

Participants were drawn from two large organisations in the south of England: a local government authority which employed predominantly female white-collar workers aged over 40 years, and a private transport company which employed a dominantly male, white and blue-collar workforce (ibid: 81). The sample of sixty people were categorised into three groups: employees aged 40-50 who were said not to have yet considered retirement; older workers who were approaching retirement; and employees who had retired within the last five years. The authors state that the rationale for this categorisation was to reflect the concept that retirement is a process which comprises three stages: pre-retirement, retirement itself and post-retirement. Human Resource and Pension Fund Managers together with Trade Union representatives were interviewed for

details of employers' retirement policies and pension fund provision, prior to semi-structured interviews being held with the participants themselves.

Before presenting the results of this research, it should be noted that individual ages are not given for employees whose data is cited, however, this fact does not detract from the value of the material as the themes that are being investigated relate to the reasons for, and experiences of, retirement and not age-identity construction per se.

Addressing the 'pre-retirement' element of the study, employees were asked what they were looking forward to [during retirement]. The authors report that in most instances, retirement was not viewed as a "stopping point" (ibid: 84), but as providing the opportunity to spend more time on existing interests or engage in new activities, as evidenced by one male transport manager:

"Basically doing what I want to do *when I want to do it*...I mean I play golf and I do quite a lot of further education..." (ibid: 84): my italics).

This response indicates that this respondent is constrained by having to work. However, a divergent view is offered by a local government male employee:

"No I've never planned to retire. I can't see myself ever *not doing anything*" (ibid: 84): (my italics).

The inference that can be made here is that retirement is a time of inactivity: "*not doing anything*". Being inactive after exiting work appears to be a concern of this employee, who appears to reject the notion of his own retirement. It would also suggest that this employee does not have any interests outside of his work or that within the frame of being retired; he construes 'doing' to mean 'work'.

Keeping busy in retirement appears to be a concern of one retired local government manager who commented that he was considering taking on another job, but in a less demanding position:

*“I got the itch and wanted to do something, so I popped into the employment bureau...and told them that although I had been a personnel manager, I only wanted a mundane post to keep me occupied”* (ibid: 84): (my italics).

Getting ‘the itch’ is a metaphorical expression that may be understood to imply being restless and not satisfied with the ‘status quo’. By stating that he wanted something to keep him ‘occupied’ the retiree is expressing his concern that he may not have had enough activities to fill his time [in retirement], which he feels is important.

Another retired local government male worker also stated that he would have preferred to stay on at work. When asked by the authors why this was, he responded:

*“I think it’s having a bit of a purpose really, a bit of purpose in something to do. There’s a reason to get up, you have to go to work, you work, you earn money, you earn money and you can do whatever so just one thing follows the other. You just need a reason to get out of bed in the morning really I think”* (ibid: 89): (my italics).

The authors suggest that this response signifies that some retirees were fearful of giving up work and losing the social interaction and routine associated with being at work (ibid: 89). The theme of needing a purpose after leaving work has not been further explored in this study. My own investigation will examine how older people who are still working, as well as people who have retired, speak about how they perceive spending their time in retirement.

Vickerstaff and Cox (2005:91) concluded that this study identified a pattern of individualised choice in respect of reasons for deciding to retire or staying on at work. However, all things being equal, they suggest that there is no “agreed language of retirement” (ibid: 91) that people can use to summarise their own issues and experiences, which has made it difficult for them to construct their own post-work identities. This closely links with the Research Questions (RQs) for my study which will examine *how* older people speak about being retired, and will help to inform the body of future discourse analytic work into this topic.

#### 2.5.2 Loretto and White (2006)

The next two studies in this section examine older workers’ perspectives and expectations of retirement. Loretto and White (2006) conducted a study as part of a larger project commissioned by The Scottish Enterprise Agency, which investigated the employability of older people in Scotland, where there was government concern over the low numbers of over 50s in employment (Randall, 2002, cited in Loretto and White (2006:496).

Data for the study was elicited from focus groups conducted in four urban and rural areas in Scotland which had been selected to exemplify the diversity of employment in the country. Participants were drawn from public and private sector organisations of varying sizes (from 2 to 18,000 employees), and included those related to finance, education, local government, hospitality, manufacturing and care providers. The topic to be discussed was “older workers in the Scottish labour market” (ibid: 497). The authors argue that this generalised topic may have elicited a broader depth of discussion than specifically targeted questions that could constrain themes of talk. The discussion was facilitated by asking

participants about plans for the future. For example, they were asked what they would do if they won the lottery (ibid: 498).

The main themes that emerged from Loretto and White's findings related to work expectations and the age at which people thought they might retire. Most people stated that they expected to continue to work after State Pension Age (SPA), or were already doing so. The main reasons given for staying on at work were financial. Some people had personal or family commitments, such as being single parents, or having to fund children's education. Other, non-financial reasons, for staying at work included wanting to keep busy and maintaining work-related social interaction, a reason which was cited more often by women than men, especially women in part-time work. One female employee, who worked part-time, said that she now had more leisure time to spend on other things:

“I only work Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and it's *absolutely luxurious* and it's really good doing something you enjoy doing, with a whole lot of good people... Being part-time and having space to do other things as well” (ibid: 499):  
(my italics.)

Workplace stress was cited as a reason for early retirement by all who wanted to retire as early as they could. However, some employees took the stance that staying on at work had health benefits, and that premature death may even be due to early or enforced retirement. One informant aligned himself to the position of 'cause and effect' of retirement and death by relating to the example of his mother:

“My mother died at 61, and she blamed her pension book. She was healthy right up until she got it” (ibid: 499).

Lack of career progression and promotion of older people were also cited as possible reasons affecting decisions to retire. These views of ageism in the workplace mirrored those of other older employees in the last section:

“I think it would be highly unlikely in [company name] that they [management] would ask someone to further their career at age 55 plus” (ibid: 501).

Some older people themselves however, had ageist views, with the perception that performance declined with age, from 45 onwards, especially where manual work was involved, which may not apply in other work contexts. One older employee from a small manufacturing company suggested that he thought the over 60s were too old to be hired:

“I certainly wouldn’t employ someone at 60” (ibid: 502).

The type of work that older workers are engaged in may also affect their perceptions of retirement and how they construct their age-identities as retirees. Participants in my study were drawn from both blue and white-collar employment roles. In my analysis chapters that focus on retirement, I will discuss how views and opinions may be contextually influenced, as well as examining how they are formulated.

### 2.5.3 Parry and Taylor (2007)

Motivation at work and attitudes towards retirement were examined in a study by Parry and Taylor (2007). Twenty four in-depth interviews were conducted with an equal number of male and female workers (who were approaching SPA), from industrial and semi-rural areas of the UK, with a range of work experiences and socio-economic backgrounds (ibid: 581). The authors state that people constructed identities of



themselves as two distinct groups which the authors labelled as either ‘creative and professional’ or ‘workers’ or (ibid: 579). The ‘creative and professional’ people, categorised by the authors as “middle-class” (ibid: 585), were all highly trained and vocational: a concert pianist, film editor, writer, architect, textiles designer and lecturer. They said they did not envisage retiring, and the SPA had little meaning in respect of their career span: the authors suggest that work was “rooted” in their identities (ibid: 585-586). As an example, the film editor asserted: “I can never visualise myself not working, no. Even, let’s say, I won the lottery, I would be lost [without work].” (ibid: 588).

The attitudes of the ‘creative and professional’ group were found to be divergent from those of the ‘workers’ (typified as being employed in manufacturing or clerical occupations (ibid: 583)) who expressed the view that retirement was a ‘reward’ for which they had worked hard (ibid: 590). However, they voiced a concern about the loss of income and inactivity which they perceived could lead to ill health. They stated that they wanted the choice to continue working in retirement. As one textile mill worker explained: “it ain’t just money, but I don’t want to sit about at home.” (ibid: 590).

Parry and Taylor (2007: 596) concluded that respondents’ divergent attitudes and priorities towards work and retirement were influenced by their differing employment situations: the ‘creative and professional’ group were more committed to continuing to work in occupations that were perceived to be an extension of their everyday lives, whereas the ‘workers’ were happy to exit work or be given the opportunity to continue.

#### 2.5.4 Sargent, Bataille, Vough and Lee (2011)

The meanings of retirement for Canadian executive and managerial retirees were examined by Sargent, Bataille, Vough and Lee (2011). Several salient metaphors which were identified in retirees' talk are exemplified below: these were categorised for similar themes. The authors suggested that the use of these metaphors highlighted the various ways in which retirees understood and conceptualised retirement.

Semi-structured interviews were held with 15 female and 20 male executive and management retirees aged from 46-64 who had worked in a variety of private sector organisations (Sargent *et al*, 2011: 316). Informants, who had been retired for an average of three years, were asked to describe their career history, how and when they retired, what their expectations of retirement had been, and their experiences in retirement, both as newly-retired and "later" (ibid: 317), (no specific length of time is defined as 'later').

The analysis was reported to have identified four macro categories of meanings [of retirement]: loss, detox, renaissance and liberation (ibid: 319). Metaphorical phrases relating to loss, were voiced by 20 retirees to describe the transitional challenges from work to retirement, as exemplified by one respondent using a 'mixed' metaphor:

“...you feel that this is a big void. You are on the *border of a precipice* here”  
( my italics) (ibid: 318).

The authors define this response as constructing a threat to the retiree's identity, evoking a fear of being forgotten and a lack of purpose (ibid: 318).

Other metaphors that were used to describe a positive outlook on life after retirement were categorised by the authors as “renaissance and liberation” (ibid: 319); with one retired executive framing his life as a book when stating:

“Okay, *let’s turn the page*. Let’s do something else” (ibid: 319).

Another retired manager reported:

“... in my mind, fifty five was the kind of when the *golden handcuffs* came off me” (my italics) (ibid: 318).

The allusion to the “golden handcuffs” ‘coming off’ suggest that the respondent was constructing a pre-retirement identity of being constrained and restricted by a well-paid job, and was now looking forward to a time of newfound freedom. His handcuffs were described as being “golden”, which suggests that he felt imprisoned even though he earned a very good wage.

Sargent *et al* concluded that metaphors of negative perceptions were not dominant in their findings (ibid: 322). They add that people attributed different meanings to retirement over time: those who were newly-retired voiced their experiences as a search for meaning, whereas those who had been retired for a longer period reported that they had been able to accept and adapt to their new life-style. However, the demographics of the participants in this study, who were all retired executives or management personnel, may have resulted in the representations of more positive attitudes than could have otherwise been elicited from a broader demographic that included people who worked in less well-paid positions. In my study, I will be analysing data from people who held blue-collar positions before they retired, as well as retirees who were professional or in management: the possible use of metaphor as well as other discursive strategies will be

examined and discussed. Data from people who had recently retired will also be compared to the testimonies of people who had been retired for many years.

#### 2.5.5 Rudman (2006)

The final study to be reviewed in this section was conducted by Rudman (2006), who used Critical Discourse Analytic (CDA) methods to investigate the discursive constructions of retirement in a Canadian newspaper. She suggests that these media articles influence people's attitudes and behaviour, (ibid: 186) and in the context of retirement, encourage older people to resist or defy the effects of ageing through self-reflection and self-improvement activities.

Texts that were selected for analysis were sourced during 1999 and 2000 from Canada's largest circulating newspaper: *The Toronto Star*. 138 articles were categorised by topics including work and housing to identify different aspects of ageing, such as attitudes towards financial and social issues. The author cited several texts which, she suggests, discursively construct how an 'ideal' retiree should think and behave, and which were "consumer-based" or "producer-based" (ibid: 189). "Consumer-based" texts were typified as those which promote defying age and maximising retirement by engaging in activities such as having cosmetic surgery and joining exercise clubs: "Add years to your life and life to your years" and "Turn back your biological clock" (ibid: 190). "Producer-based" texts were found to encourage retirees to defy age through their own efforts, such as working to stay youthful: "If you rest you rust" and "Vow not to surrender to retirement" (ibid: 191).

Rudman concludes that “morally-laden messages” (ibid: 181) which include citing evidence of positive and negative case studies; information about social trends; and ‘expert’ opinion and research findings (ibid: 192), were used to influence how older people should think and act, resulting in constructions of “positive retirement” (ibid: 183). She argues that these discourses draw attention away from the “inevitability of eventual decline, disability and dependency” (ibid: 184). This may accompany the ageing process, and which may even encourage and sustain ageism by advocating an ‘age-resistant’ attitude for retirees, thereby perpetuating a negative perception that age and ageing are problematic. She adds that, although the study only took place over a two-year period, the discursive patterns that were identified may reflect wider trends (ibid: 198). Coffin and O’Halloran (2010: 112-113) suggest that the cumulative effect of regular exposure to texts which direct readers to evaluate certain things in certain ways (such as political opinions), may result in those readers’ attitudes being influenced. I suggest that this would be the primary aim of such texts. Rudman does not state how regularly the texts in her study appeared in *The Toronto Star*, but I propose that a regular readership will have been exposed to the inferences of ‘positive retirement’ over time.

Themes that were identified in this section relate to the foci of my own research, and will enable findings to be compared to the data analysis outlined in Chapters 4-6. The view that having a purpose and keeping busy and active in retirement was discursively represented by participants as a major concern: it was felt that these activities could defray ill-health and decline in old age. Rudman’s (2006) theory that this attitude may be influenced by a culture of ‘positive retirement’ that is being promoted by media texts will be examined in relation to my own potential findings and further discussed in Chapter 7. Adapting to change and needing a sense of purpose were said to be

important to achieve a successful retirement: these themes will also be explored in my study.

## 2.6 Summary

The studies reviewed in this chapter focused on two aspects of my study: a discourse analytic approach to how older age-identity is constructed, and how older people speak about work and retirement. Examples of discursive strategies used by older people to manifest their age-identities were outlined, and will frame my own analysis as discussed further in Chapter 4.

The chapter also discussed the concept of discursively constructing an age-identity through interactive negotiation. The interpretive social constructionist approach, which argues that identity construction is contextual and influenced by personal, social and cultural factors rather than chronological age, will inform my own study. How someone constructs an age-identity as an older worker may diverge from how they see themselves as an older person in other social scenarios, for example, in a familial role. It is all about the context.

My study uses focus groups and interviews to gather participant data which will enable an in-depth exploration of how older workers speak about their age-related identities, as well as their views on retirement. The next chapter will outline and discuss the organisational processes of how material was collected together with the methodological framework used for the discourse analytic approach.

## CHAPTER 3

### DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological processes for this study of how people over 50 discursively represent and negotiate their age identities relating to work and retirement. I will outline the empirical methods were employed to investigate this topic and discuss the rationale for the qualitative approach to data analysis.

Within the three specific Research Questions (RQs) as outlined in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.5) that relate to the over-arching theme for this study of older age-identity construction, various sub-themes were investigated. These include those relating to continuity and change, accepting or rejecting growing older, and how perceptions of certain behaviours in retirement relate to successful ageing.

Data was elicited through focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Operational processes relating to participant recruitment will be outlined, including documents relating to contacting organisations for volunteers; material to introduce focus group sessions; and participant demographic information. I will also briefly reflect on the choice of using focus groups and interviews as methods of data collection, how well they worked, and if anything could have been done differently.

The choice of Discourse Analysis (DA) as the primary method of analysis for my study will be explained and justified. Discursive strategies that may be used by participants to represent their views are able to be examined using DA: these will be discussed in this section. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be briefly overviewed as a method to

examine how newspaper texts and other ideological discourses, such as political debates and media interviews, which advocate certain patterns of behaviour for older people, may influence how these people think and behave. Finally the chapter will address issues relating to participant confidentiality and anonymity in a section on research ethics, and discuss who might actually benefit from this research.

### 3.2 Qualitative research

For this study into the older worker, I have chosen a qualitative approach. This section explains why I have decided upon qualitative rather than quantitative methodologies, and discusses the critique levelled at both approaches by some authors. Bryman (2001: 78, 282) suggests that researchers may criticise the methods they themselves are not using. Some studies however, combines both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, as exemplified in Brooke and Taylor's (2005) investigation of older workers as reviewed in the last chapter (cf. 2.4.1), where a quantitative analysis of HR records was used to identify suitable participants for interviews and focus groups which were qualitatively analysed. There is a growing trend in using mixed methods, for example, within CDA (Baker and Ellece, 2011: 26).

Examining 'how' people speak about certain issues (for example relating to work and retirement) suggests an inductive approach to a study, which is one of the fundamental characteristics of qualitative research (Bryman, 2001: 284-285; Rasinger, 2010: 51-52), where theory relating to discursive strategies may be derived from research findings. This may be compared to a deductive quantitative approach, which tests a scientific hypothesis that has already been deduced (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992:7; Bryman, 2001:9). However, a quantitative approach may also lead to theory building. One



advantage of a qualitative study is that it allows for participants to orient to the topic being investigated in differing social contexts, for example during a focus group session held in a workplace amongst colleagues. However, some researchers have suggested that qualitative methods are not ‘scientific’ as results are not able to be replicated successfully and subsequently tested against those of previous studies, which affects reliability and validity (Blalock and Blalock, 1982:81; Wood and Kroger, 2000:164). The use of triangulation, where multiple methods are used to investigate a phenomenon, may help to validate the research (Wood and Kroger, 2000; Bryman, 2006; Berg and Lune, 2014). Denzin (1978 in Ritchie and Lewis 2013:275) suggests that the use of triangulation in a study can focus on different methodologies to analyse the same data, such as both qualitative and quantitative, or combine different sources of data, for example, observation, interviews and narratives on the same topic. However, Potter and Wetherell (1987: 62-64) argue that the use of multiple sources of data to help determine the “correct” version of events is not necessary in discourse analytic studies where there is no “correct” version: interpretation of data findings should be warranted by the data itself, and may be dependent on the context in which material is garnered.

Reliability of repeated findings across samples may also be a requirement for warranting the ‘soundness’ of results. Lewis and Ritchie (2003: 270-271) raise concerns about the reliability and validity of qualitative research when compared to quantitative methods. They argue that being “sustainable” and “well-grounded” are needed for a study to be replicable. However, it has been argued that qualitative studies are “dynamic” (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, *ibid*: 271), and that the constant shifting of focus and topic during an investigation precludes it from being repeated. Another criticism that is levelled at qualitative methods is that interpretation of data is, to an extent, subjective (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson, 1992, 132-133;

Bell, 1993: 6; Johnstone, 2000:3), and thus cannot be generalised to a wider sample in the same way as the findings from quantitative studies. Lewis and Ritchie (2003) contend that generalisation of findings in a qualitative study may not extend to other contexts or broader theoretical concepts, and that any generalisation is contingent on the strength of evidence [of replication]:

“It is the collective nature of the phenomena that have been generated by the study participants and the meaning that they have attached to them that would be expected to repeat.” (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003: 271).

My study into the older worker addresses the issue of a collective phenomenon: all people over 50 in paid employment would be able to provide spoken data in a workplace context that related to their identity construction. This could provide material for a discourse analytic replication of my study: future research could use the same methodological processes and the same context. Wood and Kroger (2000:164) maintain that meaning is “inseparable” from context in sociological study. In my study, replication of the methodology would allow for the reliability of my findings to be supported. However, all qualitative analysis is open to challenge, and, as stated above, should be warranted by the data itself.

I suggest that a qualitative approach is the most appropriate for my study, where the focus of the investigation is on talk, as this allows for themes and patterns to be identified during participants’ age-identity construction, and speaking about retirement. A controlled environment, where the researcher structures and leads the investigation, (which is characteristic of quantitative research), would not be conducive to the discourse analytic process used in my study. Systematic organisation during analysis to “describe, classify and connect” as part of “identifiable processes” (Dey, 1993, in

Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:8) allows for findings to be reviewed and possibly replicated. Woolcott (1994, *ibid*: 8-9) argues that data should “speak for themselves” during a process which encompasses “description, analysis and interpretation”. I will outline the processes used in my study to identify, classify, describe, analyse and interpret participant data later in this chapter. (I will be examining how people speak about their views and opinions with a particular focus on the discursive strategies they use to represent their feelings.) The use of focus group sessions to elicit data will help to facilitate interactive discussion between participants relating to the social world surrounding older workers and retirement.

Bryman (2001: 283) challenges the process by which participants are often selected during qualitative research, which he argues may affect results. I address this issue in the following sections, which will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using focus group and interview methodologies.

### 3.3 Focus groups

Focus groups were first used in the 1930s by academics and social scientists as a source of data for qualitative analysis: an alternative methodology to direct interviews and questionnaires, which elicit data for quantitative surveys (Schensul, 1999:60; Morgan, 1998, in Puchta and Potter, 1999:315). During World War II, focus groups were used to study the effects of mass communication relating to issues such as war propaganda, patriotism and how the army felt about the war (Markova, Linell, Grossen and Orvig, 2007:32). From World War II until the 1980s they were almost exclusively used for market research purposes (Morgan, 1998, in Puchta and Potter, 1999:315; Kotler, 1997, in Pole and Lampard, 2002:132), and political opinion testing (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999:

1). Over the past thirty years, the use of focus groups by social science researchers has become increasingly frequent (Morgan (1997: 2; Edley and Litosseliti, 2010: 156). Examples of studies using this methodology include investigations into how people talk about environmental sustainability (Myers and Macnaghten, 1998), climate change mitigation measures (Stoll-Kleemann, O’Riordan and Jaeger, 2001), and genetically modified crops and food (Cook, 2004). Other studies into older people in the workplace that used focus groups were examined in Chapter 2.3: Brooke and Taylor (2005) and Chapter 2.4: Loretto and White (2006). In my study into the older worker, analysis of data from focus group sessions was used to guide the discussion in subsequent interviews.

### 3.3.1 Structure and purpose

Focus groups usually comprise 6-12 participants who have been brought together specifically to discuss a topic of mutual interest that may be relevant in some way to their lives or lifestyles. Sink (1991:197, in Brown, 2000:55) suggests that this research tool is successful because focus groups are “grounded in the human tendency to discuss issues and ideas in groups”. Myers and Macnaghten (1999:175) further argue that the strength of focus groups lies in the “liveliness, complexity and unpredictability of the talk”, where the researcher is able to gather data about people’s attitudes, opinions, experiences and responses to certain issues: what Myers and Macnaghten (ibid: 174) suggest may be labelled “feelings”. The focus group setting, therefore, allows for participant negotiation during discursive interaction to construct individual opinions and consensus or conflicting attitudes.

Focus group sessions usually last between 60-90 minutes. All discussion is audio (and sometimes also video) recorded. Resulting data may then be transcribed by the

researcher as part of the analysis. Macnaghten and Myers (2004: 66-67) suggest that there are two main contrasting purposes for focus group research: market research, where a speedy consensus of views is sought on products or services that may be used by manufacturers, retailers or service providers to influence their policies and strategies; and social science research, where analysis of participants' interaction (including aspects of their language use) during discussion may result in perceived patterns and themes being used to generalise behaviour to people outside the focus group. Unlike market research, social science research does not seek a consensus of view. Instead, divergent opinions elicited from one group may be introduced to subsequent groups, thus contextually framing one group's discussion on the views of another.

Kruger (1994, in Myers, 1998: 85) advocates using a "non-threatening" neutral environment setting for a focus group session. This view is supported by Macnaghten and Myers (2004:65), who add that informal settings may be conducive to people airing their beliefs and opinions, and that in other, more formal settings, people may feel constrained and less willing to discuss their views. Markova, Linell, Grossen and Orvig (2007:32) suggest that the focus group format is not dissimilar to the social scenarios of cafes, pubs and in streets, where the same sort of talk may take place about socially relevant issues: people, possibly from different backgrounds, can agree with or challenge each other's views and opinions. However, Macnaghten and Myers (2004: 67) observe that some informal settings, such as people's homes or public houses, may pose logistical and environmental problems. They argue that the seating configurations in some people's houses may not allow for all participants to have face-to-face interaction, which could discourage some people from submitting their views; and that public houses may have a "noisy bar atmosphere", (ibid: 67), which could "send the wrong signals" to the

participants about the researcher's attitude towards the study, and which could also prevent the production of a good quality audio recording.

It may be that in some circumstances a more formal setting may be conducive to discussion on a certain topic, and that to state that most successful focus groups take place in informal settings is to over-generalise. If, for example, the topic to be discussed is how people feel about being older at work (the subject of my study), then, I suggest, it is reasonable to hold the focus group in the workplace, which is not an informal setting. The most suitable settings are possibly those in which all participants feel comfortable enough to speak out without feeling constrained by the atmosphere or the setting, whether too formal or too informal. When selecting a venue, the moderator should also take into consideration the demographics of the participants, whether they are known to each other or are strangers, and the topic to be discussed. This setting helps to facilitate an open and useful discussion in which all participants will be able to negotiate their views during the interaction.

### 3.3.2 Role of the moderator

Moderating during a focus group has been observed to be a demanding role that should ideally be undertaken by two people: a moderator and an assistant moderator (Watts and Pickering, 2005:7). Watts and Pickering recommend that the assistant should fulfil a non-participatory, supporting role before, during and after the discussion by organising the seating arrangements and being responsible for setting up and monitoring the recording equipment. Macnaghten and Myers (2004: 66) agree that two people should be involved in focus group activity, as was their usual practice. However, the roles they suggest differ from those of Watts and Pickering. Macnaghten and Myers (1998: 66-67) state that the

moderator's role should be one of logistical planning (for example, participant recruitment, organising recording equipment, room bookings, parking, and refreshments), as well as facilitating the discussion and providing a readable transcript. A second researcher should be responsible for the final detailed transcript and its analysis, focusing on the interaction and aiming to understand why people said what they did, and how they said it.

In the course of my study of the older worker, I conducted focus groups alone, which posed many challenges. Planning and organisation included identifying and contacting companies for participants (Appendix 1), producing a recruitment poster (Appendix 2), arranging dates and times, and writing presentational material to introduce sessions (Appendix 3). Audio equipment had to be operated and notes taken (to help guide subsequent transcription) as well as trying to keep talk focused on the research questions. I also adopted a "less interventionist" style (Macnaghten and Myers, 2004:71), which allowed people to speak freely and ensured that everyone had the opportunity to express their views. Myers (1998:85) has suggested that the effectiveness and success of the discussion is dependent on the "tension" between the constraints imposed by the moderator in respect of ratifying participant speakers and keeping the discussion on topic, and the interaction of the participants themselves, who may "interpret and shift" what is being spoken about (ibid:85). In the groups I conducted, talk was focused around two main themes:

- 1 How do older people feel about working in a mixed-age environment?
- 2 How do the participants feel about retirement?

The following questions (Qs) were formulated to provide an interviewing guide:

Main theme 1: working in a mixed-age environment:

- Q1 What is the age-range of employees in your organisation? How do you think this age-range compares with other organisations and why?
- Q2 Are there any specific jobs in this company that you would associate with younger or older people?
- Q3 Are you aware of people in your organisation talking about age and ageing in any specific way? What sorts of comments tend to be made?
- Q4 In your workplace, is age ever referred to directly or indirectly?
- Q5 Have there ever been occasions when there has been teasing or jokes made relating to age?
- Q6 Are you aware of any occasions when people have been made to feel uncomfortable through talk about age?

Main theme 2: How do people feel about retirement?

- Q1 What is the typical age that people retire from this company?
- Q2 Have you thought about your own retirement? What factors might influence your decision to retire or stay on at work?
- Q3 How do you see your retirement? What do you think you will miss about being at work?
- Q4 Have you any thoughts about what you will do when you retire?
- Q5 Have you discussed how you feel about retirement with members of your family or friends?
- Q6 Are there any other things that you would like to add that haven't already been mentioned?

Puchta and Potter (1999:317) state that the moderator should be able to manage the tension between a focused discussion and participant interaction, suggesting a focus group should



be both “participant-centred and participant-controlled”. Krzyzanowski (2008:165) further suggests that it is the responsibility of the moderator to maintain the balance of power between participants during the “communicative dynamism” of the group by deterring over-enthusiastic people from dominating the talk and encouraging more timorous people to contribute. These views position the moderator as the person responsible for the quality of data that is elicited during the discussion.

In my study, using focus groups in workplace settings to gather participant views and opinions resulted in a substantial amount of data: 7 hours 18 minutes. Bryman (2001: 349) argues that due to the work involved in transcribing many hours of talk, this is one of the limitations of this methodology. To counter this, a careful listening of all the material that had been recorded on a digital voice recorder was conducted. Salient extracts relating to the themes surrounding the Research Questions (RQs) were manually coded for content. Themes that were identified included examples of age-identity construction, participants reporting what interaction between younger and older workers was like, perceptions of retirement, accepting or rejecting ageing and managing age-related change. These extracts were then transcribed in detail and used to construct the interview questions around which the second part of my study was framed.

As mentioned in the introduction, I am including a brief reflection in this section about the methodological choices for my study; what worked well, what could be improved and the limitations of the investigation. Having used focus group methodology successfully for my BA dissertation and on a pilot study examining the dynamics of age-related interaction in the workplace for the Language and Communication Research team at Cardiff University, this choice of data gathering appeared to be where my strengths lay. For my study,

however, I had to approach several organisations for volunteers, where previously I had only worked with one group. This could have been problematic, but I approached places I frequented, such as supermarkets where I was familiar with the premises, or contacted companies who had been recommended to me by current or previous employees. I initially contacted eight organisations across the employment spectrum, and was only asked by one to submit a formal application to carry out my research: the others had agreed unconditionally. My application was refused, so only seven focus groups were held. The number of volunteers in each group varied from eight to only three people, which could have resulted in the session being cancelled. However, as I was not informed of the low number before I arrived, I decided to proceed, and the resulting data proved to be very useful and rich with material for analysis. Ultimately, the negotiation of age-identities and other views about retirement were often given by a small nucleus of participants, with other volunteers contributing only minimally, so my concerns about only three people taking part were unfounded.

### 3.3.3 Participant companies

To address Bryman's (2001: 283) criticism of how participants are selected during a qualitative study, which he argues may affect results by representing too narrow a sample, I approached organisations which employed women and men from across a broad spectrum of blue and white-collar workers in two UK cities: Cardiff and London, which is where I had homes. This [diversity] was not aimed at achieving a comparison between the views and opinions of people of different gender, varying employee statuses or geographical areas, but to gather data from as many different types of older workers as possible, given the constraints of working with a relatively small sample. The organisations that participated ranged from supermarkets, a home-improvement

store and an old-age care-home to a social-housing trust, a government office and a centre for further education. Details can be found in Table 1 (below). Participants included several people who were under 50: inviting younger people to take part brought an additional perspective to the discussion. There were also participants in their late 40s who could anticipate becoming 50 and submit prospective views about retirement.

**Table 1: Focus group participants**

Organisation type	Location	Number of participants	Employment status	Age-range
Superstore	Cardiff	5 female	Blue and white-collar: clerical and sales assistants	32-71
Social-housing association	London	5 female, 1 male	White-collar: clerical and management	25-65
Home-improvement store	Cardiff	3 male	Blue-collar: sales assistants	59-80
Old-age care home	London	5 female, 1 male	White-collar: senior management	43-64
Centre for further education	Cardiff	3 female	White-collar: professional and clerical	49-64
Supermarket	London	5 female	Blue and white-collar: management and sales assistants	43-66
Government office	Cardiff	4 female, 4 male	White-collar: clerical and middle management	28-56

It should be mentioned that although some of the groups only had three participants, (which occurred when some people were unable to attend at short notice), the data that I was able to elicit proved to be very valuable, which precluded the need to abandon the session and re-arrange for another date. It should also be mentioned that although the other groups consisted of more people, data extracts for analysis emanated from interaction which sometimes involved fewer people than the whole group. The ratio of 27 female to 9 male participants, 3-1, is another factor that is worth commenting upon. As previously described, the volunteers were recruited from organisations which employed both males and females. It may be that female employees were more enthusiastic about a group discussion on being older at work than their male colleagues: a possible topic for future research?

Following the focus group sessions, I wrote to all participating organisations to thank them for their help and co-operation and offered to provide a summary of my findings once my study was completed.

### 3.4 Interviews

As a method of gathering information, Holstein and Gubrium (2004: 141) suggest that interviewing has become more popular than ever in many areas, for example, the media, and social science and medical research. They argue that interviews are a “special form” of conversation (ibid: 141), which allows respondents to impart information during discursive interaction. Wray and Bloomer (2006: 152-153) further suggest that a range of social behaviours, beliefs and perceptions can be examined through interviews, because a great deal of information may be garnered from only a few people. Other uses of interviews include the study of speech variations, such as accents and dialects

(Foulkes and Docherty, 2014), gendered features of talk (Holmes, 2006), ethnographic investigations focusing on specific cultures and ethnicities (Saville-Troike, 2003), and narrative elicitations of life history for sociolinguistic analysis (Linde, 1993).

Opdenakker (2006:3) suggests that an interview should be a collaborative communicative interaction, with interview questions guiding the respondent's narrative and eliciting information in respect of the research topic. Wood and Kroger (2000: 72-73) contend that "relatively unstructured" open-ended questions posed during a [semi-structured] interview provide the opportunity for the respondent to provide the fullest account. Briggs (1986: 20) recommends "nonstandardized" interviews, where a "schedule" of questions can be presented according to the context of an interviewee's responses, rather than a fixed order of questions as in a "standardized" interview.

Conducting 'non-standardised' semi-structured interviews following the focus group sessions formed the second strand of my methodology for gathering data. For the purpose of this study, I chose to frame my interviews around this technique of interviewing as it facilitates a more flexible approach which allows respondents to negotiate their age-identities during interaction with the interviewer. Structured interviews with a rigid structure, would constrain respondents to provide answers that directly addressed the questions and not allow for any negotiation.

The following themes that were identified from focus group material were used to guide the interviews. It should be explained that, although the questions related to the same themes, they were contextualised to reflect the individual respondent's own circumstances.

- 1 How younger and older people are defined and age-categories labelled.
- 2 The contribution to the organisation of younger and older workers.

- 3 Interaction and socialising between younger and older workers.
- 4 Age-related talk: joking, banter or teasing.
- 5 The organisation's retirement policy, if there is one.
- 6 Reasons for staying on at work: for example, not taking early retirement, or leaving at State Pension Age (SPA).
- 7 Benefits of staying on at work.
- 8 Advantages or disadvantages of being 'at home' after retirement.
- 9 Reasons for retiring.
- 10 Benefits of retiring.
- 11 Disadvantages of retiring.
- 12 Adjusting to retirement: lifestyle changes.

I found that a schedule of questions was essential to maintain the 'flow' of interviewee talk whilst remaining focused on the topic. How this was achieved is discussed in the next section.

#### 3.4.1 Role of the interviewer

It has been suggested that the role of an interviewer may be challenging (Wood and Kroger, 2000: 73) and "stressful" (Wray and Bloomer, 2006: 162). The ability to be flexible and adapt to a change of direction of a narrative whilst still managing to keep on topic, is suggested to be "key" to a successful qualitative interview (Schilling, 2013: 211). Miller and Glassner (2004: 127-128) maintain that it is preferable for an interviewer to talk as little as possible and be a "good listener". Minimal input by the interviewer should provide the opportunity for the respondent to contribute long streams of narrative for analysis. Saville-Troike (2003:100) suggests that questions should be

interpolated at “natural points” during the interview, rather than keeping to a rigid schedule, and that open-ended questions without any preconceptions, should be asked. Jorgensen (1991: 211) argues that an interviewer may anticipate certain responses. As an older worker myself, a fact that was known to all interviewees as they were acquainted with me prior to the research, I may well have had views that mirrored their own. This fact could have influenced the direction of my questioning. However, my input was restricted to focusing on the themes outlined above and to facilitate the flow of interviewee responses, including comments which could lead to further negotiation of respondents’ views and opinions during the interaction. It was also my responsibility as interviewer to record the discussion, which then had to be thematically coded and transcribed. Gubrium and Holstein (2002:13) maintain that in some instances an interviewer “stands apart” from the data and is only responsible for its collection. In my study, however, the data was elicited during an interactive process between me (as the interviewer) and the respondents, which did not allow me to ‘stand apart’.

In the interviews, my position as a personal acquaintance as well as interviewer was not made salient by respondents in their talk. However, some participants evidenced this knowledge by comments such as “you know” to try and elicit my support for a specific older-age-related point of view.

Being acquainted with the respondents could also have been an issue regarding asymmetry, which may occur during interviews in other contexts, such as doctor and patient (Coupland, 2014: 4). However, due to the interactive nature of the proceedings, this issue did not arise. The role of the interviewer in my study was to facilitate the flow of responses and to participate in the interactive process, which, whilst positioning me as guiding the focus of talk, did not affect the symmetrical balance between interviewer and respondent. The fact that I was known to all interview respondents

could have affected the tenor of the interview, however, everyone took a professional approach to my research.

Miller and Glassner (2004: 127-128) argue that respondents should also have trust in the interviewer to be able to speak openly. As mentioned above, I was known personally to all [interview] respondents before they were invited to participate in this study, and interviews were conducted in their own homes. I suggest that this relaxed atmosphere was more conducive to a successful interview, a concept that is supported by Holstein and Gubrium (2004: 140), who further suggest that this is the “trick” to ensuring that respondents engage in the most productive way. Miller and Glassner (2004: 131) further maintain that respondents want to know what will happen to their data and that the findings have been useful. Following the interviews, I did not provide informants with debriefing documents, however, I have advised all participants in this study that I will provide feedback once my work is complete.

#### 3.4.2 Interview respondents

To mirror the demographic and geographic statuses of focus group participants, women and men over 50 in Cardiff and London who were still working, were invited to take part in the study. I also approached several people I knew who had either recently retired or had been retired for a number of years. As previously mentioned my methodology included analysis of retiree testimony to be able to compare their retrospective experiences of being retired against prospective views of retirement by people who were still working.



Details of interviewees are given below in Table 2. Names have been changed to preserve anonymity. Twelve respondents participated, with two being interviewed twice, so fourteen interviews were conducted in total, resulting in 9½ hours of data. Rosie and Bob were initially interviewed a few weeks after they retired, and were again interviewed approximately one year later. My intention was to investigate whether their views on retirement had changed in the period since they had retired. The results of this comparison will be discussed in Chapter 6: Being Retired.

**Table 2: Interview respondents**

Name	Gender	Age	Employment status	Occupation
Rosie	Female	58	Retired (1 <sup>st</sup> interview: 6 weeks; 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview: 12 months)	Senior technical officer- public sector
Bob	Male	65	Retired (1 <sup>st</sup> interview: 3 weeks; 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview: 11 months)	Construction worker
Jill	Female	53	Working	School secretary
Dina	Female	62	Working	Travel hostess
Nat	Male	62	Working	Author and cultural commentator
Lucy	Female	56	Retired (4 years)	Senior manager- Civil Service
Dan	Male	73	Semi-retired	Self-employed optometrist
Eve	Female	63	Working	Self-employed photographic librarian
Rae	Female	69	Working	Market researcher
Ed	Male	67	Working	Accountant
Nick	Male	65	Retired (5 years)	Textile merchant
Bella	Female	67	Retired (6 years)	Television producer

### 3.5 A discursive approach

The term ‘discourse’ has many meanings (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 6-7). For example, authors define ‘discourse’ to include all aspects of the spoken and written word (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984), the way talk combines to create meaning (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), and how linguistic practices have developed over time (Foucault, 1972). Nikander (2008: 413) contends that discourse is of “central importance” in constructing the social world. Antaki (1994: 116) describes discourse as a “stretch of connected sentences or utterances” that can be “cut and shaped like dough”, which implies that people can construct whatever meaning they wish by the things they say and the way in which they say them.

My study will analyse participants’ discourse using Discourse Analysis (DA). This approach has been developed from other multi-disciplinary methods of analysis, such as in branches of philosophy, sociology and psychology (Wood and Kroger, 2000:18). Constructing meaning by analysing discourse, from which we may draw an understanding of how society functions, is suggested by Jaworski and Coupland (1999: 3) to be an “inescapably important concept”. They argue that language not only reflects current ideologies but also creates and perpetuates those ideologies. This study will examine participant discourse for evidence of the concept that age-related negative perceptions are supported or challenged during discursive age-identity construction by the over 50s. Membership Categorisation Devices (MCD) (Sacks, 1995; Nikander, 2002) and self-labelling are two examples of discursive strategies used to construct an age-identity that may be identified using a discourse analytic approach to data analysis, which is discussed in the next section. Using a DA approach will enable me to examine the strategies used by participants to construct their age-identities. I will now move on to discuss DA in more detail.

### 3.5.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis (DA) examines how actions and meanings are constructed through text and talk. There are several approaches that can be taken using DA, which is described by Nikander (2008: 413) as an “umbrella” term. These include, for example, examining the pragmatics of talk (Leech, 1983), which focuses on how the meaning of an utterance may not be taken literally but should be analysed in the context of a whole sentence or other circumstances; and the ethnography of speaking (Hymes, 1974; Saville-Troike, 2003), which examines how language is used to construct the social and cultural practices of a specific community. Another approach to DA is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which critically examines text and talk to investigate how these may exert influence over people, and how language and ideologies are linked.

Interactional sociolinguistics (IS) (Gumperz, 2001) is one DA approach that aims to examine how meaning is made during spoken interaction. Schiffrin (1994:133) argues that different contexts can affect how identity is constructed: she speaks of “situated meaning”. Contextualised meaning-making is also the focus of a social constructionist approach (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997; Wray, Evans, Coupland and Bishop, 2003; Harris, 2008; Schilling, 2013), which argues that social identity arises during interaction. This is the approach I am taking in my study.

Within a social constructionist approach, Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that people identify with, or distance themselves from certain social groups by ‘in-grouping’ and ‘out-grouping’, as explained by Social Identity Theory (SIT). We claim group membership of a certain social or cultural group by identifying with the perceived attitudes and norms of that group, and make a self-reflexive comparison with people of other groups. During discursive identity construction, we may claim group membership

with people with whom we identify, and distance ourselves from people we do not align with, by ‘othering’. SIT again is context dependent. We may identify with more than one social group according to the situation or environment in which we find ourselves. For example, in a familial role as a child, parent or grandparent, or in a social role amongst friends. Applying SIT in a study on older-age identity construction that relates to work and retirement, allows for a discourse analytic examination of how participants negotiate their age-identities during interaction with other colleagues or during semi-structured interviews.

For the purpose of my study, a discourse analytic approach, which examines talk in context, for example, the workplace, is more appropriate than Conversation Analysis (CA) (Wood and Kroger, 2000:21; Heritage, 2004: 223; Baxter, 2010: 119), which is used to explore the ‘micro-dynamics’ of conversation, or “talk-in-interaction” (Schegloff, 1989). CA focuses on the finer details of the structure of conversational interaction, such as turn-taking and adjacency pairs (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974). Antaki (1994: 70) describes such discursive devices as the “rules” of spoken interaction. My study focuses on how participants use discursive strategies to negotiate their age-identities during interaction, rather than the examination of the interaction itself. It could be argued, however, that the interactive process during an interview between interviewer and respondent (cf. 3.4.1) lends itself to CA, and this method of analysis will be drawn upon in my study where a greater depth of understanding of participant meaning may be required.

In addition to the discursive strategies mentioned in the previous section relating to membership categorisation and labelling, my study will investigate the use of other age-identity construction strategies that were discussed in the previous chapter (cf. 2.3), such as positioning (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006) and age

categorisation processes (Coupland, Coupland and Giles, 1991). DA will allow me to examine data gathered during focus groups and interviews to establish how these discursive strategies may be used during participants' representations of their views.

Data analysis that identifies age-identity construction strategies will also focus on how older workers represent their views about remaining in work after State Pension Age (SPA) and retirement. These views may have been influenced by age-related discourses, for example, in media texts and advertising. In the next section, I will discuss how such discourses may influence these views.

### 3.6 Critical Discourse Analysis

In this study, I am examining the perceptions of retirement by older workers and retirees' attitudes towards being retired. It may be that these perceptions and attitudes have been influenced by an ideology of 'positive' ageing and later life that has been created and perpetuated by recent media discourses. In the previous chapter, I discussed a study by Rudman (2006) which critically examines the discursive constructions of retirement texts in a Canadian newspaper (cf. 2.4.5). She contends that the texts, which include newspaper articles and adverts, "oblige" (ibid: 181) older people to resist or defy the effects of ageing, by promoting services that advocate independent living and positive retirement for ageing and retired people.

It has been argued that all language should be viewed as a social practice (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258), which may shape knowledge, social identities and personal and social relationships. Fairclough (1989: 2) further contends that language is the most common way through which social behaviour is represented, and that one of the ways in

which we use language is connected to power and control (Wood and Kroger, 2000:206; Wray and Bloomer, 2006:85). ‘Power’ in this context may be said to be constitutive of the ability to exert our authority over other people, so that certain thoughts or actions are followed in a particular manner. Saville-Troike (2003:260) argues that when we use language to exert power over other people, we are demonstrating this power by the very language we are using: “Power is not only *displayed* through language; it is often *achieved* through language”, (her italics). Baxter (in Litosseliti, 2010: 126) suggests that people with hegemonic power, such as governments and politicians, may use discourses in overt or covert, subtle ways to influence people who are less powerful. Van Leeuwen (2008:124) speaks about other groups who may have discursive power to influence people, such as in advertising.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) seeks to critically examine the relationship between discursive events, such as written texts and speech, and the social structure within which they are located. Wodak and Meyer (2009: 8) argue that certain discourses can shape an ideology, which they describe as a “coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs and values”, for example, by using metaphor and analogies. They suggest that dominant ideologies appear as “neutral” (ibid: 8), and stay mainly unchallenged. As part of my analysis, I will discuss whether similar discourses may be promoting a certain way of thinking and behaving for older people, possibly inculcating an ideological view related to ageing.

### 3.7 Ethical issues

Linguistic researchers have a responsibility towards their research subjects. This responsibility can be divided into two areas, one negative and one positive. Firstly,

from a negative perspective, participants should be protected against any possible harm from taking part in a study. This may be achieved by changing subjects' names to provide anonymity and keeping all elicited data confidential and securely stored. This concept is promoted by two renowned UK research bodies: the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL). Both organisations have produced ethical guidelines for researchers. The ESRC has produced a prescriptive document: Research Ethics Framework (2014), which states that all social linguistic research should be conducted to the highest ethical standards to preserve research integrity and quality. Six key principles are recommended to maintain these standards: research design and processes should be regularly reviewed; all participants should be fully informed about the purpose and methods of a study, including any possible risks; confidentiality of data and anonymity of subjects must be assured; participation must be voluntary and free from coercion; physical, emotional or psychological harm to subjects must be avoided; research should be independent and free from bias or conflicting interests. The guidelines add that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that these criteria are followed. Unlike the ESRC, the ethical recommendations of BAAL are not prescriptive: "Ethical priorities are the central concern throughout this text, but it leans more to discussion in terms of "could" than prescription in terms of "must", (BAAL, 2009:2). These guidelines stress that it is the researchers' responsibility to guarantee the integrity, truth, fairness and democracy of any study, with respect for all participants' rights, interests, sensitivities (in areas of race, religion and gender), and privacy, and to avoid potentially stressful or intrusive situations which could cause harm to participants. However, the main purpose of the BAAL guidelines is said to help researchers maintain high standards during research by "showing due respect to all participants, to the values of truth, fairness and open

democracy, and to the integrity of applied linguistics as a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry” (BAAL: 2009:2). Researchers have a responsibility to maintain subjects’ confidentiality and anonymity, and informed consent should be secured through trust gained by researchers’ honesty and openness.

In my study, participant protection was achieved by producing consent forms that were approved by the Ethics Committee of The School of English, Communication and Philosophy (ENCAP) at Cardiff University. Documents outlined the purpose of the study and explained that everything that was said during group sessions or interviews was confidential; participants could withdraw from the study at any time, (even after data had been gathered and analysed), by contacting me personally or through their HR departments (see Appendices 4 and 5). People’s names were changed so that contributions would be anonymous. All audio recordings were securely stored electronically and password-protected. These recordings will be deleted once this thesis has been submitted and successfully accepted in partial fulfilment of my degree.

Another aspect of potential harm to research subjects relates to potentially sensitive data being made public. This is discussed by Coupland and Coupland (1995:98) who suggest that ethical research should avoid exploiting subjects, and that they should be no worse off after participating in research than before it began. There may be risks with the way subjects behave if they are not made aware of the true purpose of a study, compared to how they could behave if they were in full possession of all the facts. This issue was addressed in my study by the documents [cf. previous paragraph]. However, an occasion arose during one focus group where some employees represented critical views of their employers. To avoid compromising participants, I omitted the sensitive material, noting this in the data extract.



The second, positive area of researcher responsibility relates to the potential benefit of the research to participants, which Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson (1997:149) suggest is “research for” subjects. I agree with this suggestion. One of the objectives of my study is to raise awareness of how the over 50s speak about their experiences in the workplace: this may be achieved through feedback of research results to participants and employers. James (1977, in Finch, 1986:215) supports this action, arguing that all social researchers should act as advocates and write up research results in a positive and supportive way to present informants’ views. He adds that such actions may be the only justification for doing research, and provides reciprocity in research which benefits both researcher and research subjects.

### 3.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research framework used for my study. The reasons for using a qualitative approach which uses focus group and interview methodologies to elicit data has been discussed, and a discourse analytic approach towards this data, which could provide findings that address the over-arching Research Question (RQ) (cf. 1.5) of my investigation, has been explained. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has also been overviewed. Rudman (2006) argues that discourses of retirement and later life may perpetuate an ideology of ‘positive’ ageing which may influence older workers’ and retirees’ perceptions of this life stage.

Operational processes for my study have been outlined, and a self-reflexive assessment of how well these processes worked has been discussed. Details of organisations from which volunteer participants were drawn have been provided, and interview respondent demographics given. The spread of employment statuses were designed to provide as

broad a spectrum as possible, (given the constraints of this study), which could possibly mirror the views of other older workers. However, I accept that results of data analysis cannot be generalised to all other over 50s who are still at work. People who have already retired were also included in the interviewing process as representations of their experiences of being retired could be measured against the perceptions, expectations and aspirations of older workers who have not yet retired. The final section dealt with ethical issues that surround social research and the protection of research subjects from harm as a result of participating. The possible benefit to research subjects by having findings presented to them in the form of feedback was also advocated.

Following the methodological approaches detailed in this chapter, the next three chapters will present the findings of my study.

## CHAPTER 4

### BEING OLDER IN THE WORKPLACE

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will begin to present the data analysis findings which focus on the over-arching theme of the discursive construction of self that runs through this study. The first specific Research Question (RQ1) will be addressed: What discursive strategies do older workers use to construct their age-identities?

Discourse analytic methods that were outlined in Chapter 3 (cf. 3.5.1), will be used to examine accounts from focus groups and interviews. A social constructionist approach to identity (Potter, 1996; Gubrium and Holstein, 1997; Burr, 2003; Wray, Evans, Coupland and Bishop, 2003; Bucholtz, 2005; Harris, 2008 and Schilling, 2013) will be taken, which includes exploring how age-identity negotiation may be identified through ‘Positioning theory’ (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006) and ‘Age Categorisation Processes’ (Coupland, Coupland and Giles, 1991). My analysis also draws on the concept of Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), looking at how people identify with, or distance themselves from, certain groups to construct an age-identity, and investigates participants’ use of ‘Membership Categorisation Devices’ (MCD) (Sacks, 1995; Nikander, 2002). Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) takes a non-contextual, conversational analytic approach to identity construction, which is not dependent on the circumstances or environment in which that identity is made manifest. MCA examines how a discursive repertoire, such as self-labelling, may itself construct the context of a

situation. The application of age-related symbolic interactionism (Sherman, 1994) to construct an age-identity will also be discussed.

Data was gathered from focus groups held in participants' workplaces and subsequent semi-structured interviews (with different participants) which were conducted in informants' own homes. The interviews were framed around themes that were identified from focus group material. Data analysis will focus on possible patterns of discursive strategies of how people over 50 construct their orientations to aspects of growing older: self-perceptions related to ageing and ageist attitudes. I will also explore how positive and negative attributions of being older in the workplace are manifested. Other aspects of being older in the workplace are also examined for discursive strategies used to construct the definitions of life-stages; the acceptance or resistance of age-related change to self-identity; and issues relating to work-related performance and being valued [as an older worker] for age and experience. It should be mentioned, however, that many aspects of age-identity construction that are identified in this study do not only relate to the workplace, and may also be salient in other non-work related contexts, such as in formal or informal settings. In other words, the strategies may be used by older individuals more generally. My specific interest, however, is age-identification in relation to work and retirement.

#### 4.2 Age-related category construction

One discursive strategy that emerged during this study involved age-related self-categorisation, which may be used during interaction to negotiate an age identity which aligns with or distances oneself from a specific age cohort (Nikander, 2002:59).

Firstly, however, I will examine how Chronological Life-stage Categories (CLCs) are evoked when participants construct their age identities. CLCs may be defined as relating to specific age cohorts to which age-related labels are attributed. These labels may not conflate with the age-identity that is being constructed; for example, 'old' may be attributed to a person over 60, whereas someone over 60 may not construct an age-identity that signifies an 'old' person. I further suggest that age categories 'shift' as people grow older, and the age at which one might identify with a younger group may be extended as one ages, a concept supported by Logan, Wood and Spitze (1992: 464). An example of how people discursively 'shift' their perceptions of belonging to a younger group is demonstrated in the next section where focus group participants speak about CLCs whilst negotiating their age-identities.

#### 4.2.1 Chronological Life-stage Categories

This first extract is from a focus group in a large supermarket. Participants were selected to represent blue-collar sales staff and white-collar administrative employees working in a sales-related service environment.

##### Focus Group: Supermarket

This branch of the supermarket chain employed people whose ages ranged from 18-70 years. The group consisted of five female participants, aged 43-66: Jean (50), personnel manager; and Pam (43), Bea (66), Sue (55) and Ethel (65), who were all sales assistants. Extract 1 follows the introductory presentation (Appendix 3) by the moderator (M), followed by the first line of questioning.

### Extract 1

- 60 M okay so the sorts of things I was gonna (1.0) ask you about was um (.) in  
61 this organisation (1.0) what sort of age mix is there I mean you know can  
62 anybody tell me sort of have you got more younger people or older people?
- 63 Jean um (.) there's a lotta [(1.0) I dunno it's evenly balanced there's lotsa youngs 'n ↔  
64 Pam [old]
- 65 Jean ↔ there's lotsa middle-aged 'n we've got quite a lot of older people (.) so it's  
66 (1.0) it's fairly even across the board
- 67 Bea ° yeah I would say °
- 68 Jean people don't see middle-aged (.) as startin' at forty now I think that fifty is the  
69 new middle-age =
- 70 Sue = yeah =
- 71 Jean = and old age I would say is probably (.) people don't think that [anybody ↔  
72 Sue [seventy eighty]
- 73 Jean ↔ about seventy (.) seventy eighty is old age 'cos in the workplace (.) it's like  
74 here I mean (.) Bea's (.) sixty nine did you say (?)
- 75 Bea noo (*indignantly*)  
76 gen (*laughter*)
- 77 Jean oh(?) I was gonna say you know it was on your bit of paper
- 78 Bea (.) yeah 'n =
- 79 Jean = I don't know [how old (1.0) yeah  
80 Bea [you said the youngest to the eldest [so I  
81 Jean [yeah I mean Jim's just  
82 retired [(.) he was seventy last week (1.0) um (4.0)

83     Bea           [yeah I'm sixty six]  
84     Jean    yeah [Bea's er sixty six  
85     gen           [yeah]  
86     Bea    Fred's sixty six =  
87     Jean    = oh (.) yeah er yeah Bea's sixty six (2.0) we've got a couple of the cleaners  
88           they're in their sixties (.) I mean I think Jacob is about sixty eight  
89     Sue    so there's a few of you  
90     Ethel   I'm sixty five

(Nothing more is elicited on this subject. Ethel's self-disclosure of her chronological age appears to draw the subject to a close. After several seconds of silence, the interviewer asks the participants if there are any specific jobs they associate with older or younger employees.)

The first example of 'shifting' of perceptions of belonging to a younger group is made during a CLC construction by Jean (50), personnel manager, in response to being asked by the moderator about the age-mix of the organisation (line 61). Jean states that the workforce is "fairly even across the board" (line 66), labelling people as "youngs" (line 63); "middle-aged" and "older people" (line 65). She continues to suggest that the onset of middle-age has changed: "people don't see middle-aged (.) as startin' at forty now I think that fifty is the new middle age" (lines 68-69). She is 50 herself and is discursively demonstrating a 'shift' to belonging to a 'new middle-age', further generalising that 'people' support the idea that middle age no longer starts at 40. Sue, who is 55, agrees with Jean that a 'new middle-age' starts at 50: "yeah" (line 70). Both females are in their 50s and are positioning themselves (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006) as belonging to the newly-labelled membership category of 'new middle-age'. Sue then

suggests that 'old age' begins at "seventy eighty" (line 72), to which Jean agrees: "about seventy (.) seventy eighty is old age" (line 73), having again generalised that it is "people" (line 71) who hold this view. By supporting each other's views, Jean and Sue are collaborating in defining when 'new middle age' and 'old age' begin: Coates (1996: 117) suggests that such discursive 'mirroring' is an element commonly found in all female interaction. Jean then asks Bea to confirm her age: "sixty nine did you say" (line 74), which is indignantly refuted by Bea: "noo" (line 75): she is not 69, merely 66, a fact which she confirms in line 83. Her paralinguistics of indignation at Jean's suggestion that she is 69, indicates that she perceives the remark to be a 'face threat' (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 60-61): if she was 69 she would be nearly 70, the age suggested by Jean and Sue as the beginning of 'old age'.

The general laughter that is elicited by Bea's denial (line 76) may indicate that the other participants are amused by the indignant way that Bea repudiated this statement, or by Jean's apparent 'faux pas' by stating that Bea was three years older than she actually was. Knapp, Stafford and Daly (1986: 44) define a faux pas as a "behavioural slip or blunder" that most likely occurs during interaction with non-intimates; Cupach and Carson (2002: 457- 458) argue that the possible face- threat resulting from a faux pas is more threatening when performed in public rather than in private interaction. Despite her apparent error, Jean does not exhibit contrition or embarrassment, just questioningly exclaiming "oh?" (line 77), which indicates that she was unaware of Bea's true age. Goffman (1956: 268) suggests that people may be embarrassed when they commit a discursive infraction in this way, and possibly offer an apology in an effort to save their own 'face' (Goffman, 1999); however, Jean does not apologise. She accounts for her error by alluding to the fact that Bea had in fact given her age on "your bit of paper" (line 77). The 'paper' refers to the



questionnaire that I had sent to all organisations in preparation for the focus group, asking for details of the workforce (cf. Appendix 4); a separate questionnaire had been sent to participants asking for personal details. Bea's reference to 'your' [bit of paper] recognises that Jean, as HR manager and the person responsible for participant recruitment, had mistakenly given Bea the company's background document to complete, which asked for details of the youngest to the eldest employees. Bea had given the upper age limit of all employees, not her own age (line 80). Even when faced with Bea's explanation, Jean refuses to acknowledge her error, but in mitigation remarks, "I don't know how old" (line 79) before moving on to speak about another employee (Jim), aged 70, who has just retired (lines 81-82).

As Jean is speaking, Bea asserts that she is 66 (line 83). Jean then acknowledges that Bea's age is 66 (line 87), and gives the example of "a couple of cleaners" who are also in their 60s (lines 87-88). Following Bea's chronological age self-disclosure (Disclosure of Chronological Age (DCA) Coupland *et al*, 1991; Arber and Ginn, 1995), Ethel states that she is 65 (line 90), aligning herself with a colleague in her own age cohort. Having heard that there are several employees in their 60s, Sue (55) comments that there are a "few of you" (line 89), thereby 'othering' people over 60 by positioning herself as a younger person compared to colleagues older than herself (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006) and with whom she does not wish to be chronologically aligned. This [comment] may also signify that Sue is constructing a "distancing move" (Paoletti, 1998: 21) from the people she has defined as being 'old'.

This extract demonstrates how participants in their 50s 'shift' their perceptions of belonging to a younger group as they grow older, in this instance by constructing their

perceptions of CLCs relating to the start of ‘middle-age’ by ‘positioning’ themselves relatively to other members of the group in their 60s and by ‘distancing’ themselves from people they perceive to belong to an older age category. There appears to be consensus that people in their 70s and 80s are ‘old’, which may reflect a negative orientation towards people of that age who have stopped working. The constructions of age-identities and CLCs, which displays processes identified through SIT of in-grouping and out-grouping, takes place during interaction in the work-place, and may only be significant in this context. Age-related identity constructions in other contexts, for example, when speaking about being retired (cf. Chapter 6), may display different ways of identifying with being older.

In the next section, I will examine data from interviewee respondents relating to the focus group construction of CLCs. I will also explore the theme of the over 60s’ perception of their peers who are still at work.

#### 4.2.2 Attributions of life-stage category membership

This section will examine how respondents positioned themselves (Jones, 2006) and used ‘Membership Categorisation Devices’ (MCD), (Sacks, 1995; Nikander, 2002) to formulate their perceptions of CLCs. In the first interview, Rae (69) speaks about her perceived negative attributes of younger colleagues when compared with positive representations of her own age cohort.

##### Interview: Rae (female, 69)

Rae is employed by a leading market research organisation, visiting people in their homes to elicit their opinions on branded products. The work often entails travelling substantial

distances late in the evening. Rae has been asked by the interviewer (I) about the people she encounters in the course of her work:

### Extract 2

- 18 I when you mix with other people what what I'm looking for what sort of the age  
19 range are the people?  
20 Rae what the people I interview =  
21 I = no the people you work with  
22 Rae oh the peop' they're all ages they're from (.) the young people never stick (.) at  
23 the young people come after two jobs they vanish  
24 I how old is young  
25 Rae er the youngest one is (.) they're in their forties they're just they don't seem to  
26 have the stamina I don't know what it is (.) a lot of their [the company's]  
27 workforce are in their sixties (.) some over seventy I one lady's (.) seventy four I  
28 think still working and I'm enjoying it it's nice you get to meet the public...

(Rae continues to speak about some of the people she has interviewed.)

In this extract, Rae categorises people “in their forties” as being ‘young’ (line 25). Aged 69, she is positioning herself [within the workforce] as someone who is not ‘young’ (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006) and who implicitly shares the same chronological age-category membership with “a lot of” her colleagues who are “in their sixties some over seventy...” (lines 26-27). Her construction of CLC’s is contextualised in a work-related role: her perceptions of these life stages may be influenced by the ages of the workforce; in other situations, ‘young’ may relate to people in their 20s or 30s. She then implies that “the young people” (lines 22; 23) are unreliable: they “vanish” after two jobs (line 23) and “don’t seem to have the stamina” (lines 25-26) for the work, which Rae has explained

often entails travelling long distances and working late at night. It may also be inferred that the older employees in their 60s and 70s are more steadfast and able to carry out their duties.

In this interview, Rae (69) discursively ‘out-groups’ younger colleagues who are perceived not to have ‘the stamina’ of people in her own age cohort, basing this negative attribution of the younger people on personal experience of working with them. She contrasts [the younger people] with positive representations of the ‘in-group’ with whom she aligns herself. She has stated that some colleagues are over 70, thus indicating that at 69, she is not the oldest employee. In the next interview, Bella (67) constructs her perceptions of CLCs whilst focusing her talk on the physical attributes of people over 60.

Interview: Bella (female, 67)

Bella was a television producer employed by a Government department that makes public information films. She has been retired for seven years. The extract is 16 minutes into the interview: Bella has been speaking about how civil servants used to have to retire at 60 but that now this is no longer the case. She adds that she was content to leave work at 60, even though she believed that she still had a lot to contribute:

**Extract 3**

- 144 Bella ...I would have been happy to have retired sooner rather than later (1.0) I think  
145 there’s something a bit sad seeing old very old (*laughs*) people trying I mean (.)  
146 certainly (.) the um (.) the script supervisors (.) can be pretty ancient  
147 I what age would be ancient?  
148 Bella well (.) late sixties if not seventies  
149 I ancient?

150 Bella and um (.) well compared to the rest of the (.) crew and it shows up

*(The session is interrupted by a knock on the front door. The interview is suspended for three minutes.)*

151 I so (.) yes basically you said you were happy to go at that time

152 Bella yes I mean I mean you know we were talking about script supervisors

153 I oh yes that's right and you said they were ancient =

154 Bella = yes it they *(laughs)* sometimes looking at the rest of the crew they did look

155 pretty (.) ancient but they had quite a responsible job so they would have

156 furrowed brows *(laughs)*

157 I okay

158 Bella and you know (.) er um I suppose I had furrows too (.) but er *(laughs)* I like to

159 think I was more trendy nobody ever mentioned that er I was old *(laughs)*

160 I so people talked about them?

161 Bella yes

162 I so what did they say?

163 Bella well um they were sometimes referred to as old old Sue or old Pat *(laughs)* you

164 know

*(The conversation continues with Bella speaking about how she tried to be more 'trendy' (line 159) by dressing smartly, in response to the interviewer asking how she tried to achieve this.)*

Bella speaks about “very old people” and “ancient” script supervisors with whom she used to work and argues that “there’s something a bit sad” about them “trying” (lines 144-146). She retired at 60 and is constructing an inferable link between retiring at that age or earlier and viewing ‘very old’ people [over 60] who she perceives should not be still working. Her laughter during this utterance (line 145) may be ironic: she herself is now 67 years old. When asked to define ‘ancient’ (line 147), she states: “late sixties if not seventies” (line

148), which reinforces the suggestion that she is now potentially labelling herself as ‘very old’ for the workplace. In response to being asked to confirm the association between ‘ancient’ and ‘very old’ (line 149), Bella remarks: “well compared to the rest of the crew” (line 150), differentiating between the [‘ancient’] script writers and the younger team members. She elaborates her perception by stating that [the rest of the crew] “did look pretty (.) ancient” (lines 154-155), implying that the disparity in ages is evidenced in a physical way. However, this may also relate to their ‘trying’ [to do their jobs]: a competence attribution. Bella then rationalises that the older people had a “responsible job” (line 155), which resulted in “furrowed brows (*laughs*)” (lines 155-156). The inference is that it may have been the responsibility of the job that was causing the ‘furrowed brows’, which made the older people look physically older, and not just their age. She reminisces that she too had “furrows too” (line 158) before laughingly stating: “I like to think I was more trendy” (lines 158-159). She appears to take a contradictory position by firstly ‘in-grouping’ herself with the membership category of older people (Sacks, 1995; Nikander, 2002) who had ‘furrowed brows’) then also claiming membership of a younger age cohort by commenting: “nobody ever mentioned that I was old (*laughs*)” (line 159), which appears to ‘out-group’ people of her age cohort. Her pragmatic intention here (Leech, 1983) is to construct her age identity as an older person with a ‘young’, “trendy” attitude, which may have been more appropriate for the media-related work context in which she operated. Taking an interactional sociolinguistic (IS) approach to analysing discourse, Schiffrin (1994:133) argues that context provides “situated meaning”, implying that different contexts could affect how identity is constructed. Bella’s ‘dual’ age-identity construction of claiming membership of both an older and younger age cohort is an example of how social context can affect how age is perceived and performed.

After the interview (Extract 3), Bella explains that she tried to be ‘trendy’ by dressing smartly, which indicates that social age may be manipulated by the way we dress. Twigg (2007; 2013; 2015) suggests that the clothes we wear constitute an element of identity construction, and by trying to dress in a ‘trendy’ way, Bella appears to distance herself from the membership category she herself has described as ‘very old’. The observation that “nobody ever mentioned that er I was old (*laughs*)” (line 159) may be implying that even though other older people were labelled as “old Sue or old Pat” (line 163), Bella herself was not aware that she had been labelled thus. Her laughter at this point may signify that the possibility of being labelled ‘old Bella’ was viewed as a face-threat, or a fact to be denied. Covey (1988: 292) suggests that use of the prefix ‘old’ to a person’s name has negative connotations of decline of status and the debilitating effects of ageing.

In this extract, Bella generalises her perceptions of older workers whilst constructing her personal age-identity relatively to that of younger people. She suggests that people in their late 60s or 70s should not still be working: she herself retired at 60, but conceded in remarks before the extract started that she still felt she had a lot to contribute. This perception appears to conflict with her view that the over 60s should retire. She appears to distance herself from this age cohort even though she is 67. However, she also is claiming ‘in-group’ membership with her older colleagues by admitting that she too, had ‘furrows’. This may indicate the high status she is claiming as a TV producer, since she attributes implicitly her ‘furrows’ to the responsible position she held at work. She labels people in their late 60s and 70s as ‘very old’ and ‘ancient’, which may be contextually related to the fact that she was in a TV production environment. By contrast, in the supermarket, the focus group participants argued that old age starts at 70 or 80.

On the theme of the attributions of age in relation to work colleagues, in the next extract, Ed (67) speaks about being the oldest person in his office, and how he is not troubled by age-themed joking.

Interview: Ed (male, 67)

Ed is currently employed as an accountant by a small company. The data relates to Ed's previous employment in a larger organisation which he left two years previously. He is describing the interactions that took place with his younger colleagues. The extract is four minutes into the interview:

**Extract 4**

- 40 I was there ever any age talk there? how did people treat you?
- 41 Ed er same as everybody else there would be the occasional joke or quip er er (.)
- 42 no more than that
- 43 I what did they say? what sorts of things would they joke? what would they say?
- 44 Ed (2.0) um um they would mention the fact that you know that um sort of I was the
- 45 oldest one there or (.) um (.) um things like that (1.0) nothing nothing nasty um
- 46 nothing nasty but ere r just a joke (2.0) grandpa or something very friendly like
- 47 that nothing more (1.0) very friendly
- 48 I good did you did you ever comment about your age? make reference to it?
- 48 Ed ah no (.) no nothing that I can think of (1.0) ah (2.0) no well sometimes I would
- 49 tell them that at my age I take seniority to the (.) er (1.0) coffee machine or
- 50 something like that (*laughs*)

(Ed now speaks about how he left this company after 11 years when it moved location.)



Ed maintains that, as he was “the oldest one there” (line 45), he was subjected to the “occasional joke or quip” (line 41), but “no more than that” (line 42). When asked to describe examples of things his younger colleagues would say, he states that they would allude to the fact that he was the oldest in the office by calling him “grandpa or something very friendly like that” (line 46). He stresses that this was “nothing nasty... just a joke”, (line 46), and repeats that it was “very friendly” (line 47). He is demonstrating that he does not perceive this label to be ageist or face-threatening (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In a study of linguistic representations of the elderly in Japan, Backhaus (2008: 458), observes that terms such as ‘grandmother’ and ‘grandfather’ are often used to describe non-familial older adults. He adds, however, that these labels, which are intended to convey feelings of warmth and familiarity (especially in care homes), are often resented by older people as they are perceived to have negative connotations of ageism (ibid: 458-459). In the context of this extract, however, the use of the membership categorisation device (Sacks, 1995) ‘grandpa’ by his colleagues constructs Ed’s older age identity within the context of his workplace and not as a familial label. Ed constructs his own age identity as the oldest by joking that “sometimes I would tell them that at my age I take seniority to the (. ) er (1.0) coffee machine something like that (*laughs*)” (lines 49-50). He is demonstrating that he perceives his senior position in the office entails certain privileges and respect, even though being allowed to use the coffee machine first may not confer an important work-related status.

In this section, two discursive processes were identified which represent how participants formulate Chronological Life-stage Categories: the use of age-related labels, and claiming ‘in-group’ membership of an older age cohort whilst ‘out-grouping’ younger people.

These strategies are summarised in Table 3 (below). In the next section, I will further examine how the over 50s manifest their age identities in a work-related context.

**Table 3: Older age-identity construction strategies**

Theme	Extract	Participant	Age-identity discursive strategy	Data
<u>Age-related categories</u> Construction of Chronological Life-stage Categories (CLCs)  Attributions of life-stage categories	1	Jean (female: 50)	Constructs CLCs (in the context of participant being 50 herself); ‘shifting’ perceptions of age categories as we age ourselves.	“people don’t see middle-aged (.) as startin’ at forty now I think that fifty is the new middle-age... and old age I would say is probably... about seventy (.) seventy eighty”
	2	Rae (female: 69)	Aligns with other older people; ‘outgroups’ younger colleagues: contextualised in work-related role when constructing CLC.	“the youngest one is (.) in their forties they just don’t seem to have the stamina [for the job]”
	3	Bella (female: 67)	Labelling constructs CLC- contextualised in work-related roles.  ‘Dual’ age-identity construction: Aligns with older age cohort whilst also positioning herself as a younger person.	“the script supervisors (.) can be pretty ancient... late sixties if not seventies”  “I suppose I had furrows too ... I like to think I was more trendy nobody ever mentioned that er I was old”
	4	Ed (male: 67)	Positions himself as an older person by being labelled as a grandparent.  Claims membership of older age group by comparing himself with younger colleagues	“they would mention the fact that...I was the oldest one there...just a joke (2.0) grandpa or something very friendly like that”  “sometimes I would tell them that at my age I take seniority to the (.) er (1.0) coffee machine something like that ( <i>laughs</i> )”

### 4.3 Orienting to ageing

It has been argued that we are influenced by social and cultural expectations when we construct our age identities (de Medeiros, 2005): what society expects of us at a certain age determines how our older 'self' is "socially constituted" (ibid: 5), either through conformity or resistance. Ruddick (1999:47) suggests that cultural expectations have produced the category of 'old age' and have homogenised people who fall into the age cohort of this category. I suggest that this implies that all 'old' people are expected by society to have similar attributes and patterns of behaviour. Older people's orientation towards retirement may be influenced by discourses and advertising in the media which advocate certain products and activities that claim to delay the ageing process, as argued by Rudman (2006) (cf. Chapter 2.5.5). Biggs (2001) argues that 'positive ageing' social policies are part of a growing trend in the UK government, and are communicated through 'master narratives', such as information on how to have a healthy diet and active lifestyle to stay 'fitter for longer'. The concept that older people's orientation to age may be influenced by social and cultural expectations and negative ageist perceptions is examined in the following section.

#### 4.3.1 Accepting ageing

In the following focus group, Leo (53), a male housing manager, demonstrates his conformity and adjusting to ageing and age-related change whilst negotiating his age-identity with Amy (44), a female maintenance officer. This is the only example in the study where age-identity construction is not related specifically to the workplace.

### Focus group: Independent Housing Association office

This group was selected to represent a small sample of female and male white-collar workers in middle management. The housing association office employed 180 people whose ages ranged from 16 to 74. There are six participants in the group aged from 25 to 65. The extract was 22 minutes into the session. Amy (44), a female maintenance officer, has been speaking about how she is anticipating reaching 50:

#### **Extract 5**

- 184 Amy and I'm looking forward to fifty (.) I feel like I have some more (1.0) liberty  
185 to you do you do feel that way when you get to a certain age as you grow older  
186 you feel you can =
- 187 Leo = I think your lifestyle changes =
- 188 Amy = yes it does doesn't it?
- 189 Leo it's lifestyle isn't it I mean you said earlier about (2.0) children (1.0) grown up  
190 (.) they've moved out so it's a different transitional period for you you might  
191 have grandchildren come in or (.) things of that nature (1.0) and you have to  
192 be honest with yourself you can't do everything you would like to do
- 193 M like what?
- 194 Leo well I (2.0) you (.) I can't play football anymore I can't play squash any more  
195 so you got to accept you got to do others as well (1.0) stay active maybe in  
196 other things (.) so your lifestyle changes not giving up on things you just say  
197 "well there's some things I can't do there's some things I want to try now" (.)  
198 I went skiing for the first time at forty eight
- 199 M you did?
- 200 Leo yeah (.) even with a dodgy knee and everyone told me I shouldn't do it (.) but  
201 (.) I loved it ...

(Leo's narrative continues to describe his ambitions to go skiing with his young grandson.)

Amy claims that she will have increased agentic control when she reaches 50 (line 184), which she then generalises to include all people, (lines 185-186). Her unfinished statement is latched on to by Leo who argues that there are "lifestyle changes" [as one grows older] (line 187), which he describes as a "transitional period" (line 190). He speaks of "children" and "grandchildren" (lines 189; 191), claiming membership of a family unit to construct his age-identity using the temporal processes of fatherhood and grandfatherhood (Membership Categorisation Device (MCD): Sacks, 1995). He then appears to accept the physical limitations associated with ageing by speaking about being "honest" [with himself] (line 192), indicating the possibility that he may have had difficulty coming to terms with his loss of [youthful] ability. He is constructing an age identity as someone who is comparing his current physical performance to that of his younger self. Sherman (1994:400) suggests this discursive strategy is one which relates to symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1981), whereby the "changing definition of self" (when related to ageing), is represented by the self-reflexive evaluation of an older person measured against his/her former self.

Responding to the moderator's invitation to give an example of things he can no longer 'do' (line 193), Leo mentions "football" and "squash" (line 194), activities that demand a certain level of physical fitness and that Leo says he is unable to achieve "any more" (line 194). He suggests that there are other activities he could pursue (line 197), which could help him "stay active" (line 195), implying that these "others" (line 195) may not be as physically demanding as football and squash. He discursively generalises his

perceptions to those of other people in his age cohort: “you” [got to accept] (line 195), and “you” [just say] (line 196). However, he states that ‘lifestyle change’ does not necessarily signify “giving up on things” (line 196), adding that he went on his first skiing trip when he was 48, thereby demonstrating that he has already started to participate in new activities (line 198). His view that becoming older appears to conflate with giving up certain physical activities may be attributed to age-related negative perceptions. However, he then asserts that he “loved” (line 201) going skiing aged 48, even though he had a “dodgy knee” (line 200) and was advised by “everyone” not to do it.

In this extract, Leo demonstrates his positive orientation to age-related change by accepting the physical limitations that preclude him from the strenuous sporting activities of his youth. He now goes skiing which he perceives as being less physically demanding. He also speaks of lifestyle changes which do not appear to be subjected to financial constraints: not everyone is able to afford going skiing as an alternative to playing football.

In the next section, I will examine interview data for respondents’ discursive strategies that appear to reflect a resistance to ageing which conflict with Leo’s generally positive approach to ageing and change.

#### 4.3.2 Resisting ageing

In the following extracts, I will demonstrate how each person uses discursive strategies to construct their age-identities whilst evidencing their resistance to ageing and age-related

change. Data comes from individual interviews with five respondents aged between 56 and 67, three of whom are still working; the other two have been retired for several years. In the first interview, Lucy (56) who is retired, speaks about turning 50 whilst still at work.

Interview: Lucy (female, 56)

Lucy took early retirement aged 53 from a senior position in a government office. She has been speaking about how her line manager who was in his late 30s used to joke about his team of ‘middle-aged’ women, who were all in their 50s. The extract is 5 minutes into the interview.

**Extract 6**

38 I so (.) the fact that (.) you know you were (1.0) when you became when you had  
39 your big birthday when you were fifty I mean how (.) how was that regarded by  
40 your colleagues was anything said? or was it you know a certain age or you know  
41 Lucy no I don't think (1.0) I'm not really somebody who's particularly (.) bothered in  
42 some ways like I mean nobody wants to get older it's horrible getting older but  
43 (.) I always sort of (1.0) try not to (.) make a thing about it really I I just feel I'm  
44 me and whatever I am (.) I hope people just regard me as me (.) I don't  
45 particularly want them to think of me as aged fifty six or I'm aged fifty I just  
46 want them to regard me as me

(The extract continues with Lucy voicing her concerns about the perception of her colleagues that, at 53, she was not as effective at work [as a younger person] and the pressure she felt to perform. This data is analysed in Section 3, which will deal with being older in the workplace.)

Responding to a question about her colleagues' reaction to her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and whether anything was "said" about reaching this milestone age (line 40), Lucy recalls that, as far as she remembers, nothing special was mentioned, (line 41). She does not explain if birthdays were usually celebrated in her office; it may be that she had not mentioned this fact to colleagues. She then proceeds to construct an age identity of herself as "not really somebody who's particularly (.) bothered" (line 41), possibly indicating that she feels age is irrelevant, but also that she may be concerned about growing older. This argument is reinforced by her next assertion that "nobody wants to get older it's horrible getting older" (line 42), an example of Extreme Case Formulation (ECF) (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Edwards, 2000), to express a view [about ageing] that Lucy perceives is widely held. She says she does not want to "make a thing about it" (line 43), and that "I just feel I'm me" ... I hope people just regard me as me" (lines 43- 44), not wanting [them] to think of her as "aged fifty six or I'm aged fifty" (line 45). She is demonstrating a social construction of ageing by distinguishing between her personal sense of age and her chronological age (Arber and Ginn, 1995; Nikander, 2002: 90), which appear to differ. She repeats the desire just to be accepted for herself and not subjected to negative perceptions that may be associated with ageing.

In this extract, Lucy's age-identity construction constitutes a nuanced appeal not be defined or oriented to as an 'older' person at work just because of her chronological age. She demonstrates her psychological resistance to ageing by asserting that growing older is 'horrible', and is concerned about how other people may have negative perceptions of her as she is now 56.

In the next extract, Ed (67) appears to take a resistant stance towards the physical effects of ageing by distancing himself from being 'old'.



Interview: Ed (male, 67)

Ed is employed as an accountant. The extract comes at the end of the interview: Ed has been speaking about how he envisages spending his time when he retires. He has been asked if there is anything else he would like to add before the interview is terminated:

**Extract 7**

- 135 I excellent okay well I think we've covered all (1.0) all the sorts of things on my er  
136 list um (1.0) anything else you wanna say about (.) being older over fifty working  
137 not working?  
138 Ed nah it's it's a (.) I certainly don't feel old I don't (1.0) see myself as old (.) um  
139 (2.0) I meet up with my (.) friends from my previous job (.) they're much much  
140 younger than me (.) um never had a problem (.) we get on very well no no I er  
141 age was (1.0) never a problem never a problem I (.) I don't feel old (1.0) I think  
142 I don't look old (1.0) um so um (1.0) nah not a problem  
143 I okay (1.0) excellent (.) thank you

This is the first time [in the interview] that Ed has mentioned how he 'feels' about being older: a subjective or psychological dimension of ageing (Laslett, 1989; Arber and Ginn, 1995). He is 67 years old, but appears to distance himself from his peer age cohort by repeatedly stating that he doesn't "feel" or "see" himself as "old" (lines 138; 141), adding that he does not "think" that he 'looks' old (lines 141-142). He may be comparing his physical appearance with other acquaintances of his age. Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) speak of the 'mask of ageing', whereby an ageing physical appearance conflicts with the sense of a younger inner self. Ed's assertions demonstrate that he is distancing himself from being and looking 'old'. Logan *et al* (1992:451) argue that age has social content and personal meaning: "You're only as old as you feel". Ed is demonstrating a

self-reflective view about how 'old' he sees himself relationally in society. His observations also indicate that he perceives that his physical attributes should not be associated with archetypal images of older people. Hurd (1999: 421) argues that 'old age' can be equated with deterioration, and that older people may reject ageist perceptions of "physical decline", by distancing themselves from the label 'old'. Ed comments that he interacts well with younger colleagues: "never had a problem" (line 141). This suggests that being able to "get on very well" (line 140) with younger people signifies that he does not view being older as a barrier to sociability and continuing relationships with younger colleagues, which potentially could be problematic for other older people. His final comment: "nah not a problem" (line 142) signifies his resistant stance to his ageing being a 'problem': he has already made this assertion three times in line 140 ("never had a problem"), and in line 141, ("never a problem never a problem").

In the next extract, Dina (62) demonstrates her resistance to the social aspect of ageing by appearing to align herself with younger people.

Interview: Dina (female, 62)

Dina is employed as a travel hostess, her working on her own and not part of a team, however, she has the opportunity for interaction with other colleagues. The extract is five minutes into the interview. The interviewer has been asking about Dina's colleagues and whether she mixes with them socially:

**Extract 8**

59 I so do you mix with them at all on the station? you know you said some of them  
60 are young some are older

61 Dina I talk to (.) everyone and I got a good rapport with all ages I don't have a  
62 problem with the young (.) and old people are just people to me whoever they  
63 are you know (.) and some of the young ones come and chat with me (1.0)  
64 and (.) I think I'm quite (.) um (.) quite forward thinking so I can talk to 'em  
65 about anything it doesn't worry me in the slightest bit you know and they think  
66 of me as a mother figure....

. *(Dina continues to relate how she has known many of her colleagues for over ten years,*  
. *and that they sometimes mix socially. She then speaks about how age-related talk*  
. *sometimes occurs during interaction with her male colleagues.)*

80 I what sort of things do the men say

81 Dina well you know "we're getting old" an' all this and "when you retire" an' that sort  
82 of thing but it's just joking the one that's a year older than me but it's joking just  
83 joking there's no there's never any malice you know I think if anyone I just  
84 wouldn't take any notice of what they say because I don't think of myself as old  
85 (*laughs*) it's a psychological thing I think isn't it you know

86 I well you look really good you keep yourself good your make-up and =

87 Dina = it's a state of mind age it's not a number (0.5) I don't think it's a number in any  
88 way (1.0) ...

(The interview continues with Dina speaking about how women at work today are allowed more flexible working arrangements whereas when she was a young mother she had to leave her job.)

Dina comments that she neither aligns herself with "old people [who] are just people to me" (line 62), nor identifies with them (Sherman, 1994: 398). At 62, she may perceive

herself as being 'young-old'. She maintains that she has a "good rapport with all ages" (line 61), asserting that she has no "problem with the young" (line 62), and that she can "talk to 'em about anything" (lines 64-65). She self-reflexively observes that she is "quite forward thinking" (line 64), aligning herself with younger people she can still engage with even though they potentially have different interests to her. However, she then positions herself (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006) as a member of an older age cohort by labelling herself as a "mother figure" (line 66), constructing a 'dual' identity she warrants by stating that this is how she is perceived [by younger people]. This observation appears to challenge her self-representation as being 'forward thinking': a discursive strategy designed to communicate 'how I see myself compared to how others see me' (symbolic interactionism: Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1981). She agrees that there is some age-related banter and joking amongst her male peers (lines 80-83), but stresses that there is "never any malice" (line 83) directed against her: "it's joking just joking" (lines 82-83). Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997: 275-276) argue that a sense of 'in-grouping' can be achieved by "conversational joking" during the development of "relational identity" amongst participants. Dina's comment "we're getting old" (line 81), supports this concept by personally aligning herself with people in her same age cohort. However, she also reports others speaking of "when you retire", which appears to generalise this stage-of-life (retirement) as one that she is not yet personally considering. She suggests that even if the men were not joking, she "wouldn't take any notice of what they say because I don't think of myself as old" (lines 83-84). She reinforces her age identity construction as a person who is not 'old' by noting that one of the men who make 'jokes' about retiring is "a year older than me" (line 82), thus distancing herself from his age group membership.

Dina remarks that chronological age is “a psychological thing” (line 85) and that “it’s a state of mind age it’s not a number” (line 87). Her laughter (line 85) may signify that other people do not share her perception that she is not ‘old’. However, as Marander-Eklund (2008) suggests, laughter is a communicative paralinguistic device that may be used to express emotions other than comedy or humour. Dina is constructing an age-identity of herself as someone who accepts that her chronological age may define her as an ‘older’ person, but she does not accept that her chronological age aligns her with the category ‘old’ (line 84). Her verbalisation, which may be influenced by negative views of ageing, echoes that of Nikander (2009: 868) who argues that people may accept their ageing process as a natural occurrence without accepting the culturally held negative perceptions that are associated with ageing.

In this extract, Dina has achieved her age identity construction through reported interactions with her colleagues. In the next interview, Eve (64), demonstrates her resistance to ageing and change by constructing an age-identity as someone who has attempted to represent herself as being chronologically younger than she actually is.

Interview: Eve (female, 64)

Eve is self-employed and runs a photographic library. She employs 5 female assistants who are aged in their 20s and 30s. The extract comes at the end of the interview in response to being asked if there is anything else she would like to add:

### Extract 9

- 178 I okay I think we've covered everything =
- 179 Eve = that's all?
- 180 I absolutely and anything else =
- 181 Eve = I'm sorry
- 182 I no no don't apologise you've already actually two or three things that were
- 183 age salient the way you spoke about yourself =
- 184 Eve = I will tell you one thing actually (.) ° maybe a useful thing ° you know they have
- 185 this professional website LinkedIn? you know LinkedIn don't you?
- 186 I no
- 187 Eve LinkedIn LinkedIn everybody's on it
- 188 I yes yes I have seen it yes yes
- 189 Eve so everyone's on it and you get requests for people to you know whatever (.) a
- 190 friend or (*laughs*) and er so I carefully er (1.0) altered the date on my work (.)
- 191 experience to make me about ten years younger (*spoken confidently and proudly*)
- 192 because I I (.) I'm (.) aware that it could make me (1.0) er (.) possibly a target (.)
- 193 for um (.) er (.) from the point of view of competition you know ° there's an old
- 194 woman running this and she's gonna be on her last legs ° so (.) I can't um (.) I
- 195 can't (.) er expose that sort of vulnerability and as I (.) don't look quite my age so
- 196 as I reckon although lately as I noticed in the chemist they've given me the form
- 197 to sign (*laughs*) but so you do one is aware that especially with younger people
- 198 around you know and it's it's (.) you know business dealing with people so you do
- 199 er (.) um but that's really more not just myself it's to protect the whole
- 200 business...

(Eve continues to speak about how the business network website works.)

Eve latches on to the interviewer's comment about age salient data [during the interview] (lines 182-183), by announcing that she is about to make a disclosure: she then relates how she altered the date on her work experience details [for a professional internet website] to make herself appear to be ten years younger (lines 190-191). Her disclosure at this point is an anaphoric reference (Jasperson, 1997) to the fact that she is now aware that it was age-salient material that the interviewer was trying to elicit, which is reinforced by her quiet utterance: "° maybe a useful thing °" (line 184). She voices the disclosure confidently and proudly (line 191), using paralinguistic devices to signify that she believes herself to have been clever and cunning to lie about her chronological age for the website. This information was not solicited by the interviewer and may not have been disclosed if the informant was ashamed or embarrassed by her action. She justifies why she has made this alteration: she is concerned that her business reputation could suffer ((Semin and Manstead, 1983: 91-92) if her competitors make attributions of her as "an old woman running this and she's gonna be on her last legs" (lines 193-194). She suggests that her business would be "vulnerable" and needed to be "protected" (lines 199-200) if she allowed her competitors to know her real age (lines 194-195). She is also maintaining her positive 'face' (Goffman, 1999) (the positive self-representational image she wants others to attribute to her). She wishes to be perceived as a younger woman in the eyes of her competitors by "distancing" herself from assumed negative characteristics she attributes to people in her own age cohort group (Paoletti, 1998: 20-21).

Eve then asserts: "I (.) don't look quite my age", (line 195), possibly linking her appearance-age to a photo of herself on the website which accompanies her business details. Thus she discursively constructs her age-identity as one which challenges the 'look' of deterioration (that is not caused by ill health), which may be attributed to ageing

as she moves through the life-span (Coupland, 2009: 854). However, she then tangentially provides anecdotal evidence that she may actually look her age as ‘they’ gave her the ‘form’ to sign in the chemist, alluding to the fact that people over 60 get free medication in England (lines 196-197). She does not mention the ages of the chemist shop assistants (“they”, line 196). However, the presentation of the unsolicited ‘form’ for Eve to sign may have signified a ‘face-threat’ (Brown and Levinson, 1987), whereby her chronological age was assumed to be 60 or over. Eve herself has stated that she doesn’t ‘look quite her age’ (line 195), adding “so as I reckon” (lines 195-196), which strengthens her claim that she looks younger than her chronological years. Her laughter after voicing this memory (line 197) suggests that, even though she believes she doesn’t look her age, people in the chemist’s gave her the benefit of the doubt that she was over 60 so that she could qualify for free medication. She then reinforces her perception that she needs to make herself appear younger “to protect the whole business” (lines 199-200), asserting that this deception is “not just myself” (line 199), and implying that she is not doing this for vanity. She then makes the assumption that the interviewer (whose age she knows) will agree with her observation that “one is aware that especially with younger people around *you know...business dealing with people so you do*” (my italics) (lines 197-198), the inference being that her business will not be a success if she is perceived to be an older person by her competitors and clients due to possible institutional and internalised ageist attitudes (Johnson and Bytheway, 1993; Nelson, 2005).

In this extract, Eve negotiates her age-identity as someone who would like others to see her as how she sees herself. Ylänné (2012: 5) speaks of a subjectivity that relates to how ‘old’ one feels that may conflict with how others see us; a “self v. other identification”. The fact that Eve has altered her details on an internet website to make herself appear



chronologically younger indicates that she may be resisting the perception of declining work-related competence and performance that may be stereotypically associated with growing older. She is aware that, at 64, her age may be perceived as problematic in the public domain, which could harm her business.

However, having tried to construct a younger age-identity, she also accepts that in certain contexts (for example, in the chemist shop) she may be perceived as being her true age. She is claiming a positive self-identity associated with the attributes of younger people: a dissimulation contrived to position herself as a member of a younger age cohort (Sacks, 1995; Jones, 2006). In the next extract Bella, a retired female film producer aged 67, also discursively constructs her age-identity to make herself appear to be younger in a workplace environment, demonstrating a resistance to chronological ageing.

Interview: Bella (female, 67)

Bella retired when she was 60 as a film producer within the communications division of the UK Government with responsibilities for promoting policy. She has been speaking about how she used to mix well with younger as well as older people socially after work, but how the older people used to leave early after a night out, instead of going on to a disco. The interviewer has asked if age had ever been referred to during social interaction at work or out of working hours:

### Extract 10

- 27 I so was age ever referred to in any conversations at all?
- 28 Bella no I mean people didn't realise how old I was (.) and um (.) it was my feeling
- 29 that the er more the creative teams I worked with from the advertising agencies
- 30 (.) some of them were (.) young enough to be my children (.) if not my
- 31 grandchildren and (*laughs*) I had a hard job disguising the fact that er my
- 32 knowledge went to further years than theirs did (.) especially with music for
- 33 instance you know I'd mention (.) a pop group that they had never heard of
- 34 (*laughs*) but it made it made me realise the age (.) difference and I didn't know
- 35 who they were talking about either so I haven't kept in touch musically
- 36 I (2.0) okay so that's a good example I suppose (.) you were aware of that
- 37 Bella yes
- 38 I did you behave any differently when you had that awareness?
- 39 Bella no oh no no no it's just I kept my mouth shut (*laughs*)

(Bella goes on to speak about how there had never been any reference to age or age-related banter during social interaction with her younger colleagues.)

The first thing that Bella maintains was that “people didn't realise how old I was” (line 28), explaining that ‘people’ related to the “creative teams” (line 29) from advertising agencies with whom she had worked (line 29). She describes some of them as being “young enough to be my children (.) if not my grandchildren” (lines 30-31), followed by a laugh which may indicate her amusement, or uneasiness, that she could have adult grandchildren. Bella may also be signifying that she is positioning herself as someone who does not want to be old enough to have adult grandchildren. Alternatively, the laughter may be that she “had a hard job disguising the fact” (line 31) in relation to the “knowledge that went to further years than theirs did (.) especially with music” (line 32). This is an example of a Temporal

Framing Process strategy (Coupland *et al*, 1991:64), with Bella reporting that her knowledge of popular music predated that of her younger colleagues [knowledge]. She is constructing her age-identity as someone who is old enough to remember “a pop group they had never heard of” (line 33), which made her aware of the age difference between herself and the younger people (line 34), adding that she was not musically “in touch” either (line 35). When asked if the awareness of this age gap had resulted in her behaving any differently (line 38), Bella laughingly responds that she “just kept her mouth shut” (line 39). She has oriented positively to other people’s perception of her as being younger than her chronological age and has done nothing to dissuade this perception by withholding her ignorance about contemporary pop culture. Her laughter at admitting she “kept her mouth shut” (line 39) further signifies that she was happy to be regarded as a member of a younger age cohort, which may be said to be an implicit discursive strategy to signify her resistance to chronological ageing.

This section examines how older workers orient to age whilst constructing their age identities by accepting or resisting ageing: see Table 4 below. A positive age-identity construction is grounded in the acceptance of the physical limitations that may accompany ageing. Resistance to chronological ageing, the perceptions of declining competence, and the sociological and psychological perspectives of wishing to be ‘seen’ as belonging to a younger age cohort are demonstrated by other participants. The next section will focus on issues that may arise from being over 50 at work, such as the ability to learn new skills, and being valued for experience and reliability.

**Table 4: Orienting to older age-identity**

Theme	Extract	Participant	Age-identity discursive strategy	Orienting to growing older	Data
Orienting to ageing Accepting ageing	5	Leo (male- 53)	Uses MCD to claim membership of family group to construct ageing identity.	Accepts physical age-related changes.	“children(1.0) grown up (.) they’ve moved out... grand-children come in”
			Age-related symbolic-interactionist example: self-assessment of current physical ability compared to that of younger self .		“you got to accept you got to do others [sports] as well... not giving <u>up</u> on things... some things I can’t do... there’s some things I want to try now”
Resisting ageing	6	Lucy (female- 56)	Uses ECF to express a widely held view.	Resists psychological aspect of ageing.	“nobody wants to get <u>older</u> it’s horrible getting older”
			Distinguishes between personal sense of ‘self’ and chronological age.		“I just feel I’m <u>me</u> ... I don’t <u>particularly</u> want them to think of me as aged fifty six... I just want them to regard me as me”
			Distances himself from being ‘old’: compares his physical appearance to his perception of how ‘older’ people look.		“I certainly don’t feel old I don’t (1.0) <u>see</u> myself as old”
			Aligns with younger people.		“I think I’m quite... forward thinking... I can talk to ‘em about <u>anything</u> ”
8	Dina (female- 62)	[Also] aligns with older people, constructing ‘dual’ age-identity	Accepts role [of mother]: not only age-salient.	“They [young people] think of me as a mother figure”	
		Aligns herself with a younger age cohort (admits to altering details on a professional website).	Resists chronological aspect of ageing.	“I <u>carefully</u> er (1.0) <u>altered</u> the date on my work (.) experience to make me about ten years younger”	
9	Eve (female- 64)	Compares ‘self’ to others- how she would like to be ‘seen’.	Resists psychological aspect of ageing.	“I don’t think of myself as old... it’s a <u>state</u> of mind age it’s not a number”	

	9	Eve (female- 64)	Distances herself from perceived negative attributes of ageing.  Constructs physical image as a younger person.	Resists performance aspect of ageing.  Resists physical aspect of ageing.	“I can’t (.) er expose that sort of vulnerability [to her business competition]  “I don’t look quite my age”
	10	Bella (female- 67)	Uses Temporal Framing Age Categorisation process to distance herself from being her actual chronological age.	Resists chronological aspect of ageing.	“you know I’d mention (.) a pop group that they [younger colleagues] had never heard of ... it made me realise the age difference...I kept my mouth shut”

#### 4.4 Ageing at work

Griffiths (2009: 123) suggests that “overall, older workers perform as well as younger workers” and cites several studies (such as Salthouse and Maurer, 1996; Benjamin and Wilson, 2005) which have found many positive work attributes pertaining to older people. For example, they tend to demonstrate more positive work values and lower turnover rates. She does not chronologically define the term ‘older’, but writes about people who retire at 50 or 55 (ibid: 123): this therefore may be the age to which she is applying the label ‘older’. She adds that other scientific studies have concluded that there may be age-related loss of cognitive abilities, such as memory capacity and information processing speed (Kowalski-Trakofler, Steiner and Schwerha, 2005), but notes that much of this research was directed at people over 65, who are not usually still working. In the following extracts, some examples of participant data echoed the findings of Kowalski-Trakofler *et al*: concerns were voiced that related to effectiveness at work which appeared to include the ability to assimilate new skills. Positive attributes of older workers, which support Griffiths’ argument, are also represented by

some participants who speak about how they perceive age and experience are valued by employers.

#### 4.4.1 Performance at work

The following data was gathered during one focus group session and two interviews. In the first extract, Edna (64) speaks about how it takes her longer to learn new technological skills compared to a younger person.

##### Focus group: Centre for further education

This group was chosen to represent white-collar and professional people working in the education sector. There were only three female participants for the hour-long session: Edna (64) a tutor; Sara (52) an executive administrative officer; and Linda (49), a senior secretary. The extract is 18 minutes into the session: the group have been discussing how colleagues talk about age and a pre-occupation with fitness, diet and clothes.

##### **Extract 11**

118 M so they don't make reference to your age but it's just are you suggesting that  
119 it's implied that you're looking good for your age sort of thing or it's (2.0) or  
120 just a general people tell each other that they look good? =  
121 Edna = it's a lot a lot and well I mean people talk a lot about (.) a birthday I mean an  
122 upcoming birthday "my God I'm going to turn forty my God I'm going to turn  
123 fifty" (1.0) as if the the tragedy of the life-cycle were happening to them (1.0) oh  
124 (*affects a gasp*) and (1.0) I mean (.) I turn to look at them "what will you do when  
125 you get to [where I am?]" you know how will you deal with the (.) fact that you  
126 gen [laughter]

127 register things more slowly (.) you know if you go to a computer training  
128 session and actually you're shown at top speed as if everyone in there were  
129 nineteen =

130 M = yes =

131 Edna = you're shown at top speed how to do something (.) once once and given a booklet  
132 "goodbye" (.) but (1.0) what whatever you are fifty nine or sixty (.) three or  
133 whatever it is (.) it takes more time for it to go in it's a fact of life everybody  
134 knows this about the ageing brain (.) but it is seen as such a disgrace that no  
135 concession can ever be made for that (1.0) nothing can be explained more slowly (.)  
136 never again "my God she must be failing" you know (.) "is she really smart enough  
137 to be teaching here? (1.0) because she didn't get that the first time" (.) okay? so these  
138 are the (1.0) wait for it =

139 Linda = mm that's not been my experience yet I I think =

140 Edna = no it wouldn't it hasn't it doesn't happen until it's a post-menopausal thing (.)  
141 um when the hormones don't get there as (.) um you know as regularly your  
142 brains are going to age it happens to us (.) and if we want to work we have to  
143 learn that (1.0) erm there's another rhythm at which you assimilate these things  
144 and if it's not going to be taken into account fine...

(Edna continues her narrative by making an argument for positive age discrimination for young people by expressing her opinion that they will not be able to find work if older people keep working after retirement age.)

The sequence opens with participants being asked if colleagues "tell each other" that they "look good" [for their age], even though age is not referred to directly (lines 118-120). Edna latches on to this question by observing that "people" talk a lot about decade

boundary birthdays (cf. Bytheway, 2005) and that they represent these events as tragic (lines 121-123). She speaks of 40 and 50 as being examples of landmark ages when people appear to mourn chronological ageing, and represent the “life-cycle” as a “tragedy”, possibly signifying that people perceive growing older as a negative occurrence. She voices a rhetorical question to her younger colleagues: “what will you do when you get to where I am?” (line124-125), metaphorically framing her age as a location and, aged 64, positioning herself as a member of an older age cohort, (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006). She is also creating the implicature that this stage of her life is rendering her less able to “deal with the (.) fact that you register things more slowly” (lines 125,127) than younger people, referring to the computer training session she attended, and suggests that more time should have been allowed for the training. She repeats this observation by adding that people are taught how to do something at “top speed”, being given “a booklet”, and summarily dismissed: “goodbye” (lines 131-132). She argues that older people have “another rhythm” to “assimilate these things” (line 143). She attributes her observation that it “takes more time for it to go in” exemplifying the ages of 59 or 63, to the fact that older people have an “ageing brain”, stating that this is “a fact of life” (line 133). She argues that it is “a disgrace” (line 134) that no concession is made for older people to be allowed to assimilate information “more slowly” (lines 133-135). She is 64, and is aligning herself with other people she perceives take longer to learn new information. She then rationalises that learning more slowly will be perceived as an indicator of failure: “my God she must be failing you know” (line 136). She voices the projected appraisal of others which evidences ageism in the workplace, that she is unable to do her job properly: “is she really smart enough to be teaching here (1.0) because she didn’t get that the first time” (lines 136-137).



At this point, Linda (49) challenges Edna's perception: "mm that's not been my experience yet I I think" (line 139), signifying her disagreement with Edna's point of view, however, acknowledging via the conjunction 'yet', that this phenomenon may occur as she grows older. Edna latches on to this comment, replying immediately that Linda would not have experienced this phenomenon [yet] as it is a "post-menopausal thing" (line 140), assuming that Linda, aged 49, has not reached the menopause. This assumption may be perceived to be a face-threat (Brown and Levinson, 1987) by Edna towards Linda, as Edna is referring to a personal and sensitive female issue about which she may not have prior knowledge. Edna explains that the 'post-menopausal thing' occurs "when the hormones don't get there" as regularly (line 141), alluding to her perception that the brain needs hormones to function effectively, which she believes does not occur after the menopause. She is construing a link between the speed at which knowledge is assimilated and the loss of hormones as a physiological process which affects the 'ageing brain', constructing a biological rationale for cognitive 'slowing down'.

This narrative discursively constructs Edna as a strong-minded female who is representing her views on the inability of women in their late 50s and early 60s to assimilate new information as quickly as younger people, citing computer training as an example. She argues that this is a "fact of life everybody knows", rationalising that the biological effects of the menopause are responsible for this lack of ability. She voices concern that her inability to grasp these new skills may be perceived as a "failing" and suggests that people may think she can no longer function effectively in her job.

Edna's narrative is indicative of someone who accepts the changes that accompany ageing, (based on the presupposition of what she says is 'true' rather than her version of reality),

and perceives that these changes may be seen by others to negatively affect performance at work. These concerns are again manifested in the following data elicited during two interviews which were conducted with female respondents aged 64 and 56: one had retired three years previously and one was still working. In the first extract, which is 5 minutes into the interview, Eve (64) has been speaking about the competitiveness of her industry and her main rivals to the photographic library business she owns.

### **Extract 12**

68 Eve ...there are two groups actually there's kinda the old guard who would be  
69 around my age but then there's quite a lot of new ones coming up all young  
70 and bright and hungry and kinda thing  
71 I you sound quite hungry (*laughs*)  
72 Eve no they're much hungrier (.) ah but then they're (.) often in different areas from  
73 us (.) we're in more (.) kinda editorial (.) um (1.0) but obviously (.) the (.) er (.)  
74 younger you are the more energy you have and this is (.) sorta quite  
75 technologically cutting edge (.) industry (.) er (.) so that is going to be um  
76 difficult if you're a bit older and if you're young er er everyone is fully aware  
77 of the various potential for the software...

. (*Eve continues to stress the importance of being computer literate in order to have a*  
. *successful business, and how she sometimes out-sources her work.*)  
.

82 I okay you talk about (.) highly technical do you manage this? or is it something  
83 you feel is more for younger people?

84 Eve I did at the beginning I I try not to now 'cause it's hard work for me to remember  
85 all these things unless I'm doing it all the time I'm not an instinctive computer  
86 person

87 I right

88 Eve um (.) but I I understand the principles so that generally enables me to kind of  
89 give encouragement sort of guidelines as to where it should be going

(The interview now continues with Eve being asked how she thinks she is viewed by her younger employees.)

At the start of the extract, Eve explains that there are two groups of people who are her main competitors (lines 68-69): she differentiates them by their ages, claiming age cohort membership with those who are of a similar age to her, labelling them “the old guard” (line 68). She refers to her younger rivals as “young and bright and hungry” (lines 69-70), metaphorically transposing ‘hunger’ for food to a desire to be successful at work, and possibly implying that the ‘old guard’ are not so “bright and hungry”. Stating that these “new ones” are “coming up” (line 69) also assumes an age-related hierarchy. The interviewer suggests that Eve herself sounds “quite hungry” (line 71), to which Eve responds that the younger people are “much hungrier” (line 72), reinforcing her perception that the ‘old guard’ may have already achieved a measure of success when compared to the younger people. She explains that the work [of the younger staff members] is often different to her own (lines 72-73), and generalises that younger people have more energy: “the (.) er (.) younger you are the more energy you have” (lines 73-74), which she suggests, is ‘obvious’ (line 73): she may be making the implicature that older people have less energy. She generalises that if people are “a bit older” (line 76) it may be “difficult” (line 75) [to adapt] to the “technologically cutting edge (.) industry” (line 75) [of the environment in which she works], personalising this observation by adding that “it’s hard work for me to remember all these things” (lines 84-85). She is implying that younger people find it easier to acquire technological skills compared to older people. She reformulates this suggestion by observing that younger people are “fully aware of the

various potential for the software” (lines 76-77). Eve’s representation of her view that younger people have the ability to use computer technology whereas older people may find it more difficult may be said to mirror Edna’s perception of disadvantages of ageing (cf. Extract 11 above).

In the next extract, Lucy (56) who took early retirement from her civil service job three years previously, speaks about issues relating to her perceptions of diminishing ability at work as she grew older. This extract follows on from Lucy’s age-identity construction interview (cf. Extract 6), where she has been speaking about wanting to be regarded as herself, not a number associated with her chronological age, and not wishing to be aligned with the possible negative stereotypes of ‘old age’ (cf. Extract 7).

### **Extract 13**

47 Lucy ...I I suppose one of the things it it does do as you get older you feel (1.0) a  
48 certain amount of pressure to make sure that that you (.) your performance  
49 isn't diminishing (.) um (.) so perhaps (2.0) I don't know perhaps it's just me  
50 as a person (.) but I do feel that (.) I was always keen to make sure that I pulled  
51 my weight an' that you know nobody would sort of think oh God you know  
52 (*laughs*) she's past it in that respect (.) but maybe that's that's just me as a person  
53 but I don't know if that's age-related or not really (1.0) but I wouldn't want  
54 anyone to think that I couldn't do the job properly 'cause I was a bit older

(The dialogue continues with Lucy describing how she had enjoyed her work but that she had often been under pressure.)

Lucy’s main concern discursively represented in this extract is that she remained as effective in her job when she was still working, compared to when she was younger. She

communicates this concern by generalising “as you get older you feel (1.0) a certain amount of pressure” (lines 47-48); she is identifying with other ‘older’ people. She continues to generalise: “you need to ensure that “your performance isn’t diminishing” (lines 48-49). However, she then personalises this observation by adding that “so perhaps (2.0) I don’t know perhaps it’s just me as a person” (lines 49-50). From this it can be inferred that Lucy is concerned that her ‘performance’ may have been ‘diminishing’ as she grew older, but accepts that not all other older people may share this concern about their own working abilities as they age. She states that she was always eager to demonstrate that she “pulled” her “weight” (lines 50-51), voicing her fear that her colleagues would think she was “past it” (line 52) if she did not ‘pull her weight’. However, she laughs as she is saying this, possibly showing resistance to a perceived problem. Jefferson (2004:124-125) argues that when laughing accompanies reported troubles, it indicates that the problem may not concern the informant: she labels this behaviour: “troubles-resistance”. At the end of the extract, Lucy reformulates her main concern, that she did not want people to think she could not “do the job properly” (line 54), using age to account for attributions of failing professional ability. This concern again echoes other participants who allude to ageist assumptions in the workplace.

In this section, female participants are seen to represent their perceptions pertaining to ageing at work whilst constructing their age-identities as people who are not resisting growing older (see Table 5 below). Concerns are voiced about age-related loss of effectiveness and ability to assimilate new information, (especially relating to new technology), and being perceived as being ‘past it’ by younger colleagues.

These nuanced accounts represent negative views about ageing at work. The theme that younger people are more adept than older people at using modern technology is extended in the next section where being valued as an older worker is examined. Focus group data indicate that the skills of younger people are perceived not to attenuate the age and experience of older colleagues.

**Table 5: Older-age identification constructions**

Theme	Extract	Participant	Age-identity discursive strategy	Data
<u>Ageing at work</u> Performance at work	11	Edna (female- 64)	Frames age as a location; positions herself as 'old' by claiming membership of older age cohort.  Aligns with other [older] people who may take longer to learn.	"what <u>will</u> you do when you get to where I am?"  "whatever you <u>are</u> fifty nine or sixty (.) three... it takes more time for it to go <u>in</u> "
	12	Eve (female- 64)	Identifies with other older people of similar chronological age.	"the old guard who would be around my age"
	13	Lucy (female- 56)	Demonstrates older age-identity by aligning with possible negative perceptions of failing ability.	"as you get older... I wouldn't want anyone to think I couldn't do the job properly 'cause I was a bit older"

#### 4.4.2 Age, experience and reliability

This section examines how the over 50s speak about being valued for their age, experience and reliability at work. In the first extract, focus group participants construct their age identities whilst comparing their perceived positive age-related attributes as older workers to those of younger colleagues. However, aspects of performance at work may also evidence negative perceptions of ageing.

##### Focus Group: Home-improvement store

This extract is from a group session in a branch of a large home-improvement retail company which is renowned for employing older people. The store employs 150 people aged from 16 to 81, with over 30% of staff being over 50. Participants were selected as a sample of blue-collar workers. The three male participants in the group are sales advisors: Fred (80) works in the gardening department; Brian (64) is a carpentry specialist; and Mark (55) is a general assistant. The extract which is 6 minutes into the session, follows a discussion about the type of employment most suited to younger people:

##### **Extract 14**

- 77 M what about here are there some jobs that older people do and some jobs that  
78 younger people do?
- 79 Brian not really it or it would be with the experience obviously if somebody wants to  
80 know something (.) there's no point going to somebody and asking them how  
81 you gonna do this or they haven't got the knowledge for that
- 82 Fred we did have youngsters on gardening a few years ago (.) if a customer went up

83                   to them an' asked about a certain plant they'd come an' ask us the older ones  
84                   because they didn't have the experience

(The discussion continues with participants speaking about the advantages and disadvantages of using computers.)

In response to being asked about whether older and younger people do the same type of job (lines 77-78), Brian (64) responds that this is dependent on individuals' "experience" (line 79), adding "obviously" (line 79) to suggest that 'everyone' knows this implicit fact. He argues, however, that "there's no point going to somebody and asking them how you gonna do this...they haven't got the knowledge for that" (lines 80-81). This implies that younger people are not experienced enough to help in certain situations. This implication is supported by Fred (80), who speaks about "youngsters on gardening" who had to "ask us the older ones because they didn't have the experience" when "a customer went up to them an' asked about a certain plant" (lines 82- 84). Fred is claiming age-group membership with Brian (even though he is 16 years older), "us", relationally positioning himself as an 'older' worker and distancing himself from the inexperienced 'youngsters, "they". He is using experience as a conceptual resource for claiming positive self-identity at an older age.

In the next extract, age and experience at work are not perceived to be valued by employees working in a government office.

#### Focus Group: Government office

This extract is taken from a group that was conducted in a government office: part of a larger Department employing people aged 18 to 65. This organisation was selected as a



sample of white-collar employees. The group consisted of 8 participants (4 female and 4 male) aged 28 to 56, however data in the following interaction relates to four females: Mary (56), support officer; Lily (28), policy advisor; Bren (49), help-line manager; and Jess (56), section manager and one male; Dan (45), a policy official.

The extract, which is 42 minutes into the session, follows a discussion about how participants plan to spend their retirement. This topic effectively concludes the session; however, the moderator asks if there is anything else anyone would like to add. Jess (56) observes that the issue of being valued at work has not been raised:

### **Extract 15**

394 Jess I we haven't talked about whether (name of employer (1)) values older people

395 and their experiences I don't think they do

396 Dan to be fair though [(.) I don't think anybody [necessarily values anyone today

397 Jess [I don't think they do]

398 gen [laughter ]

399 Lily [oof]

400 Bren it's becoming apparent that they don't

401 Jess certainly age and experience doesn't really [get

402 Mary [(( ? )) make out they do that what

403 these people

. *(participants continue to discuss a recent situation when a form needed to be*

. *submitted to reception for a visitor instead of making a telephone call, as had*

. *been the previous practice. It was suggested that this demonstrated a lack of*

*confidence by management in all workers, irrespective of age.)*

418 M that's sad isn't it?

419 Jess it is but they do tick all the boxes and all this IIP [*Investors in People scheme*]

420 we've [*the Department*] got credit for this they (.) in reality they don't value us

421 at all certainly not when you're older an' you got experience don't make any

422 difference

423 Bren and the perfect example is the way they got rid of these people (early retirement)

424 (.) "there you are 'bye slam the door behind you and don't forget to clear your

425 desk" no respect at all

(The discussion then moves on to relate participants' reminiscences of how they were treated by senior managers when they were younger, which were more positive.)

Jess (56) introduces the issue of whether her organisation "values older people and their experiences" (lines 394-395); offering a personal opinion: "I don't think they do" (line 395). At 56, she is claiming membership as an 'older' worker to construct her age-identity in a workplace context. She adds: "certainly age and experience doesn't really get" (line 401), and appears to be supported by Mary (56): "they [her employers] do that what these [people]" (lines 402-403). Dan (45) starts to mitigate this observation in defence of his employer: "to be fair though (.) I don't think anybody necessarily values anyone today" (line 396), (arguing that perhaps things have changed since 'yesterday', when people were valued by others). However, this comment is challenged by Jess who simultaneously repeats her bald assertion: "I don't think they do" (line 397). The interaction [between Jess and Dan] is met by laughter from the other participants at the apparent face-threat (Brown and Levinson, 1987) by Dan towards Jess and the counter face-threat by Jess towards Dan. The conflicting views of Dan and Jess are personal and

cannot be validated. Antaki (1994: 163-164) theorises that such arguments may occur when views are propounded without being based on deductive validity, but are based on individual opinions which are not grounded in facts that can be tested.

Bren (49) demonstrates her support for Jess's view, observing that "it's becoming apparent that they don't" (line 400). She warrants her argument: "the way they got rid of these people" (line 423) (referring to an early retirement package option): "(.) "there you are 'bye slam the door behind you and don't forget to clear your desk'". She concludes that her employer (whom she has 'voiced in her example) has "no respect at all" (line 425). At 49, Bren appears to be aligning herself with Jess as an older worker even though she is seven years younger. It may be that she perceives herself to be in the same age cohort as she is nearing 50. It is also interesting to note that Dan (45) is only four years younger than Bren, but does not support his older colleagues' perceptions.

Jess (line 401) suggests that "age and experience doesn't really get", which supports Bren's observation [that older people are not valued]. She argues that: "in reality they don't value us at all certainly not when you're older an' you got experience don't make any difference" (lines 420-421). She states that this position is taken by her organisation even though "we've got credit for" (line 420) a scheme that invests resources in training its staff. She is implying that her employer, who wants all the 'boxes ticked' and 'forms filled' as part of the assessment process which demonstrates that they value their staff, 'in reality' (line 420) do not value older people.

In this extract, participants represent their views about not being valued at work. The older participants, Jess (56), Mary (56), and Bren (49) state that the positive attributes of age and experience are not recognised as being assets by their employer, which signifies age-discrimination. However, Dan (45) argues that he does not think that 'anybody

necessarily values anyone today’, not just older people. In the next example, the theme of positive attributes of older people at work is continued when focus group participants speak about how they perceive older people to be more reliable than younger people.

### Focus Group: Supermarket

The focus group was held at a branch of a multi-national supermarket with over 200 stores in the UK. The store employs 450 people whose ages range from 16-71 years. The group, selected as a sample of blue collar and white collar workers from the retail sector, comprised six female participants, aged from 32 to 71. This extract, which is 8 minutes into the interview, contains data from Jen (50), personnel manager; Kate (54), checkout operative; and Rachel (32), sales assistant. The group has been speaking about how age is not talked about at work, and that being older is not problematic. Jen goes on to say that the only time age is mentioned at all is on the application form for employment.

### **Extract 16**

- 119 M okay so age isn't an issue then basically what you're saying working here is  
120 that what you're saying?
- 121 Jen no it's fine (.) er (2.0) it is part of the application process the date of birth but  
122 you see it's on the system it's not actually part of the interview process or  
123 selection process and I think some ways subconsciously if somebody's older  
124 (.) you probably think they're better 'cause they're gonna be more settled and  
125 reliable =
- 126 Kate = yes
- 127 M when you say "you think" are you talking from your own personnel

128 experience?

129 Jen no I just think in general in everything (.) not just um (.) necessarily people  
130 that work here but I think you just (.) tend to think “oh if they’re like if they’re  
131 late teens or early twenties they might not be as reliable as someone that’s  
132 older they wanna go out and have a good time and” that sort of =

133 Rachel = but you do find that on department you gotta be honest you do find =

134 Kate = you find you got the youngsters in on the weekend you can guarantee that  
135 [(.) there are sick calls the older the colleague the more reliable they are to ↔

136 Rachel [yes]

137 Kate ↔ work with

138 Jen ‘cause you come across it by experience I think you tend to generalise it in  
139 your mind then without (1.0) necessarily having proof of that person’s  
140 reliability you just tend to think that “oh they’re only young (1.0) they’ll be  
141 here in five minutes” or “they won’t be doin’ that for long” and (1.0) you think  
142 “oh thank goodness for that someone who’s gonna stick to it and (.) have a  
143 bit of enthusiasm for what they’re doin’”

(The discussion continues with another participant, Chris (56), who relates how she had applied for her current job just after her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday as she had been made redundant.)

Jen generalises: “if somebody’s older (.) you probably think they’re better” (lines 123-124), in response to being asked if age is an issue in her organisation (line 119). She rationalises this perception by arguing that older people will “be more settled and reliable” (lines 124-125). She is correlating being ‘older’ with reliability in the workplace; an example of “positive ageism” (Palmore, 1999:6), which calls for prejudice in favour of older people, rather than prejudice against them, as in age discrimination. It could be argued, however, that age-discrimination applies to people of any age, not just older [people]. Support for this view is immediately offered by

Kate (54) who latches on to Jen's remark: "yes" (line 126). Jen extends her generalisation: "not just um (.) necessarily people that work here" (lines 129-130). She argues that people in their "late teens or early twenties" (line 131) "might not be as reliable as someone that's older" (lines 131-132), suggesting that this may be due to the fact that the younger people "wanna go out and have a good time" (line 132). This theme is expanded by Kate, who like Jen is over 50: "youngsters in (work) on the weekend you can guarantee that (.) there are sick calls" (lines 134-135), implying that younger people take time off work on Mondays due to 'having a good time' over the weekend. She adds that: "the older the colleague the more reliable they are" (line 135). She appears to be aligning herself, together with Jen, with 'older' colleagues who she perceives are 'reliable'. Rachel (32), however, also supports this theory: "yes" (line 136): she may not be claiming in-group membership as an older worker who is over 50, but does not identify with people in their 'late teens or early twenties' who are considered to be unreliable. Jen ends the sequence by explaining that: "you come across it by experience" (line 138): she is the personnel manager and has knowledge of staff attendance. She expresses her gratitude: "thank goodness for that someone who's gonna stick to it and (.) and have a bit of enthusiasm for what they're doin'" (lines 138, 142-143), referring to older workers in general.

This section focuses on the theme of the attributes of older workers. All participants claim 'in-group' membership with other older workers they perceive as having the positive attributes of being experienced and reliable, (see table 6 below). However, some older workers adopt a negative position, claiming that their experience was not valued by their employers.

**Table 6: Constructions of older age-identity, reliability and experience**

Theme	Extract	Participant	Age-identity discursive strategy	Data
<u>Ageing at work</u> Age, experience and reliability	14	Fred (male- 80)	Claims in-group membership with older people.  Out-groups younger colleagues perceived as not having the experience of older people.	“us the older ones”  “we did have youngsters on gardening...they’d come and ask us the older ones because they didn’t have the experience”
	15	Jess (female- 56)	Claims membership as an ‘older’, experienced worker.	“they don’t value us at all certainly not when you’re older an’ you got experience”
	16	Kate (54)	Aligns with ‘older’ colleagues who she perceives are ‘reliable’. Distances herself from ‘youngsters’ who are ‘unreliable’.	“you find you got the youngsters in on the weekend you can guarantee that (.) there are sick calls the older the colleague the more reliable they are”

#### 4.5 Summary

This chapter presents the findings relating to the first aspect of my study: how the over 50s construct their age-identities in a workplace setting. As ‘older’ people, the discursive construction of self may inter-relate with how age is also made manifest, which may occur in varying contexts. I suggest that being older at work is a specific scenario where being over 50 may be viewed differently compared to being over 50 in other situations, for example, in a familial context or in a social club of mixed ages.

Analysis of participant data identified discursive strategies that were used to construct age-related identities and perceptions of different aspects of being an older worker, for example, from a social or psychological perspective. Examples of how age was manifested included participants identifying with, or distancing themselves from, other older people by ‘in-grouping’ and ‘out-grouping’, which can be linked with Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). One participant appeared to claim membership of both an older and a younger age cohort: this multiple categorisation together with possible issues relating to how older people are categorised by others will again be discussed in Chapter 7. Representations of age-group membership may be said to be an integral part of age-identity construction (Hadden and Lester, 1978; Coupland, Coupland and Giles, 1991).

Other discursive strategies that were used to construct an age-identity as an older person can be examined from the perspective of ‘positioning theory’ (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1995; Nikander, 2002). The use of age-related labels, such as ‘old’, ‘very old’ and ‘ancient’, appeared to be contradictory, and will be discussed in Chapter 7. The use of labels such as ‘grandpa’ to describe older people will also be discussed.

A positive orientation to growing older was demonstrated by some participants who spoke about the perceived attributes of being more reliable and experienced at work when compared to younger colleagues. This finding echoes testimonies from older workers in a study by Loretto and White (2006; cf. 2.5.2), where experience was perceived to be an asset to an employer. This positive view of ageing echoes the argument of Ellis and Velten (1998: 2) who suggest that the advantages of growing older include having more life experience and being able to pass on this “essential value” to younger people. Older workers in a government office, however, adopted a



negative position relating to their experience as older workers: they indicated that their employers did not 'value them at all' (cf. 4.4.2). Their views are supported in Loretto and White's (2006) study, where employers were said to have 'let all the good ones [older workers] go' (cf. 2.5.2), indicating that a positive self-identification of 'experience' was not felt to be recognised.

In my study, a positive age-identity construction by one male participant was grounded in the acceptance of the physical limitations that may accompany ageing (cf. 4.3.1), however, a positive orientation towards ageing was not indicated by all participants. Participants represented negative views during emergent themes that related to the 'shifting' perceptions of ageing and acceptance or resistance to growing older (cf. 4.4.2.1). Resistance to chronological ageing, the perceptions of declining competence, and the sociological and psychological perspectives of wishing to be 'seen' as belonging to a younger age cohort was demonstrated by other participants. One factor that may have affected how age-identities were perceived and constructed was the contextual aspect of participants' work roles, and how being older in certain jobs may prove to be problematic, such as those that required technical ability. One female participant spoke about finding it difficult to learn new information (cf. 4.4.1). This supports the views of older workers in previous studies, who said that they had been 'nervous' to learn something new, suggesting that it was 'because of our age' (Brooke and Taylor, 2005: cf. 2.4.1). Age-related gender issues relating to the menopause may also have influenced how one female participant in my study constructed a link between a cognitive 'slowing down' and the physiological process of ageing (cf. 4.4.1), using age as a resource to frame limitations or decline.

This chapter has examined how the over 50s spoke about being older in the workplace. It may be assumed in most instances, that the next life-stage after exiting work due to age (not for health reasons or caring responsibilities) is retirement. In the next chapter, I will examine how older people construct their perceptions of retirement and how they discursively orient to this next life-stage.

## CHAPTER 5

### ORIENTING TO RETIREMENT

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined how people over 50 constructed their age-identities in a workplace setting. This chapter will investigate how participants negotiate and define the transition from being older workers to becoming retirees, thus addressing the second specific Research Question (RQ2) of this study (cf. Chapter 3.1): What discursive strategies do older workers use to represent their views about retirement? Analysis will focus on how participants, aged 53-80, construct their age-identities and changing statuses of 'self' whilst articulating their perceptions about retirement, a life-stage that Carter and Cook (1995: 67) suggest is a period of adjustment and role redefinition.

It has been argued that the relationship between the past and the present form a continuation of adaptation and development (Continuity Theory, Atchley, 1989: 97). Atchley proposes that 'continuity theory' is a framework whereby patterns of activity are replicated throughout the lifespan and may be used as a strategy for maintaining stability during the ageing process to help ensure successful ageing. Nimrod and Kleiber (2007: 2) build upon this concept by suggesting that pursuing innovative activities in retirement may be "growth producing and liberating" and help to create a positive sense of self and "internal continuity". They argue that their 'Innovation Theory' is not inconsistent with Atchley's 'continuity theory' (ibid: 18), and that in many situations, innovative activities may help to "preserve a sense continuity".

I suggest that retirement is a time of adaptation and change. Nimrod and Kleiber (2007:2) argue that 'internal continuity' resulting in a positive 'sense of self' may be

achieved by continuing patterns of activity after retirement. Discursive strategies used by participants to advocate active, and thereby successful, ageing (Davey, 2002; Walker, 2006; Bowling, 2008; and Van Dyk, Lessenich, Denninger and Richter, 2013) will be highlighted and discussed. Analysis of data relating to age-identity construction will again be theoretically informed by the concepts of ‘Membership Categorisation Devices’ (Sacks, 1995; Nikander, 2002), ‘Distancing theory (Paoletti, 1998), and ‘Positioning theory’ (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the State Pension Age (SPA) in the UK is steadily rising, and for financial reasons people may find that they have to work until they are older than previously envisaged. This situation has resulted in a complex relationship between growing older and the implicit fact of retirement that it connotes, which may affect how older workers negotiate their orientation to the ‘hazy’ life-stage of being retired. The concept of retirement dates back to the late 1800s and was introduced by the government and other large private employers as a system of pension provision for their older workers (Bernard and Phillipson, 2004: 354). Blaikie (2006: 14) argues that retirement has been ‘reinvented’ from the original concept, and is now defined more by ‘what it is not (relating to work) than what it is’. The negative conceptualisation [that retirement is a time of non-productivity], is supported by Warnes (2006: 212-213) who suggests that retirement is the period when older people cease to be economically productive. Walker (1999:104) takes this argument one stage further by defining retirement as a time when retirees not only lose their jobs, but also relinquish their ‘eligibility for a centrally valued moral and social identity’: that is to suggest that all older workers are generally no longer perceived to make a positive social and economic contribution to the society in which they live, when they retire. Laslett (1989), who labels the early part of retirement the ‘Third Age’, argues that this life-stage has

developed negative connotations, even though he also takes a more positive approach, suggesting that retirees today have more agentic control than those of their forebears, resulting in a more fulfilling lifestyle. Gilleard and Higgs (2002: 372) mitigate this argument by contending that a positive ‘Third Age’ is contingent on retirees being wealthy enough to enjoy the social and material benefits of retirement, and may be contrasted with other retired people who are poor.

Whilst accepting the above arguments, I would like to challenge this negative generalisation of retirement. People who are newly-retired or who have only been retired for a few years may not have the same perceptions as people in their 80s and older, who may have spent many years in retirement. These retirees may now be suffering from age-related decline and senility: a ‘fourth age’ of vulnerability (Baltes and Smith, 2003) which may contrast with the physical and cognitive status of younger retirees. For people in their 60s and 70s, this life-stage may be viewed as a positive era in terms of personal fulfilment; Vickerstaff (2015: 299), speaks of a retirement “evolution”.

Two main themes that were identified during focus group sessions will frame the analysis for this chapter:

- 1 Negotiating and defining retirement
- 2 Deciding when to retire

Sub-themes that emerged relating to keeping active and not being bored after leaving work, and retirement as a time of opportunity, will also be discussed.

## 5.2 Envisaging retirement

Notwithstanding the labels or definitions which have been applied to retirement by other authors, this section will focus on how older workers themselves discursively negotiate their views about this life stage. Many participants articulate concerns about the perceived negative effects of being retired, effectively envisaging retirement as ‘bad’ or problematic. However, these concerns are countered by other participants who express positive expectations of ‘good’ retirement whilst constructing their age-identities as prospective retirees.

### 5.2.1 ‘Self’ and the future

In the following three extracts, older workers discuss their prospective conceptualisations of retirement. Focus group sessions were held in a government office, a retail outlet, and an old-age care home to provide a broad demographic of employment roles and statuses.

#### Focus group: Government office

This extract which addresses the theme of perceptions of ‘bad’ retirement compared to ‘good retirement’, was elicited from the government office (cf. Chapter 4.4.2; Extract 15). The three female participants in the extract are Jess (50), female section manager; Mary (56), support officer; and Bren (49), help-line manager. The extract is 30 minutes into the session. The group has been speaking about the active lifestyle of their family and friends who have already retired. The moderator (M) suggests that this lifestyle may be anticipated by the participants during their own eventual retirement.

### Extract 17

- 240 M see what you have to look forward to
- 241 Mary I think it's a bit daunting the thought of retiring but then when it actually
- 242 happens things fall into place that you want to do
- 243 Jess the only thing that's daunting about it you face up to how old you are
- 244 Mary adjustment
- 245 Jess I'd like to retire so (.) I don't want to be any older but
- 246 M (3.0) so the label 'you are retired' means you are a certain age? =
- 247 Jess = past it
- 248 M okay is that what's going on?
- 249 Mary a label maybe just a label
- 250 Jess I mean I met one of my previous colleagues a couple of weeks ago for a coffee
- 251 and he retired after about blimey over forty years
- 252 M over forty years
- 253 Jess forty three years in the office I think an' he'd been about twenty five years in
- 254 the same division went up through all the grades in the job an' he came in the
- 255 other week and said he hasn't missed the job at all he said he really thought he
- 256 would (1.0) he misses the people
- 257 M misses the people
- 258 Jess misses the team but he doesn't miss the job an' he said he's surprised about
- 259 that himself and he's always you know there hasn't been a day when he's been in
- 260 bed beyond eight o'clock in the morning everyday he's doing something it's great
- 261 Bren but that keeps you going
- 262 Jess ° yeah °

263 Bren it's those that don't have anything to do that suffer I think (.) you gotta keep  
264 the brain active keep the body going

(Participants continue to reflect about other colleagues who are no longer working, especially a senior manager who became ill and subsequently died whilst still at work, thus never having the opportunity to retire.)

At the beginning of the extract, Mary (56) states that she thinks that the thought of retiring is “a bit daunting” (line 241). Jess (50) argues that the only thing that is ‘daunting’ [about retirement] is that: “you face up to how old you are” (line 243), demonstrating an age-salient awareness of this life-stage and possibly connoting retirement and the perceived accompanying lifestyle changes with a negative view of ageing. Mary mitigates her view of a ‘daunting’ retirement by suggesting that “when it actually happens things fall into place that you want to do” (lines 241-242), and that retirement [is a time of] “adjustment” (line 244), demonstrating a positive orientation to the changes that accompany this life-stage. Jess states that she would “like to retire” (line 245) but resists the perceived ageing that this connotes. She is constructing her age-identity as someone who may be resisting growing older but accepts that this process will bring positive benefits to her lifestyle.

In response to the moderator’s comment: “so the label ‘you are retired’ means you are a certain age?” (line 246), Jess immediately retorts: “past it” (line 247). This metaphorical expression denotes not only being past one’s best and no longer able to function as effectively as when one was younger, but may also construct an ageing identity of decrement and decline (Nikander, 2002:70). By comparing one’s ability as an ageing ‘self’ to when one was younger, we are also metaphorically representing life as a journey, constructing our age-identities according to where we are along life’s path.



When we are in our youth, the journey is just beginning and we may not have an awareness of our strength and vigour: it is taken for-granted. As we age and travel through life, there may be a gradual awareness that we do not have the same cognitive and physical ability of our younger selves, which may lead to the perception of being 'past it' (Hockey and James, 1993). Jess did not laugh when she made her comment: this suggests that she intended to be taken seriously, and was not engaging in 'banter'. The moderator again reformulates the suggestion that for Jess, retirement not only connotes ageing, but also the associated perceived decremental changes: "okay is that what's going on?" (line 248), to which Mary responds "a label maybe just a label" (line 249). Even though she does not clarify to which 'label' she is referring, (being 'retired' or being 'older') Mary is constructing her view that the social category of retirement does not represent being 'past it': she is constructing a more positive evaluation of life after retirement.

Jess then gives a contextualised account about meeting one of her "previous colleagues a couple of weeks ago for a coffee" (line 250). She summarises how "every day he's doing something it's great" (line 260), demonstrating a positive orientation to an active and fulfilling retirement which may help to defray the negativity of a 'daunting' retirement. She is implying that an active retirement is 'great', inactivity in retirement is 'not great'.

Bren (49) supports this concept, arguing "but that keeps you going" (line 261). She is suggesting that keeping active after retirement is a 'good' thing; a view which is quietly supported by Jess herself "°yeah°" (line 262). Bren then generalises that "those that don't have anything to do" after retirement "suffer" (line 263): arguing "you gotta keep the brain active keep the body going" (lines 263-264). She is distancing herself from

['those'] people who are inactive after retirement (Paoletti, 1998) by positioning herself (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999; Jones, 2006) as someone who perceives that the state of being active is the ideal.

In this extract, participants distinguish between perceptions of 'bad' retirement and 'good' retirement. The construction that [retirement] is 'daunting' was associated with growing older, which in turn was associated with being 'past it', thus reflecting perceived negative ageist attitudes. Being active was thought to be beneficial which defrayed the possible negative consequences of being inactive, and suggests that participants would wish to emulate this behavior when they themselves retire. In the next extract, participants reinforce this view using formulaic expressions to describe the perceived negative effects of inactivity in retirement.

Focus group: Home-improvement retail store

This extract is from the focus group session in a home-improvement retail outlet (cf. Chapter 4.4.2; Extract 14). The three male participants are all sales advisors: Fred (80), Brian (64) and Mark (55). The extract is 19 minutes into the interview. Participants have been discussing how they envisage spending their retirement.

**Extract 18**

141	Brian	I'd do what I always wanted to do (2.0) smallholding I'd have that to
142		keep me going
143	Fred	you'd find something to do
144	Mark	if you retire as well as work you can work for yourself if you've got

145                   you know a smallholding you are working for yourself

146    Brian           you need something to keep you going otherwise your cells would go

147                   grey wouldn't they

148    M                (laughs) so you've obviously thought about it?

149    Brian           yeah you don't wanna lose the thing of "I've gotta get up" once you start

150                   stayin' in bed you're on a downhill slope you've gotta get up and get on

151    Fred            I've known quite a few people who've taken retirement and they're not

152                   with us any more =

153    Mark            = yeah I've known quite a few you gotta you gotta keep fit gotta keep

154                   active haven't you

155    M                (*addressing Fred*) so people who have stopped work aren't with us

156                   anymore

157    Fred            I've known people that have taken retirement and through inactivity

158                   they've become ill

159    M                so you associate possibly retiring and not keeping busy with you know

160                   sort of that it's not good for you

161    Mark            well it's not is it? something I don't think like the ones that's in homes

162                   and things like that just vegetating in a chair 'cos they're not stimulated

163                   at all I think you know there but for the grace of God any of us you

164                   know an' I an' I think that's probably more down-to-earth the way we

165                   look after old people I mean old people that's infirm now as opposed to

166                   old people that can still do a bit um you can see them it's sad really sad

167                   you see them sat in chairs and it's not a lot of those rest homes whatever

168                   places they are cos' they're not stimulated they've got staff in there

169                                 workin' no doubt an' they're not stimulating the people and I think (1.0)  
170                                 that's I think (.) stimulated they'd probably be healthier

(The interview is then disrupted by a knock on the door. When the session resumes, participants speak about how family responsibilities could influence their decisions to retire.)

Brian opens the sequence, constructing his age-identity as a prospective retiree, by proposing that he could have a “smallholding” to “keep me going” [after retirement] (lines 141-142), which demonstrates his perception that he will need to keep busy. He rationalises that “you need something to keep you going” otherwise “your cells would go grey” (lines 146-147): the reference to cells going “grey” is possibly intended as an indexical reference to ageing, but may also have been confused by Brian with the metaphorical expression ‘grey cells’ which is often assumed to represent the brain, or, by association, cognitive ability. However, his discursive goal is clear: he believes that inactivity after retirement could have a decremental cognitive effect and seeks support for his view: “wouldn't they [cells would go grey]” (line 147). Holmes (1984) suggests that tags such as ‘wouldn't they’ are used as mitigating linguistic devices to solicit a hearer’s agreement, rather than as a question; however, in this extract, this remark is used as a facilitating tag. Fred (80) reformulates the concept of ‘keeping going’ by observing that Brian would “find something to do” (line 143), and Mark suggests that even after retirement, Brian can work for himself on a smallholding (lines 144-145). The concept of ‘cells going grey’ is reinforced by Brian in response to the moderator’s prompt: “so you’ve obviously thought about it?” (line 148), an anaphoric reference to the smallholding and keeping busy. He voices his perception that staying in bed all day leads to decrement and decline (lines 149-150), and speaks about losing ‘the thing’ of the daily routine of going to work. He exemplifies getting up each day by metaphorically ‘voicing’ “I’ve

gotta get up”: a discursive strategy used to give ‘outward’ expression for a private ‘inner’ viewpoint (Bakhtin, 1986), and suggests that staying in bed leads to the metaphorical ‘downhill slope’ of increasing decline.

Fred supports Brian’s view [that people decline after retirement] by stating that many retirees he has known are no longer “with us anymore” (lines 151-152). The moderator interprets ‘with us’ as being a euphemistic expression representing death. To clarify this, she addresses Fred and repeats his words back to him: “aren’t with us anymore” using a rising intonation to question his exact meaning (lines 155-156), and stresses the word “with” to represent the state of not being alive. Fred does not respond directly to this question, but reformulates his remark by now stating that people he has known have become ill after retirement “through inactivity”, (lines 157-158). Even though he is 80 years old, he appears to be aligning himself with his colleagues in their 50s and 60s who are still working, and distances himself from older people who may be in his age cohort and who have already retired. Mark supports the view that inactivity is *not* good after retirement and further extends this view to include other ‘old’ older people in care homes, alluding to the ‘Fourth Age’ (Laslett, 1989; Gilleard and Higgs, 2011), describing them as “just vegetating in a chair” (line 162). He ascribes this ‘vegetative’ state to the fact that the old people are “not stimulated at all” (lines 162-163). This can be described as an Extreme Case Formulation (ECF) (Edwards and Potter, 1992, cited in Edwards 2000: 348) which expresses his view that “there but for the grace of God any of us you know” (lines 163-164), and which implies that anyone could be in that situation under certain circumstances, and that this would be a terrible fate.

Mark then implies that there is a collective responsibility for the way in which “ we look after old people that’s infirm” (lines 164-165), arguing that “it’s sad really sad you see them sat in chairs” (lines 166-167) in care homes where he suggests, “staff in there”

(line 168) are “not stimulating the people” (line 169). He does not say if he has personal experience of seeing old people in “those rest homes” (line 167), so it may be assumed that he is generalising based on stereotypical perceptions of life in old age care homes. He ends his argument by observing that the old people would “probably be healthier” (line 170) if they were ‘stimulated’ by the “staff in there workin’ no doubt” (lines 168-169). He is making the implicit criticism that perhaps the ‘staff’ are not working as well as they should be, and that they should be encouraging the old people to be more active. This reinforces the view that ‘activity is good, inactivity is bad’, and that inactivity exacerbates health problems.

The theme that people need to keep active in retirement to prevent the perceived decremental effects of ageing is again represented in this extract by the collaborative discourse. To preclude these negative effects, plans for continuing to work during retirement are discussed by participants, representing positive attitudes towards this post-work life stage. In the next extract, analysis of focus group data will demonstrate an extension of this positive attitude towards retirement as a life-stage when part-time consultancy work, leisure pursuits and caring responsibilities can be undertaken.

#### Focus group: Old age care home

The focus group was held in the head office of a care home organisation that provides social care services in over 70 locations employing over 1,100 staff. The group was selected to represent middle and senior management in a white-collar organisation. There are four female participants: Essie (60, quality assurance manager); Myra (57, finance manager); Kay (54, assistant director for community services); and Pru (63, practice development manager). Roy (64, business manager) is the sole male

participant. This extract is 17 minutes into a group discussion about the age at which people in the organisation usually retire.

### Extract 19

- 159 Myra some sixty [(.) some sixty five some stayed until seventy it depends
- 160 Roy [yes]
- 161 Essie I've just been given the opportunity and I am retiring at the end of the
- 162 month but coming back two days a week [(1.0) so I will still be in the ↔
- 163 Myra [yeah they come back]
- 164 Essie ↔ workforce [(1.0) and I've decided to do consultancy (1.0) but (.) juggle ↔
- 165 Myra [yes]
- 166 Essie ↔ it with grandchildren and an older mother
- 167 M yep
- 168 Essie um (.) and I see that as an opportunity (.)
- 169 Kay that was the word I was going to use I have to say I'm planning as well um
- 170 (.) but I see that as an opportunity [(2.0) I don't see it as a sort of [(1.0) ↔
- 171 Essie [yeah] [negative]
- 172 Kay ↔ beginning of the end
- 173 Myra [no no
- 174 Pru [(1.0) rather like me I think you know I think more time with the
- 175 grandchildren more (.) time to do [things (2.0)
- 176 Kay [mm]
- 177 Pru pursue hobbies that I want to do [(.) you know
- 178 Essie [absolutely]

179 Myra [volunteer]

180 Roy no it's important it's important to be active

(The discussion continues with participants giving examples of roles they would like to pursue after they exit work, such as volunteering and taking on roles of responsibility within the community.)

Essie (60) states that she has been given “the opportunity” (line 161) [to retire], and that she is “retiring at the end of the month” (lines 161- 162). She is 60 years old; retirement may be particularly salient to her at this time when she will shortly be reaching SPA. It is also interesting that she defines retirement as ‘an opportunity’, however, she continues to say that she will be “coming back two days a week” (line 162), “to do consultancy” (line 164). This appears to be a normative practice, as observed by Myra (57): “yeah they come back” (line 163), referring to others who have previously retired. Essie’s positive orientation to her retirement is somewhat mitigated by the fact that she will still be working, albeit on a part-time, self-employed basis. She then remarks that she will have to “juggle it” (lines 164, 166), (referring to her ‘retirement’), “with grandchildren and an older mother” (line 166). She is positioning herself in the familial roles of grandmother and daughter, and constructing an age-identity as someone who, even though she will be retired, is still ‘young’ enough to have caring responsibilities for her mother: a grandparent may be generally expected to have some caring duties for grandchildren. She again speaks of “an opportunity” (line 168) to adopt this new lifestyle pattern, reinforcing her positive stance to this life-stage.

Kay (54) supports Essie’s concept of retirement as a time of ‘opportunity’: “the word I was going to use” (line 169), adding that she is “planning as well” (line 169), and that she does not envisage “it as a sort of (1.0) beginning of the end” (lines 170, 172). She is



challenging the perception that retirement presages decline, a view that is supported by Essie: “negative” (line 171), and Myra: “no no” (line 173). Pru (63) then aligns herself with Essie: “rather like me I think” (line 174), constructing her age-identity as a grandparent by explaining that she would also like “more time with the grandchildren” (lines 174-175). She gives examples of the ‘things’ she would like to do [in retirement], such as “pursue hobbies” (line 177), and is supported in this concept by Kay: “mm” (line 176); Essie: “absolutely” (line 178); and Myra: “volunteer” (line 179). Roy (64) then summarises the consensus of opinion: “it’s important to be active” (line 180).

Whilst constructing their age-identities as prospective retirees, (see Table 7 below), all three extracts evidence representations of consistently held views, that successful retirement is contingent on keeping busy and active: to ‘get up and get on’. This phrase may connote keeping active, it may also be construed to represent a new life stage that will be encountered after a person has exited work. In the next section, the concept of keeping active after leaving work is further explored: participants articulate how they envisage spending their time in retirement using metaphor and other discursive strategies.

**Table 7: Prospective identity constructions as retirees**

Theme	Extract	Participant	Age-identity discursive strategy	Orienting to retirement	Data
‘Self’ and the future	17	Jess (female- 50)	Resists the prospect of ageing which she perceives as having negative connotations.	Conflates being retired with negative perceptions of decline.	“you face up to how old you are...I don’t want to be any <u>older</u> ...past it”
		Mary (female- 56)		Connotes being retired with negative stereotypes of ageing: ‘bad retirement’.	“I think it’s daunting the thought of retiring...”

	17	Mary (female- 56)		Challenges own perception by constructing positive attitude.	“when it actually happens things fall into place that you want to do... [retirement/being older is] a label maybe just a label”
		Bren (female- 49)	Distances herself from people who are inactive after retiring by positioning herself as someone who will be active.	Constructs perceptions of ‘good’ retirement for active people.	“but that keeps you going... it’s those that don’t have anything to do that suffer... you gotta keep the brain active keep the body going”
	18	Brian (male- 64)	Constructs age-identity as a prospective retiree by stating he will keep busy in retirement, thus defraying the perceived effects of ageing leading to decline.	Represents perception of ‘bad’ retirement as a time of decline if people are inactive.	“I’d have that to keep me going...otherwise your cells would go grey... you don’t wanna lose the thing of ‘I’ve gotta get up’... you’re on a downhill slope you’ve gotta get up and get on”
		Mark (male- 55)		Supports the concept of keeping active for ‘good’ retirement.	“you gotta keep fit gotta keep active haven’t you?”
		Fred (male- 80)	Aligns with younger colleagues in their 50s and 60s. ‘Out-groups’ people of his own age-cohort who have retired.	Connotes inactivity in retirement with ill health.	“I’ve known people that have taken retirement and through inactivity they’ve become ill”
	19	Essie (female- 60)	Constructs positive prospective retiree identity by outlining her imminent plans.	Represents ‘good’ retirement as a time of opportunity.	“I’ve just been given the opportunity... I <u>am</u> retiring at the end of the month”
		Kay (female- 54)	Constructs age-identity as a prospective retiree by stating that she has ‘plans’.	Perceives retirement as a time of opportunity- challenges negative stereotype.	“I’m <u>planning</u> as well... I see that as an opportunity... I don’t see it as... the beginning of the end”
		Pru (female- 63)	Aligns with other older people who have grandchildren.	Represents ‘good’ retirement as a time to pursue other interests.	“rather like <u>me</u> ... more time with the grandchildren ...pursue hobbies I <u>want</u> to do”
		Roy (male- 64)		Constructs the perception that being active is vital for ‘good’ retirement.	“it’s important to be active”

### 5.2.2 Activity in retirement

Prospective views of how they will spend their time in retirement are represented by participants in the next four extracts: one focus group session and three interviews.

#### Focus group: Centre for further education

This extract, from a further education college (cf. Chapter 4.4.1: Extract 11) is 42 minutes into the session: Edna (64, who works part-time from home), Sara (52, full-time administrative officer), and Linda (49, full time school secretary) have been speaking about the factors that will influence their retirement decisions. To contextualise Linda's final comment, it is necessary to mention that she has only been employed in her current position for six months, having taken 'early' retirement from her previous post as a senior marketing manager.

#### **Extract 20**

- 375 M okay so have you thought about what you will do when you stop?
- 376 Edna (2.0) I do it for a lot of the time anyway (1.0) I'm only teaching part-time
- 377 M (1.0) so you mean you already have activities that you do? =
- 378 Edna = oh yes yes
- 379 M so sort of life after work doesn't sort of concern you at all or how you fill your
- 380 time?
- 381 Edna well it (.) concerns me but it doesn't (.) it doesn't trouble me if you like (.)
- 382 it's wonderful it's wonderful to be able to go out and (.) dig for an hour in
- 383 my flowerbeds (2.0) and um answer the e-mails (.) later
- 384 M (1.0) because you don't actually come into work do you? (.) you don't have
- 385 the sort of interaction with colleagues on a daily basis

. (M confirms with Edna that she came into work especially to participate  
. in the focus group session)  
.  
390 how about you ladies (*addresses Sara and Linda*) I mean you know (.) if you  
391 weren't at work what do you think you would miss? (2.0) would you miss  
392 anything?  
393 Linda (2.0) um (3.0) the financial security (.) I think is (1.0) you know it is [important  
394 Sara [I agree  
395 with you  
396 Linda would I miss (.) the social banter? (.) no I don't think so I value my personal  
397 time and I um like you (*addresses Edna*) I'm quite happy to potter around  
398 for an hour (*laughs*) you know in the garden or going to an exercise class that  
399 doesn't bother me I don't think I'm going to be the sort of older person who  
400 will be bored (1.0) or will fade away um (1.0) and I think there's a lot of (.)  
401 older people that I grew up with who are more like that now when I think of  
402 you know (.) an older generation to just (1.0) stop and I don't think you know  
403 as well we're getting older that we will stop (2.0) I think we're going to (1.0)  
404 we are the silver surfers we're not I think we're not um (.) afraid to try out  
405 new things (*laughs*) (.) um (1.0) unlike you know if I think of my grandparents  
406 who were never in the UK but when I think of that generation those people  
407 retired and that was it whereas now people retire and they go travelling and they  
408 do other things and I think I'm more likely to be in that camp I think (*laughs*)  
409 when I do retire the second time round (*laughs*)

(The focus of talk then shifts to the issue of part-time working and the flexibility this would allow for other activities outside of work.)

In response to participants being asked by the moderator: “what will you do when you stop? [work]” (line 375), Edna (64) responds that she already does “it for a lot of the time anyway” (line 376), using the pronoun ‘it’ as a referent for thinking about stopping work. She explains that she is “only teaching part-time” (line 376), implying that she already engages in other activities outside of work. This inference is taken up by the moderator who asks Edna to confirm this implication (line 377), which she does (line 378). Responding to how she will “fill” her time [in retirement] (lines 379- 380), she comments that: “it (.) concerns me but it doesn’t trouble me” (line 381). She enthuses about how it will be “wonderful” to “dig for an hour in my flowerbeds” (lines 382-383), and to be able to “answer the e-mails (.) later” (line 383), referring to the fact that she works from home. Linda argues that, for her, “the financial security” of being at work is “important” (line 393) to which Sara immediately agrees (lines 394-395). Linda concludes that she would not miss “the social banter?” (line 396), warranting this observation (Antaki, 1994:3): “I value my personal time” (lines 396-397). She aligns herself with Edna, by stating that she is “quite happy to potter” in her garden (lines 397-398). She also gives the example of “going to an exercise class” (line 398). She implies that she is not concerned about finding things to do when she retires, asserting: “that doesn’t bother me” (line 399), indicating a dichotomy between being bored in retirement and being concerned at the loss of financial security alluded to in line 393.

Linda then distances herself from “older people that I grew up with” (line 401), people who were ‘old’ when she was ‘young’, and who she describes as “an older generation to just (1.0) stop” (line 402). She constructs a positive age-identity as a prospective retiree by arguing: “I don’t think I’m going to be the sort of older person who will be bored (1.0) or will fade away” (lines 399-400). She suggests that her generation “are the silver

surfers” (line 404), using this metaphorical expression to identify herself with an explicit age cohort of the ‘Third Age’ (Laslett, 1989), which is generally accepted to denote older people who are computer literate. This expression signifies a generation of retirees who are members of a post-modern age cohort which embraces modern technology. She constructs her self-identity by comparison with an out-group of: “those people retired” (lines 405-406), (exemplifying her own grandparents), and her own age cohort who retire and “go travelling and they do other things” (lines 407- 408). She laughingly perceives that this is how she envisages her retirement “the second time around” (line 409), making reference to the fact that she took early retirement from her previous employer.

This extract demonstrates how participants construct their age-identities whilst speaking about how they envisage keeping active in retirement. One participant, who identifies with other people of the same age cohort who would keep busy after leaving work ‘others’ people of an older generation of retirees who ‘just stopped’. ‘Digging flowerbeds’ and ‘pottering in the garden’ are given as examples of more leisurely pursuits that could be followed: more ambitious activities, such as ‘travelling’ and ‘trying new things’ are also cited. In the next extract, keeping busy in retirement appears to conflict with Jill (53) who represents divergent views.

Interview: Jill (female, 53)

Jill has worked for nearly twenty years as a full-time head teacher’s Personal Assistant in a secondary school. She is several years younger than her husband who has recently retired and is busy renovating their house. The extract is 10 minutes into the interview: Jill has been speaking about colleagues in senior positions who have retired, and

subsequently returned to school to work part-time in less responsible roles. She states that for financial reasons, she will have to work until she receives her government pension.

### Extract 21

- 91 I and (1.0) you say you'll probably work until State Pension Age which for you  
92 is what? sixty [six (1.0) that's right 'cause you're (.) young enough now ↔
- 93 Jill [sixty six]
- 94 I ↔ for it to impact
- 95 Jill yep yep
- 96 I so and (.) have you thought about being sixty six and stopping?
- 97 Jill (5.0) not usually no
- 98 I (2.0) I suppose it's a long way [off?
- 99 Jill [it is quite a long way off I mean it's just (2.0)  
100 I'm acknowledging that (2.0) that I don't want to be as (2.0) pressured (1.0)  
101 by the time I'm sixty (2.0) but I hadn't really (.) sort of thought about (2.0)  
102 not doing anything (1.0) no I haven't I haven't got many hobbies or anything  
103 like that but [husband's name] has got (.) so I'm sort of anxious that I'm  
104 keeping (.) enough things going on (1.0) and giving him tasks to keep him  
105 busy (2.0) you know blow this weather ... (*speaks about the renovating work*  
106 *that husband is planning to do*) that's a bit unfortunate but (2.0) I actually see  
107 myself naturally as quite a lazy person
- 108 I (2.0) right
- 109 Jill so I think I'll probably be able to (.20) sit around and (1.0) you know (.) a tootle  
110 here and a tootle there (2.0) probably manage with (?) quite well

(Jill then goes on to speak about the possible pressure from her husband to retire or reduce her hours in the future as he has already exited work, but that this is not an option as she needs the money.)

Jill agrees with the moderator's assessment that she will be 66 before she will qualify for her State Pension (line 95), as recent UK legislation stipulates that the age for women's SPA will increase incrementally until 2020 when eligible women will have to be 66 before receiving their pension (Age UK, 2012). In response to being asked if she had "thought about being sixty six and stopping?" (line 96), Jill states: "(5.0) not usually no" (line 97); her lengthy pause allowing her time to reflect on how much consideration she had given this issue. It may be inferred from this response that Jill does sometimes think about working until SPA. However, she distances herself from people in her age cohort who may be thinking about retirement by echoing the moderator's words (line 98) "it is quite a long way off" (line 99), constructing an age-identity as someone who does not perceive herself nearing retirement. She adds: "I don't want to be as pressured (1.0) by the time I'm sixty" (lines 100-101), alluding to the responsibility of her job as the head teacher's personal assistant rather than exiting work. She supports this concept by acknowledging that she "hadn't really (.) sort of thought about (2.0) not doing anything" (lines 101- 102). She describes herself as "naturally quite a lazy person" (line 107), who has not "got many hobbies or anything like that" (lines 102- 103). She defines being lazy by suggesting that she will "probably be able to (2.0) sit around and (1.0) you know (.) a tootle here and a tootle there" (lines 109- 110), and that she will "probably manage quite well" (line 110). She is using the formulaic expression of 'tootle' to signify doing very little. She comments that even though she has no hobbies, her husband "has got" [some] (line 103), and that she will be



“giving him tasks to keep him busy” (lines 104- 105), which suggests activities centred on the house renovation project that was alluded to.

In this extract, Jill does not appear to perceive life as a retiree as ‘daunting’ even though she feels she is too young to be thinking about retirement at her age (53). She admits to having only a few hobbies and being ‘naturally lazy’, she may be implying that she will continue to be inactive in retirement. The continuation of activity as one grows older, (or in Jill’s case, inactivity), is suggested to help facilitate successful ageing (‘Continuity Theory’, Atchley, 1989), and Nimrod and Kleiber (2007:2) suggest that continuing patterns of activity after retirement may lead to an ‘internal continuity’ and positive ‘sense of self’. In envisaging her inactivity continuing into retirement, Jill may be ensuring a successful ageing and transition to this next life-stage. This view however, conflicts with that of an active retirement represented by participants in Extract 20. However, all data [in the previous two extracts] were elicited from females. In the following two extracts, male respondents in their late 60s and early 70s construct their perceptions of life after retirement from a different perspective.

Interview: Dan (male, 73)

Dan is self-employed and working part-time as an optometrist. The extract is 3 minutes into the interview. He has been speaking about the need to continue working until he is in a financial position to retire; however, he states that he is happy to continue in a role that he finds both interesting and fulfilling. The interviewer then asks Dan about retirement.

## Extract 22

- 33 I okay (.) so the day will come when you retire when you (.) are able to retire =
- 34 Dan = yes
- 35 I how do you envisage life will be then?
- 36 Dan busy
- 37 I (3.0) how will it be busy?
- 38 Dan because (.) um (.) I shall be at my wife's beck and call all the time instead of
- 39 only half the time
- 40 I (*quietly chuckles*) er I that is this is this is that serious?
- 41 Dan (*without a trace of humour*) absolutely serious yes
- 42 I oh okay

(The discussion continues with Dan speaking about his various hobbies and interests.)

Dan envisages that his life in retirement will be “busy” (line 36). When asked by the interviewer to elaborate on this response, he explains that he will be at his wife’s “beck and call all the time instead of only half the time” (lines 38- 39), implying that he is already involved with helping his wife as he is just working part-time. Being at her ‘beck and call’ suggests that Dan’s wife is quite demanding. Drew and Holt (1995: 117) suggest that many idiomatic expressions derive their meaning from figurative rather than literal use, where the meaning is not derived from constituent words, and give the example of ‘kicking the bucket’, signifying death. The interviewer finds this response amusing and asks Dan if he “is serious” (line 40), to which he responds without any humour: “absolutely serious yes” (line 41). This admission by Dan that his wife demands all his time when not at work may be counter-normative to expectations, admitting this fact implies that his wife is in control of his actions. It should be noted at this point that through personal association with both Dan and his wife, I know her to be

in good health: the assumption that Dan perceives that he will be ‘at her beck and call all the time’ when he retires is not, therefore, related to any special health-related needs.

In this short extract, Dan perceives that when he retires, he will be busy helping his wife for most of the time. In the next extract, Ed also envisages helping his wife after he finishes work.

Interview: Ed (male, 67)

Ed is employed full-time as an accountant. The extract comes towards the end of the interview: Ed has been speaking about how long he will continue to work. His company has no age retirement policy and he envisages working until he is at least 70.

### **Extract 23**

113 I so (.) when you’re seventy (.) and you stop how do you see your days

114 progressing? have you thought about it?

115 Ed ah certainly I’d like to travel yeah

. *(Ed speaks about the places he would like to visit and how he spends his*  
. *days sightseeing and relaxing in the sun when on holiday.)*

119 I okay (.) but what about when you’re home?

120 Ed (1.0) when it’s home I think I think that’ll be a problem (1.0) I think it’ll be

121 a problem (2.0) er what to do during the day? (1.0) um (.) I can certainly see it

122 as as er as er (.) difficult (1.0) what I’ll do about it at the moment (.) I don’t

123 know (1.0) um (3.0) I don’t know

124 I okay does it does it worry you?

125 Ed (1.0) at the moment no I I will get worried nearer the time (.) I’m sure of that

126 I okay (1.0) um (2.0) do you have hobbies and things that? how can you? you  
 127 must have an idea of some of the activities you might like to do I mean (.)  
 128 interests or (1.0) perhaps would you consider just doing maybe reducing  
 129 your doing some sort of work at home or something?  
 130 Ed (1.0) um (1.0) unlikely very unlikely um (.) if I'm gonna give up work  
 131 I'm gonna give up work there's a I don't want to do it sort of half-heartedly  
 132 um (1.0) probably things to do around the house (.) help (*wife's name*) with  
 133 the (.) with the housework (1.0) I don't mind (.) so er (.) that's something to  
 134 look forward to

(The interviewer then asks Ed if he would like to add anything before the interview comes to an end. He proceeds to speak about how he does not 'feel old': cf. Chapter 4.3.2; Extract 9.)

Ed states that he would "like to travel yeah" (line 115) after he retires, and describes some of the places he would like to visit (lines 116- 118). However, when asked what he will do when he is "home" [and not travelling] (line 119), he predicts: "that'll be a problem (1.0) I think it'll be a problem" (lines 120- 121). He reflects: "what to do during the day?" (line 121), suggesting that this could be "difficult" (line 122). He states that he is not worried about this situation (line 124), but adds, however, "I will get worried nearer the time (.) I'm sure of that", (line 125). When asked if he has any hobbies or interests, and whether he would consider working 'at home' [after he retires] (lines 126- 129), Ed responds that this would be "unlikely very unlikely" (line 130). He adds: "if I'm gonna give up work I'm gonna give up work" (lines 130 131), and justifies this decision by adding: "I don't want to do it sort of half-heartedly" (line 131). He then explains that there are "probably things to do around the house" (line 132), explaining that he may "help (*wife's name*) with the housework" (lines 132- 133). His comment "I

don't mind [helping with the housework]" (line 133) appears to conflict with his final remark: "that's something to look forward to" (lines 133- 134). He did not mention 'helping with the housework' when asked about how he will spend his time in retirement. It may possibly be inferred that he is being sarcastic; however, nothing in his prosody indicated this.

Data in this section evidences divergent perceptions of how respondents construct their changing statuses of self (see Table 8 below), whilst envisaging spending their time after leaving work. Two female participants speak about planning to keep busy with activities such as gardening and exercise classes, whilst another female says she is 'naturally' lazy. Male respondents envisage helping their wives in the house; one male adds he would like to travel. The next section examines how people speak about deciding when to retire.

**Table 8: Discursive constructions of activity in retirement**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Extract</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age-identity discursive strategy</b>	<b>Orienting to retirement</b>	<b>Data</b>
Activity in retirement	20	Linda (female: 49)	Outgroups older age cohort who were inactive: identifies with younger people.	Positive orientation to retirement: positions herself as a member of age cohort who will be active retirees.	"older people I grew up with...an older generation to just stop ... not afraid to try out new things"
		Edna (female- 64)	Constructs identity as prospective retiree by relating how she will spend her time after leaving work.	Positive orientation to retirement: states she is 'concerned' but not 'troubled' as she knows how she will spend her time.	"I do it for a lot of the time anyway... it's wonderful to be able to go out and (.) dig for an hour in my flowerbeds"

	21	Jill (female: 53)	Distances herself from other 50 year olds who may be nearing retirement.	Has not yet considered retirement.	“It <u>is</u> quite a long way off”
	22	Dan (male- 73)	Constructs his identity as a prospective retiree by speaking about life after leaving work.	Inferred negative orientation: envisages having to help his wife in the house.	“busy... I shall be at my wife’s beck and call all the time instead of only <u>half</u> the time”
	23	Ed (male- 67)	Positive identity construction as a retiree by revealing he would like to travel.	Both positive and possible negative views about retiring: as well as travel, he suggests he may have to help his wife with the housework.	“ah certainly I’d like to travel... probably <u>things</u> to do around the house... help with the housework”

### 5.3 Deciding when to retire

This section will focus on how participants discussed factors that may influence their decisions about staying on at work or retiring when they reach SPA. Analysis of data extracts will examine formulations of the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of retirement. Focus group participants and interviewee data will relate to several themes that have been identified as reasons for remaining at work or retiring, such as staying on due to perceived health and social benefits and the financial implications of not earning a wage; and leaving for health reasons, family influences and concerns, and having ‘had enough’ [of work], indicating losing interest and lack of motivation. The first section examines how people speak about their reasons for staying in work.

### 5.3.1 Staying in work

Reasons to remain at work after SPA were evidenced in data from two focus groups and two interviews. In the first extract, participants state that they will stay at work for financial reasons and perceived health benefits.

#### Focus group: Supermarket

This extract comes from the branch of a large supermarket chain (cf. Chapter 4.2.1; Extract 1). There are five female participants: Jean (50), Pam (43), Bea (66), Sue (55) and Ethel (65). The extract, which is 17 minutes into the session, follows a discussion about the increase in SPA following recent UK government legislation (Age UK, 2012).

#### **Extract 24**

- 174 Pam I'd retire today if I could
- 175 gen (*laughter*)
- 176 M okay
- 177 Jean I think that if you (.) financially you were you know (1.0) viable (.) I mean
- 178 if my circumstances change (.) I'll leave
- 179 M okay so are we all saying that it's financial reasons =
- 180 Sue = yeah yeah
- 181 M everybody agreeing with that? or is it? [sorry
- 182 Ethel [I mean (5.0) I could could retire but
- 183 I enjoy what I'm doing see and when I'm ready to retire [I
- 184 Bea [an' you sit at home

185 and that's when people do die they sit at home an' get into a rut and that's  
 186 when they start they really do get old  
 187 Ethel you start dropping [start  
 188 Bea [yeah yeah  
 189 M so that's what you feel basically it's not just money it's [kinda  
 190 Ethel [no  
 191 Jean I mean I wouldn't give up work even if I could afford to (.) completely 'cause  
 192 like they say =  
 193 Bea = you could say like you got grandchildren an' stuff it's like (.) but if you (.)  
 194 but unless you were going (1.0) to a little cottage or something (.) for a bit  
 195 an' then you'd get bored with [that you know in the house all the time you ↔  
 196 Ethel [you'd get bored anyway]  
 197 Bea ↔ can't have kids round you all the time twenty four seven you know what I  
 198 mean it would drive you mental  
 199 Pam you're out and (.) you're meeting [people  
 200 Ethel [yeah and you're keeping your mind occupied

(The moderator then asks about the social aspect of not working, which leads to a discussion about the possibility of reducing working hours.)

Pam (43) evokes laughter (line 175) from the rest of the group by stating that she would "retire today if I could" (line 174). The other participants know that she is only 43 and has many years to go before she can consider retirement. Jean (50) suggests that if: "financially you were you know viable" (line 177), adding: "if my circumstances change (.) I'll leave" (line 178), a suggestion that Sue (55) supports: (line 180). Ethel (65) challenges Jean's view of staying at work for financial reasons: "I could could



retire but I enjoy what I'm doing see" (lines 182- 183), implying that she does not need to remain at work for the money. She is about to speak about when she is "ready to retire" (line 183), but is interrupted by Bea (66) who suggests that "people do die they sit at home an' get into a rut and that's when they start they really do get old" (lines 184- 186). This bald statement, without any mitigation, indicates that Bea perceives retirement will lead to stagnation and death. Ethel supports the perception that people "start dropping" (line 187) [if they leave work]. The moderator reformulates the suggestion that 'the money' is not the only reason for Ethel and Bea to stay on at work (line 189). Ethel confirms this, reiterating her position: (line190).

Jean then appears to contradict her earlier position of leaving work if she were financially 'viable' (lines 177-178). She states that she "wouldn't give up work even if I could afford to (.) completely" (line 191), implying that she would consider working less hours, and justifies this contradiction by appearing to agree with Ethel and Bea's argument: (lines 191- 192). Bea latches on to this comment by generalising that people would become "bored" (line 195) "going (1.0) to a little cottage or something (.) for a bit" (line 194), and being "in the house all the time" (line 195), a perception that is supported by Ethel: (line 196). Bea continues to build her argument to stay on at work: "it would drive you mental" (line 198) to have "grandchildren an' stuff" (line 193) and "kids around you all the time twenty four seven" (line 197). She is warranting her reasons for not wanting to retire as she perceives stopping work would affect her mental health. Pam offers a further positive aspect of remaining at work, suggesting that: "you're out and (.) you're meeting people" (line 199), which is supported by Ethel who remarks: "yeah and you're keeping your mind occupied" (line 200).

This extract demonstrates how participants negotiate a consensus view about the 'pros' and 'cons' of retirement. A 50 year-old female perceives that her finances are the most

important consideration when deciding about retirement, whereas participants in their middle 60s argue that staying on at work is good to prevent them from ‘really getting old’ by not becoming bored and keeping their minds ‘occupied’. The disparity between ages may be a salient factor that influences these perceptions: people aged 50 may not be as concerned about becoming bored in retirement as people who are already older than SPA and for whom retirement is therefore much closer. In the next extract, three male older workers support the reasons for staying on at work as represented in the above data.

Focus group: Home improvement retail store

This extract is from the focus group session conducted in a home-improvement retail company, (cf. Chapter 4.4.2; Extract 14). The extract is 17 minutes into the session: Fred (male, 80,) Brian (male, 64) and Mark (55) have been discussing pensions. Brian is saying that the timing of his retirement is contingent on his pension provision.

**Extract 25**

- 109 Brian I'll see now what happens now with the pension this new government I'll see  
110 and that (1.0) I may have to stop on if my pension doesn't come through alright  
111 M so that's the thing that will decide it for you is the money?  
112 Brian yeah the money  
113 M (1.0) how about you two gentlemen? (*addressing Fred and Mark*)  
114 have you thought? =  
115 Fred = I just enjoy it to me it's therapy  
116 Brian (2.0) oh I enjoy workin' here don't get me wrong =

117 Fred = it's um (1.0) it's the money is a bit of a help to run the car and pay for holidays  
118 (1.0) at the moment I got no thoughts of retiring  
119 M okay  
120 Mark the mortgage won't let me retire until I'm seventy (*laughs*) that's about it really  
121 M who'll let you retire?  
122 Mark (*laughs*) the mortgage  
123 M the mortgage so again it's financial so let me ask you (1.0) oh well not Fred  
124 although you say the money is nice if you hit the jackpot tomorrow would you  
125 all stop work tomorrow?  
126 Mark yeah  
127 Brian I'd be gone I wouldn't come back I'd be gone  
128 Mark I don't think anyone would if they had the ((1))  
129 M (*addressing Fred*) you'd stop as well  
130 Fred oh yeah yeah  
131 M even though you describe it even though it's therapy?  
132 Fred I'd find something else to do

(The group then discuss what they would do if they had a lot of money.)

After explaining that the new SPA regulations (Age UK, 2012) may affect his decision on when to retire: "I'll see now what happens" (line 109), Brian (64), agrees with the moderator's suggestion that the money will be the deciding factor: (line 112). Fred (80) and Mark (55) are then asked if they had 'thought' [about retirement] (line 114). Fred immediately responds: "I just enjoy it [work]", adding that it is "therapy" to him (line 115), to which Mark rejoins: "oh I enjoy workin' here" (line 116). He appears to be concerned that the moderator (and possibly his colleagues), are making the inference

that he does not enjoy his job by adding: “don’t get me wrong” (line 116). Fred then explains that another reason he is still working is that “the money is a bit of a help to run the car and pay for holidays” (line 117), adding that “at the moment” (line 118) he has “no thoughts of retiring” (line 118). Mark also refers to the topic of money by laughingly noting that: “the mortgage won’t let me retire until I’m seventy” (line 120); personifying his mortgage by metaphorical association with the money it costs and his inability to repay it until he is 70. He asserts “that’s about it really” (line 120), suggesting that this is the only (financial) reason he has to stay at work.

The moderator then asks the group if they would “all stop work tomorrow?” (line 125) if they “hit the jackpot” (line 124). Mark agrees with this suggestion (line 126) and Brian states: “I’d be gone I wouldn’t come back” (line 127), to which Mark adds: “I don’t think anyone would” (line 128). The moderator then asks Fred, who had earlier maintained that he had ‘no thoughts of retiring’ (line 118) as it was ‘therapy’, if he too would also stop working if he ‘hit the jackpot’. Fred confirms that he would: (line 130), explaining that he would “find something else to do” (line 132), implying that it was keeping occupied that was his main concern, not necessarily working in his current job. He is supporting Brian and Mark in their position of remaining in paid employment purely for financial reasons.

In this extract, the theme of financial [pension] provision is represented as being salient for retirement planning. However, even though they represent their reasons for staying at work as primarily financial, the oldest participant who is 80, voices his concern that he would also need ‘something else to do’ if he retired, echoing Ethel’s view in the previous extract. The following interview data again demonstrates that money is not the only reason why the respondent is still working.

Interview: Eve (female, 64).

Eve is a self-employed female owner of a photographic library, (cf. Chapter 4.3.1; Extract 9). This extract is three minutes into the interview. Eve has been saying that she has had no thoughts to date about retirement: the interviewer observes that the SPA for women of Eve's age is 60.

### **Extract 26**

33 I okay so in your case you could have retired at [sixty and taken your pension ↔

34 Eve [yes]

35 I ↔ why did you decide not to do that?

36 Eve well because of the money (*laughs*) that's why (*laughs*)

37 I only the money? =

38 Eve = yes (*laughs*) I'd be impoverished yes

39 I so (.) are you saying if it wasn't for financial reasons you would have stopped?

40 Eve no no but there's certainly no money if it's not it's not viable you can't live on

41 a few thousand pounds a year

42 I okay so you (.) um =

43 Eve = but no (.) no I enjoy working

44 I that's what I was trying to say is it? =

45 Eve = I enjoy working

(Eve continues to speak about the challenges she would miss if she was no longer working, describing how her business operates. She then explains how many of her competitors are younger than herself: this data can be found in Chapter 4.4.1; Extract 12.)

Eve agrees that she could have taken her government pension at 60: (line 34). When asked why she decided not to do that, she responds laughingly that it was “because of the money” (line 36). Eve’s laughter may indicate that she perceives the question to warrant an obvious answer: everyone needs money; however, she may also be embarrassed to admit that she needs the money. She is the owner of her company and may not wish to be perceived as being unable to retire due to lack of income. She laughingly adds that she would be “impoverished yes” (line 38), in response to being asked if the money is the only thing that has prevented her from retiring (line 37). ‘Impoverished’ connotes having no money at all, and appears to indicate that if she did not continue to work, Eve could not afford to live. The moderator asks for confirmation that it is only ‘financial reasons’ which have stopped Eve from retiring (line 39). In response, Eve appears to contradict her previous assertions in lines 36 and 38, (that it was ‘only’ the money) by responding “no no” (line 40). However, she then argues that it was not “viable” to “live on a few thousand pounds a year” (lines 40- 41), referring to the amount of government pension paid to retirees. She then asserts: “but no (.) I enjoy working” (line 43), elaborating on her previous response that she was not only continuing to work for the money. She repeats: “I enjoy working” (line 45), which indicates another valid reason for not retiring.

By contrast, in the next extract, Nat (62) makes no mention of any financial implications or concerns about needing ‘something to do’ as his reasons for continuing to work.

Interview: Nat (male, 62).

Nat is self-employed as a broadcaster and writer. When asked if there is any age-related talk amongst his peers, he relates how, when he has been responsible for recruitment, he always created favourable pension packages for older people who retired.

**Extract 27**

- 36 I what sort of age would you look at somebody wanting to? =
- 37 N = sixtyish
- 38 I (2.0) sixtyish?
- 39 N yeah yeah
- 40 I (1.0) how about you? I mean you're over sixty and you're still working? so
- 41 have you thought about your own pension package and what you're gonna what
- 42 you are likely to do in the future?
- 43 N oh gonna work till I drop
- 44 I work till you drop? =
- 45 N = you know as long as I can still express myself coherently (.) why would I
- 46 not do that? (.) um (1.0) you know I have a function and a purpose (.) it's also
- 47 (1.0) it's it's fine it keeps me engaged and involved with people (.) and (2.0)
- 48 I'm not the sort of person you will find going on a cruise or lying on a beach
- 49 (.) that's that's just not what I've done with my life

(At this point, Nat is interrupted by his telephone ringing. When the interview continues, the interviewer asks Nat about his own pension provision, even though he has stated that he is going to 'work until he drops'.)

Nat latches on to the question: “what sort of age would you look at someone wanting to?” (line 36), (referring to the fact that he had been responsible for employee pensions): “sixtyish” (line 37). The interviewer repeats this response (line 38): she is aware that Nat himself is over 60 and that he is still working (line 40). When asked about his own pension and future plans for retirement (lines 41-41), Nat remarks: “oh gonna work till I drop” (line 43). He is using this metaphor to assert that he will keep working until he is physically unable to carry on. He rationalises that he will continue to work “as long as I can still express myself coherently” (line 45), adding that he has a “function and a purpose” (line 46). He explains that work keeps him “engaged and involved with people” (line 47): this suggests that it is important that he continues to have the interaction associated with his work (Continuity Theory, Atchley (1989)). He describes himself as “not the sort of person you would find going on a cruise or lying on a beach” (line 48), typifying these leisure activities as archetypal behavior which may be associated with some retired people from whom he is distancing himself. He continues to explain that “that’s just not what I’ve done with my life” (line 49), implying that now that he is in his sixties, he has no intention of stopping work to participate in leisure activities that he did not pursue when he was younger, thus creating a ‘causal inference’ (Linde 1993: 127) to explain his reason for this personal trait. He is also discursively establishing his desire for a continuity of behaviour which Linde (ibid: 151) suggests is a ‘coherence principle’ during autobiographical narrative.

This section has examined how participants construct their older age-identities whilst articulating reasons to stay on at work (see Table 9 below). Some people voice concerns about the financial implications of retiring, however, others state they enjoyed working, and would stay on even though they could afford to retire. Most participants also mention the need to remain at work for perceived health benefits, which include



keeping minds ‘occupied’ and not being ‘driven mental’ through boredom. The theme of continuity is evidenced in this data, and is discussed further at the end of the chapter.

In the next section, factors that influence people to leave work are investigated. It appears that health issues that affect some older workers’ decisions to remain at work, (as evidenced above), also play a part in the decisions of other older workers to retire.

**Table 9: The benefits of staying on at work**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Extract</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age-identity discursive strategy</b>	<b>Reasons for not retiring</b>	<b>Data</b>
Reasons to stay at work	24	Ethel (female- 65)	Positions herself as being old enough to retire: she is 65.	Resists younger colleague’s suggestion that people only stay on at work for financial reasons: people need to maintain cognitive ability.	“I <u>could</u> retire but I enjoy what I’m doing...you’re keeping your mind occupied”
		Bea (female- 66)	Positions herself as being older by referring to her grandchildren.	Represents perceptions of needing to keep busy to prevent mental decline, ill health and death.	“like you got grandchildren an stuff... you’d get bored... it would drive you mental”
	25	Brian (male- 64)	Positions himself as a prospective retiree by alluding to the pension he will receive.	Argues that his financial situation will determine if he stays on at work or retires.	“I’ll see what happens now with the pension”
		Fred (male- 80)	Distances himself from others of his age who are retired.	Resists the thought of retirement... formulates work as being important to remain fit and healthy, even if he won the lottery.	“at the moment I got no thoughts of retiring... I just enjoy it to me it’s therapy... I’d find something else to do”

	26	Eve (female- 64)	Positions herself as being old enough to retire by stating that she could have retired when she reached SPA.	Argues that she needs to stay at work for the money; then challenges this statement by saying she enjoys work. She is implying she would not retire even if she did not need the money.	“yes [ she could have retired at 60]... [it’s] because of the money...I’d be impoverished...but no I enjoy working”
	27	Nat (male- 62)	Aligns with other over 60s by resisting suggestion he should retire. ‘Outgroups’ retirees of his age cohort who demonstrate perceived archetypal behaviour.	Constructs importance [to him] of keeping busy and mentally and socially active.	“gonna work till I drop... it keeps me engaged and involved with people...I’m not the sort of person you will find going on a cruise or lying on a beach”

### 5.3.2 Leaving work

In this section, older workers from a focus group and two retired interviewees speak about their reasons for wanting to leave work. Issues relating to health concerns and having ‘had enough’ of work were discursively represented.

#### Focus group: Supermarket

The focus group was held at the branch of a multi-national supermarket (cf. Chapter 4.4.2; Extract 16). The extract is 18 minutes into the interview: Kate (54) and Freda (62) have been speaking about things they would miss if they were no longer at work.

Freda, who lives on her own, has said she would miss the social interaction of being at work, having also previously stated that she was considering retirement.

### Extract 28

- 226 M (addressing Freda) but you said you were thinking about retiring so [how would  
227 Kate [°she'd have  
228 to look for (.) something to do°  
229 Freda yes and that's why my family think I should retire and I should be (.) giving up  
230 now you know I need it for my mental health =  
231 Kate = that's right  
232 M so your family suggested that you should oh right  
233 Freda and I did think about it I seriously thought about it 'cause I mean we are getting  
234 on you do get tired =  
235 Kate = yeah yeah  
236 Freda it's a fact of life you don't do things as quickly as you used to (.) so you know  
237 (.) I thought and I would hate to stay on a job when I was older if I couldn't  
238 do the job =  
239 Kate = yeah

(The moderator now addresses the rest of the group about their reasons for staying in work or retiring: two participants state that they would like to reduce their hours if this was possible.)

Freda (62) is asked to explain the apparently contradictory observation that she would miss the social aspect of being at work, yet she was considering retirement (line 226). She is interrupted by Kate (54) who quietly suggests that Freda would “have to look for

(.) something to do” (lines 227- 228), implying that Freda would be bored if she was not at work. Freda does not react to Kate’s remark, which she may not have heard, but responds instead to the moderator’s [previous] question by commenting that her family thinks she should retire (line 229). She adds that they think she should be “giving up now” (lines 229- 230). She argues that she needs to retire “for my mental health” (line 230). It is unclear whether this is Freda’s own argument or that of her family or a consensus. The moderator reformulates Freda’s comment, that her family advocate retirement (line 232), at which Freda continues to explain that she “did think about it seriously” (line 233), justifying her consideration by arguing: “we are getting on you do get tired” (lines 233- 234). She is aligning herself with other people in her age group who are ‘getting on’, and presenting as a reasonable notion that older people do not have the same energy levels as younger people. She does not appear to find this problematical. She then uses an example of Extreme Case Formulation (ECF) to observe that it is a “fact of life” that older people “don’t do things as quickly” as they used to (line 236), adding that she “would hate to stay on a job when I was older if I couldn’t do the job” (lines 237- 238). Kate, in her 50s, supports Freda’s observations: (lines 235, 239). Freda is now adding another justification for her reasons to consider retirement: she is also concerned that she may not be as effective in her job as when she was younger. She is echoing the negative perceptions about age and the decline of ability that were voiced by other older participants in the previous chapter: cf. Chapter 4.4.1, Extracts 12 and 14). She is also rationalising that the age-related issues that will necessitate her retirement are partly beyond her agency.

In this extract, a 62 year-old female participant warrants her reasons for thinking about leaving work: her family wants her to retire; she needs it for her mental and physical

health; and she is concerned that she could not ‘do the job’ as she is ‘older’. This may indicate that her physiological or psychological age may not align with her professional sense of ‘self’ and suggests that age itself, or certain aspects of ageing, becomes a reason for leaving work. The data also represents popular discourse about growing older and becoming increasingly fatigued when compared to younger people. In the next extract, Lucy (56) speaks about why she decided to take early retirement when she was 53.

Interview: Lucy (56)

Lucy (56) took early retirement from her civil service job three years previously (cf. Chapter 4.3.1; Extract 6). The extract is 7 minutes into the interview: Lucy has been describing how she had enjoyed her work but being under pressure often resulted in her being tired at the end of the day.

**Extract 29**

- 59 I so you decided to retire?
- 60 Lucy yes
- 61 I what factors influenced that?
- 62 Lucy well I just felt that (*sighs*) (2.0) I’d worked for thirty years (.) more or less I felt
- 63 as though I’d reached a point in my life where I just wanted some me time ‘cause
- 64 I (.) my mum died when she was sixty one (.) and I think I am quite conscious of
- 65 that (2.0) she never had the chance to retire she never had the chance to do the
- 66 things that she would have liked to do (1.0) we’d sort of reached a (.) point where

67 financially we were secure not (.) not well off but secure we didn't naturally  
68 have to have my wage (2.0) and I was a lot of the time I was feeling tired and  
69 irritable when I was at home and that wasn't really me (.) and so basically my  
70 husband said well (.) you know (.) 'you sure you want to carry on feeling like this?  
71 'cause you've got other options you know if you want to (1.0) give up (.) and  
72 have more time for yourself why don't you try it and see (.) how you feel about  
73 it?' ... (*relates how her father was also unwell at this time which added to her*  
74 *level of stress*) ... so I wanted to go while I still felt I could enjoy going and I  
75 didn't want to make myself unwell or anything

(Lucy then speaks about how changes within her team at work had resulted in another female colleague also taking early retirement.)

When asked 'what factors' influenced her decision [to retire] (line 59), Lucy comments: "well I just felt that (*sighs*)" (line 62) before beginning a lengthy narrative to explain her reasons. The sigh that precedes a two second pause while she formulates her response may indicate sadness, boredom, weariness or resignation, as suggested by Teigen (2008:55). It is difficult to ascertain why Lucy is sighing: she may be sad that she felt she had to retire. There may have been many reasons for this, but one of the reasons she is about to outline relates to her mother who has died, which may also warrant her sighing through sadness. She positions herself as an older person by recalling: "I'd worked for thirty years" (line 62) and felt as though: "I'd reached a point in my life where I just wanted some me time" (line 63), implying that work had been time-consuming and she had reached a milestone in her life when she wanted change. She states that she is "conscious [of the fact]" (line 64) that her "mum died when she was sixty one" (line 64), before she had the "chance to retire she never had the chance to do the things that she would have liked to do" (lines 65- 66). The

inference that may be drawn from Lucy's statement is that she wanted to retire early enough to be able to do the 'things' she would like to do before she dies, (unlike her mother); possibly anticipating physical decline with age. This suggestion is also supported by her comment that she 'wanted some me time', indicating that she wished for self-fulfilment.

Lucy then marks an economic life-stage, which may also represent the life-stage of contemplating stopping work. She indicates that she had reached a time of change: "we'd sort of reached a (.) point where financially we were secure" (lines 66- 67). She describes 'secure' as being "not well off" (line 67), but explains that her wage was not really necessary (lines 67- 68). She continues to justify her reasons for her decision to retire: "a lot of the time I was feeling tired and irritable when I was at home and that wasn't really me" (lines 68- 69). Her husband had also voiced concerns: "you sure you want to carry on feeling like this?" (line 70), and had suggested that she had "other options" (line 71). He argued that she should "give up" [work] and have more time for herself (lines 71- 72). Lucy then relates how the illness of her father at that time had added to her stress (lines 73- 74), before reiterating her previous remark: "I wanted to go while I still felt I could enjoy going" (line 74). She adds that she "didn't want to make myself unwell or anything" (line 75).

In this extract, Lucy clearly indicates that health and familial changes, which relate to lifespan development, affected her decision to take early retirement. During this time of change, she was entering a pre-'Third Age' (Laslett, 1989), when she was old enough to take early retirement but young enough to 'enjoy going'. In the next extract, Bob (65) speaks about why he retired on his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Interview: Bob (65)

Bob is a male construction worker who retired on his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, three weeks before the interview took place. He had worked in the construction industry since leaving school aged 15. This extract is 8 minutes into the interview. Bob has been speaking about his employer's policy on retirement age: it is not mandatory to retire at SPA; however, Bob explains that most people left work around the time they reached their 65<sup>th</sup> birthdays.

**Extract 30**

- 78 I okay so my next question was gonna be what made you decide to retire but  
79 what it sounds like you're saying it was assumed you were gonna go because  
80 you were sixty five
- 81 Bob it was assumed I was gonna go (.) and I think (.) I could probably have (.) you  
82 know asked if I could stay on but I didn't (.) I don't know what would have  
83 happened if I'd asked but (1.0) I didn't want to so there didn't seem any point  
84 in finding out
- 85 I er why were you happy to retire?
- 86 Bob well I'd had enough really yeah the hours were quite long hours (1.0) I was I  
87 was still going out the house a quarter to six in the mornin' I was getting back  
88 (.) at a quarter to seven at night (.) you know at the age sixty four that's enough
- (Bob continues to speak about the plans he has for spending his time in retirement, including a project to renovate his house.)



The moderator opens the sequence by remarking that she was about to ask Bob why he chose to retire as soon as he reached SPA, however, she notes that he has already stated that it was ‘assumed’ people in his organisation retired when they reached 65 (lines 78-80). He confirms that: “it was assumed I was gonna go” (line 81), constructing his age-identity as a prospective retiree, whilst reflecting: “I think (.) I could probably have (.) you know asked if I could stay on” (lines 81- 82), which may have set a company policy precedent. He elaborates, however, that there “didn’t seem any point in finding out [if he could stay on]” (lines 83- 84), indicating that he had little choice in the matter. This lack of agency does not appear to concern him as he “didn’t want to [stay]” (line 83).

He states that his reason for not ‘staying on’ was that he had “had enough really” (line 86), explaining that the “hours were quite long hours” (line 86). This entailed him working a thirteen-hour day: “going out of the house a quarter to six in the mornin’” (line 87), and not returning home until “a quarter to seven at night” (line 88). He remarks that “at age sixty four that’s enough” (line 88). He is quite unequivocal in his reason for retiring, implying that he did not enjoy his job any longer or find it fulfilling, and representing his work as something he had had to endure. He is demonstrating relief at his release from a demanding schedule.

Analysis of extracts in this section indicate that concerns about health and wellbeing are the primary factors affecting older workers’ decisions to retire, some of which are issues voiced by family members. It should be noted, however, that the data elicited from the last two interview respondents may be contingent on the particular contexts of their lives and previous employment: Lucy’s mother died before she reached SPA; Bob had worked in the construction industry, which is a physically demanding occupation. Discursive strategies used to construct older age-identities and represent participants’ reasons for retiring are summarised in Table 10 (below).

**Table 10: Reasons for wanting to retire**

Theme	Extract	Participant	Age-identity discursive strategy	Reasons for leaving work	Data
Reasons to leave work	28	Freda (female- 62)	Claims membership of older age cohort which is subject to 'slowing down' that may be perceived to be an aspect of ageing.		"I mean we <u>are</u> getting on you <u>do</u> get tired... it's a fact of life you don't always do things as quickly as you used to"
	29	Lucy (female- 56)	Positions herself as an older person by relating How long she had been working.	Argues that family pressures have influenced her attitude towards leaving work: suggests that retirement may have psychological benefits.	"my family think I should retire... I need it for my mental health"
	30	Bob (male- 65)	Constructs his age-identity as a person nearing retirement age.  Claims membership of age-cohort by stating chronological age.	Explains that she felt her well-being and health would suffer if she stayed at work.  Implies that he no longer enjoys his job which he had to endure.	"I'd worked for thirty years"  "I just wanted some <u>me</u> time... a lot of the time I was feeling <u>tired</u> and irritable... that <u>wasn't</u> really me... I didn't want to make myself unwell"  "I'd had enough really... the hours were quite <u>long</u> hours"  "at the age of sixty four that's enough"

## 5.4 Summary

In this chapter, analysis focused on two main themes, the first of which was how participants negotiated and defined retirement whilst constructing their age-identities. Many participants distanced themselves from negative attitudes perceived to be associated with being retired. They constructed prospective self-identities as retirees who resisted conceptualisations of previous cohorts of older workers who were perceived to be inactive and thus ‘age’ more quickly than people who were active and ‘kept busy’ after they left work, possibly drawing on past experience of observing these negative effects in people who had retired. Keeping active and not becoming bored after leaving work were represented as being fundamental to successful ageing and retirement. Participants spoke about ‘getting up and getting on’, a phrase which may ‘voice’ the view that retirees have a moral responsibility to keep active, and thereby retain good health. This may be part of a cultural script which is now framing the ideology that keeping active after retirement is good (Gilleard and Higgs, 2002: 371; Biggs, in de Medeiros, 2005: 303; Rudman, 2006). There does not appear to be any consideration of an alternative choice to ‘getting up and getting on’: is it no longer acceptable to retire and ‘do’ little or nothing? Other authors also support the concept of ‘active ageing’ leading to ‘ageing well’ (van Dyk *et al*, 2013): Bowling (2008) argues that cognitive and physical activity are vital to maintain good health in older people; Walker (2006) suggests that the theory of keeping active in retirement should be applied to the practice of keeping active; and Davey (2002) argues that keeping active in middle and later life should include education to enhance skills. The concept of keeping active in retirement may now be even more important than previously theorised: following a longitudinal study into the association between physical activity and brain volume, function, and risk for Alzheimer’s disease, Erickson, Weinstein and Lopez (2013)

conclude that greater amounts of physical activity are associated with a reduced risk of dementia in later life. 'Active ageing' appears to have become predominant discourse for successful ageing and retirement, as was also indicated by participants in my study.

Other discursive strategies to construct changing statuses of 'self' were identified in the data by participants who positioned themselves as grandparents and spoke about impending retirement, thus representing themselves as prospective retirees. They defined perceptions of a positive next life stage, speaking about a 'time of opportunity' and challenged negative attitudes that described retirement as 'the beginning of the end'. The theme of continuity during the transition from work to retirement was evidenced which demonstrated how people represented their reasons for staying on at work: continuity of financial security; continuity of good health and well-being; and continuity of the enjoyment of doing a job and not being bored. It has been argued that a continuation of activity and personal situation as people move from work to retirement may contribute to successful ageing and a positive sense of 'self' (Continuity Theory, Atchley, 1989; Nimrod and Kleiber (2007).

There were diverging views about how participants envisaged spending their time in retirement. The theme of keeping busy and active was again identified by most people. This echoed the findings of other studies, where prospective retirees had envisaged keeping occupied and that 'not doing anything' would be problematic (Vickerstaff and Cox, 2005: cf. 2.5.1). In my study, however, one female spoke about being 'naturally lazy' (cf. 5.2.2), but would find things for her husband to do in their house. Home-centred activity in retirement appeared to be the focal point for female participants, with married male respondents indicating that they would be expected to help around the house when they finished work. This view diverged from one male perspective, where travel was said to be an aspiration, an activity that was away from the home. It could be

argued that the females are conforming to perceived archetypal behaviour that suggests a woman's place is in the home, even though they themselves are in paid employment.

Deciding when to retire was the second main theme that was investigated in this chapter. Some people voiced concerns about the financial implications of retiring, however, most participants spoke about the need to remain at work for the perceived health benefits, representing these perceptions by speaking about keeping their minds 'occupied' and being 'driven mental' by becoming bored if they left work. Enjoyment of work was also given as another reason for not retiring by some participants. It is interesting to note, however, that concerns about health and well-being that affected some older workers' decisions to remain in work, also played a part in the decisions of other older workers to retire.

Growing older may be evidenced by a 'slowing down' of physical and cognitive ability. Participants who spoke about retiring for health reasons, did not appear to be influenced by negative attitudes towards ageing, but through personal experience. One female respondent gave the example of her mother who had died before she reached SPA (cf. 5.3.2). Her decision to take early retirement appears to have been a result of this premature death which had not allowed her mother to enjoy being retired. The inference is that the respondent did not want this situation to happen to her. A similar experience was identified by Loretto and White (2006) (cf. 2.5.2), where retirement was blamed for the poor health and subsequent death of a participant's mother.

This chapter focused on prospective views of retirement by older workers. The next chapter will examine data from people who have already retired. It will be interesting to compare how their experiences of being retired will compare to the perceptions, aspirations and expectations of retirement as evidenced above.

## CHAPTER 6

### BEING RETIRED

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we looked at how older people who were still at work discursively represented their prospective views about retirement. This chapter will investigate how people who have already retired, retrospectively speak about the experience of being retired to address the third specific Research Question (RQ3): How is the social identity of a retiree discursively constructed? Themes surrounding discourses of activity and ‘busyness’ and continuity of purpose after leaving work that were said to be fundamental for successful ageing and retirement by older workers (cf. Chapter 5) will be compared to the accounts of three female and two male retired interview respondents.

It has been suggested that the ‘traditional understanding’ of retirement (Jones, Leontowitsch and Higgs, 2010:116) has ‘changed dramatically’ over the past 25 years (ibid: 105), with a more positive view of retirement replacing the possible negative stereotypical perceptions of decline and decrement associated with this life-stage, which is defined by Stevenson and Waite (2011:1229) as ‘the period of one’s life after retiring from work’. Vickerstaff (2015: 299) speaks of a retirement as an ‘evolution’, and contends that, as people live longer and have healthier lives, it is almost an expectation that they should work for longer. She describes an “iron cage” of previous social restrictions for retired people being “torn apart” (ibid: 297), allowing retirees to construct new identities in a time of opportunity and challenge.

A positive view of a post-work life stage is also demonstrated by Katz (2009:16), who argues that ‘new aging cultures’ are now represented by agentive values of ‘independence, activity, well-being and mobility’, suggesting that retired people are now taking, or being encouraged to take, a pro-active stance in engaging with activities that promote a positive lifestyle. The concept [of keeping mentally active in retirement] is apparently not new: Francis Bacon (1997 [1638] in Katz, 2009:121) spoke about a “retired kind of life” for older people, “but that their minds and thoughts should not be addicted to idleness”. The notion of Ekerdt’s (1986) ‘busy ethic’ which can make the difference between ‘good’ or ‘bad’ retirement appears to mirror the view of Francis Bacon.

A positive view of retirement as the ‘third age’ (Laslett, 1989), part of the life-span cycle that emerges after people leave work, is contended by Gilleard and Higgs (2007: 14) to contrast with the traditional view of ‘old age’, which may be perceived by some to begin when a person retires. This perception may, in turn, be reinforced by negative representations of retired [older] people, for example, in advertising. Williams, Ylänne and Wadleigh (2007) investigated how older people were viewed after an advertising campaign had been conducted which targeted a general audience. The authors maintain that older people are often negatively perceived by younger people as being cognitively deficient, miserable and weak, but that positive traits, such as being kind, supportive and wise, were also acknowledged. They further argue that older people may also have negative perceptions about themselves (ibid: 3-4), which may revert back to a time when, as younger people, they also viewed older people in a negative way. The study found that images of ageing people are now more often positively represented as being strong, happy and active when compared against negative portrayals that were prevalent before the 1980s, which often characterised older people as being frail and feeble.

Data extracts for analysis in this chapter were extrapolated from seven interviews with people who had already retired. Two extracts in the previous chapter (cf. Extracts 29 and 30) have already demonstrated how these informants constructed their older age-identities: this chapter examines how participants construct their retiree identities of ‘self’ in respect of age. One female and one male respondent were interviewed twice: the first time after they had just left work, with second interviews approximately one year later. It had been my original intention to conduct a comparative study of these two retirees to investigate their initial expectations and aspirations of retirement against their experiences after one year; however, the data from both respondents’ second interviews mirrored their original views and did not indicate any divergence. I decided, therefore, to incorporate both their first and second interview extracts with the other retiree data.

Data analysis for this chapter will relate to two main themes;

1. Keeping active in retirement.
2. Attributions of retirement

Further sub-themes will also be introduced and discussed which relate to a continuity of purpose after leaving work and how change is managed during the transition from work to retirement.

## 6.2 Adapting to retirement

Data analysis of two extracts from recently retired respondents will demonstrate how retaining a continuity of purpose after leaving work and keeping busy and active are discursively represented as being important for ‘good, or ‘successful’ retirement.



### 6.2.1 Keeping active and continuity of purpose

In the first extract, Bob draws upon a discourse of activity to demonstrate his pragmatic intention (Leech, 1983: 13-14) to keep active by planning his day around a work-related routine. His construction of a scenario of ‘busyness’ in relation to doing renovation work on his house suggests that it is important for him to feel as useful and productive as when he was still working, possibly drawing on ideologies of active, successful ageing.

#### Interview: Bob (65), retired male construction worker

Bob retired on his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, three weeks before the interview took place. He had worked in the construction industry since leaving school aged 15. This extract is 9 minutes into the interview. Bob has been giving his reasons for retiring (cf. Chapter 5.3.2, Extract 30): the interviewer now introduces the subject of how Bob has been managing his newly-retired status:

#### **Extract 31**

92 I and you’ve been at home two weeks now just over two weeks now =

93 Bob = well three weeks ago (1.0) well whatever

94 I okay yeah yeah and how’s it been?

95 Bob well it’s been very good the weather’s upset things you know the odd jobs and

96 things I was gonna do I haven’t because of the snow and the cold (.) but (2.0)

97 you know pottering about with this and that and the other ran messages done

98 this done that done the other I’ve kept myself occupied alright there hasn’t

99           been a problem in doin' (.) you know I have had there haven't been long  
100           periods of (1.0) the day I've sat and wondered what I can do and started  
101           reading books and watching television or anything like that I've always been  
102           (2.0) you know more or less (2.0) occupied I don't get up now 'till (2.0) well  
103           p'rhaps half past seven or something like that (1.0) where I was getting up at  
104           quarter past five and then I have quite a leisurely sort of breakfast and read the  
105           newspaper before I start pottering about (.) then I'll come in for an hour (.) mid-  
106           day and have you know a sandwich and a cuppa tea I don't rush around but I I  
107           still do you (.) er know (.) I've always got something to do er I can see that  
108           going on (.) until sort of mid-summer you know odd jobs decorating (2.0)  
109           we're we're doing quite a bit with the house one way and another (1.0) and  
110           I'm by the time we have the house finished (.) decorated and all the odd jobs  
111           done (1.0) it will be at least mid-summer next year I would think (1.0) at that  
112           point (1.0) if I got bored I would look for a part-time job or a (2.0) I'll wait till  
113           that comes to decide whether I'm bored or not (*laughs*) you know I'm not  
114           gonna make any decisions on the matter

(Bob continues to consider his options about what he could do if he became 'bored'  
when his house project was completed.)

To represent how he constructs his busy life in retirement, Bob draws upon a linguistic repertoire (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 138), including metaphor. He states that he has been: "pottering about with this and that and the other ran messages done this done that done the other" (lines 97-98), describing non-specific activities to illustrate that he is keeping busy in retirement. 'Pottering' connotes archetypal retiree behaviour which is less physically demanding and less purposeful when compared to work that may be very

task focused. Bhatti (2006:325-326) suggests that another activity that may be construed as a salient feature of life in retirement is gardening. He contends that different leisure activities may be undertaken by older people as their physical ability declines, such as working in their gardens, an activity which, however, may also entail hard work. Phoenix and Sparkes (2009: 231-232) argue that retirees may keep busy, even if their pace of life is slower and contend that the activity [of being busy] is what is important to retain a sense of “making the most of life”. Bob also speaks of not having “long periods of (1.0) the day” when he has “sat and wondered what I can do and started reading books and watching television or anything like that” (lines 99-101). He is giving further examples of activities, which he perceives, typify the behaviour of people who have time to fill in retirement, and constructs his identity as a busy person by distancing himself from these people.

Bob demonstrates that he believes keeping busy is good and being inactive is not good [in retirement] by constructing his image as a person who has “always been (2.0) you know more or less (2.0) occupied” (lines 101-102). By stating: “I’ve kept myself occupied alright” (line 98) Bob is demonstrating how he feels it is important to keep busy, and that: “there hasn’t been a problem in doin’” (lines 98-99). He continues to construct his identity as someone who is busy and ‘occupied’ by giving a detailed account of how he spends his day. He contrasts his relaxed morning routine with the very early starts whilst still at work: “I don’t get up now ‘till (2.0) well p’rhaps half past seven or something like that (1.0) where I was getting up at quarter past five and then I have quite a leisurely sort of breakfast and read the newspaper before I start pottering about” (lines 102-105). Characterising breakfast as “leisurely” and reading the newspaper suggests that these activities are the very antithesis of how Bob’s working day used to begin. Stating that after breakfast he starts “pottering about” (line 105)

before 'coming in' for a "sandwich and a cuppa tea" for "an hour mid-day" (lines 105-106), suggests that Bob may be acculturated into the pattern of a working day, even though he has now retired, and also indicates that he does not stay indoors all day. He re-affirms that he doesn't "rush around" any more (line 106), whilst declaring that he always has "something to do" (lines 106-107), thereby framing his assertion that whilst he no longer has to 'rush around', he feels it is important to keep busy even though he is no longer at work. It is interesting to note that for Bob 'keeping busy' appears to entail slowing down. In a study which focused on a series of interactive interviews with a retired 70 year-old physically active man, Phoenix and Sparkes (2012: 230) concluded that being 'leisurely' in retirement indicated that taking time to enjoy the present was more important than a "race towards a future" [for this retiree]. By giving examples of how he does not 'rush around' any longer, Bob is also constructing his age-identity in retirement as a person for whom being more leisurely is acceptable and desirable.

Without further prompting, Bob then embarks upon an account of how he sees the first few months of his retirement proceeding: he has lots of 'odd jobs' to do as he and his wife are renovating their house (line 109). He states that he can "see that going on (.) until sort of mid-summer you know odd jobs decorating" (lines 107-108), indicating a schedule by adding that: "by the time we have the house finished ... it will be at least mid-summer next year I would think" (lines 110-111). He asserts that by the time the work is finished, if he was bored he would "look for a part-time job" (line 112).

Repetition of the word 'bored' (lines 112 and 113) implies Bob's fear of inactivity, which is suggested to be the overall discursive goal of his narrative. His laughter (line 113) may evidence that the possibility of being bored (or not) is risible, and does not represent the image he wishes to construct of himself as a busy person. He appears to be structuring his days to mirror a work-related environment, (even though he is getting

up later in the morning and being more ‘leisurely’), which suggests the desire for a continuity of purpose: for him, adapting to retirement appears to entail the importance of a scheduled routine of activity to retain the same social sense of usefulness as a retiree as when he was at work.

In the next extract, Rosie, also newly-retired, speaks about her strategies to retain the continuity of a work-related routine.

Interview: Rosie (58) retired female senior Government technical officer

This extract again represents the theme of ‘busyness’ being perceived as an important aspect of being retired. The interview with Rosie takes place 6 weeks after she has taken early retirement. In response to being asked how she is finding life as a retiree, she speaks about maintaining a busy routine. The extract is nine minutes into the interview: Rosie has been describing how she now has more time for the interpreting work she used to have problems finding time to carry out whilst she was still at work. She also mentions other activities she engages in, including visits to the gym. The interviewer asks about these ‘other activities’:

**Extract 32**

102 I excellent what sort of activities do you (.) do you sort of you said there were

103 external activities that you were involved in now what? =

104 Rosie = there are

105 I I know you mentioned you go to the gym =

106 Rosie = yeah aha I go to the gym I have two book er (.) book clubs one in English one in

107 French (1.0) um there are various language groups on Friday evenings Saturday  
108 evenings (1.0) er (.) also there are some meetings in pubs once a month (.) I have  
109 (1.0) a women's group (.) um you know I have friends I see so I'm never bored  
110 during the day (1.0) I make a programme for the day (1.0) and er I just fill the  
111 time it's so easy and I'm also doing an evening class at the university so during  
112 the week I have to [(.) yeah homework plus my freelance er interpreting work  
113 I [busy]

(The interview continues with Rosie being asked about the ages of the people she associates with when she engages in these activities.)

In this account, Rosie illustrates how she makes a 'programme for the day' (line 110) to construct her identity as a busy person, also giving several examples of the activities that 'fill the time it's so easy' (lines 110-111). She speak about visits to the gym and two book clubs (line 106); regularly attending language groups (line 107); going to an evening class (line 111); and working as a free-lance interpreter (line 112). She asserts that she is "never bored during the day" (lines 109-110). She is also constructing the importance of sociality in her life by belonging to "a women's group", and has "friends I see" (line 109).

This extract demonstrates how Rosie has a strategy for never being 'bored' by 'filling the time'. She had previously mentioned [before the extract commenced], that whilst still at work, she had problems finding enough time to do her free-lance interpreting work, which indicates that, although she has retired from her full-time employment, she is still working for herself on a part-time basis. Mirroring Bob's strategy to manage the transition to retirement, she constructs a daily 'programme' of activity.

These two extracts from newly-retired respondents represent how they plan their days and are consistent with constructing images of people who wish to be perceived as 'keeping



118 I just I keep fit every day I walk the dog every day Monday to Friday I exercise  
119 (1.0) and the day goes really quickly (1.0) and I just (.) feel a hundred times more  
120 relaxed (.) and I just feel more content in myself I hardly ever get irritable now  
121 (1.0) an' I just feel I'm I'm more back to the person I was (2.0) [before  
122 I [okay

(The interviewer now asks Lucy if she envisages continuing with this pattern of activity. Lucy responds that she occasionally looks in the 'situations vacant' pages to see if there are any suitable part-time jobs, but then realises that she does not actually want to return to any form of work.)

Lucy's narrative identifies two themes that shape her identity construction as a retiree. Firstly, she demonstrates agentic control of her actions: "I just do what I want to do now" (line 114), when asked by the interviewer how 'it' [retirement] has been (line 113). She is implying that she was constrained when at work by her daily routine. She asserts: "I never feel as though I've got nothing to do" (lines 115-116), and gives examples of her activities: "family history... more time to see family and friends ... keep fit every day I walk the dog every day ...I exercise" (lines 118). However, she then maintains that "the day goes really quickly" (line 119), which suggests that perhaps all her activities are designed to 'fill the time', which also supports her comment following the extract that she looks to see if there are any part-time jobs available. It may be that Lucy is concerned about becoming bored in retirement.

The second theme that Lucy uses to construct her retiree identity relates to her positive sense of well-being since she left work by comparing being at work to being retired: "I just (.) feel a hundred times more relaxed (.) and I just feel more content in myself" (lines 119-120). She adds: "I hardly ever get irritable now" (line 120), possibly referring to her



previous comment (Extract 13, Chapter 4.4.1) about feeling ‘pressure to perform’ whilst still at work. She concludes: “I just feel I’m more back to the person I was (2.0) before” (line 121), confirming that her job had had a negative effect on her and her sense of ‘self’.

In the next extract, Nick echoes Lucy’s positive constructions of being retired by describing how he ‘absolutely loves’ this life stage.

#### Interview: Nick (65) retired textile merchant

Nick has been retired for five years. For 25 years he ran a family retail textile operation with his two brothers. The extract is 2 minutes into the interview: Nick has been explaining that the decision to sell the business was made shortly after his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday which suited him well as he had always wanted to retire at a [comparatively] early age. The interviewer asks if he had ever discussed ageing with his brothers:

#### **Extract 34**

- 27 I as you grew older did you talk about getting older? or how did it go?
- 28 Nick (2.0) well we we’ve always (2.0) you know talked about getting older because er
- 29 we’re a very very close family and we (.) I suppose we were connected very
- 30 much to my father (2.0) uh (.) who (1.0) although he was not in the business or
- 31 anything else but (1.0) er he lived to a great age he died when he was a hundred
- 32 I wow =
- 33 Nick = and nine days (1.0) and and er we talked about (.) actually (1.0) we we wanted
- 34 to to do the same my father retired when he was fifty (2.0) and (.) we saw him
- 35 between the age of fifty to age a hundred (.) never regretted it (1.0) loved every

36 minute being retired (1.0) and I suppose it rubbed off a little bit on us because  
37 we've all said (1.0) we wanted to be like him (2.0) and er obviously we didn't  
38 retire at fifty (*chuckles*) I mean I retired at sixty (.) but er (.) it still (.) it still gave  
39 me five years of enjoyment (1.0) you know the last five years (1.0) I mean er (.)  
40 when I first retired (.) a lot of people friends said you will hate it you will be  
41 bored (.) you will not know what to do you will age quickly (1.0) exactly the  
42 opposite as I said five and a half years have gone now and I I absolutely love it  
43 there is no way that I can (1.0) or want to go back (.) no way at all (2.0) yeah it's  
44 a (.) my days are full (.) er (1.0) and I just go on from here

(Nick continues to describe how he can now take holidays whenever he wants to, visiting family and friends abroad and staying in a small flat he has purchased.)

This respondent's retrospective account [of being retired for five years] can be divided into three sub-themes: a) wishing to emulate his father; b) the 'enjoyment' of retirement; c) challenging other people's views about retirement.

Nick reports that his father, who "died when he was "a hundred...and nine days" (lines 31, 33), "retired when he was fifty" (line 34) and that "although he was not in the business or anything else" (lines 30-31), (referring to the textile company Nick ran with his brothers), he and his brothers "wanted to do the same" (lines 33-34). He is constructing his parent as a positive role model, stating that, as his father lived to "a great age"; this meant he was retired for fifty years before he died, and that he [the father] "never regretted it (1.0) loved every minute being retired" (lines 35-36). Nick makes the supposition that "it rubbed off a little bit on us" (line 36) as he and his brothers "wanted to be like him [his father] (line 37), and retire at fifty. He wryly observes however that: "er obviously we didn't retire at fifty" (lines 37-38), as he has already told the interviewer he retired just after his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Nick then constructs his own positive age-identity as a retiree, speaking about: “five years of enjoyment” (line 39), adding: “I absolutely love it” and stresses that there is “no way” (line 43) that he would “go back [to work] (.) no way at all (line 43). He states that his “days are full” (line 44), implying that he is engaged with many unspecified activities. He challenges the views of “a lot of people friends” (line 40) who said that he would “hate it” you will be bored (.) you will not know what to do you will age quickly” (lines 41-42). He says that “exactly the opposite” (lines 41-42) has occurred, and that he will “just go on from here” (line 44) [in the same manner]. It should be mentioned, however, that he does not explain whether the ‘friends’ who said he would ‘hate’ being retired and would become ‘bored’ are retired themselves or still at work. Their employment status could indicate whether they were speaking from personal experience [of being retired] or negative perceptions of life in retirement based on stereotypes: he himself had positive expectations based on the experience of his father.

The representations of how the two respondents in this section spend their time in retirement diverge in some respects from that of the newly-retired people in the first section, who speak about how they strategize for a ‘busy’ life by having a daily routine. Some evidence of regular activity, for example walking the dog every day (cf. Extract 33), was demonstrated by one interviewee who had been retired for three years. In the next section, I will examine data from a female who has been retired for seven years, to investigate how she positions herself as a retiree whilst speaking about how she spends her time in retirement.

### 6.3 Life as a retiree

In this section, the attitude of retirees is again represented by speaking about their perceptions and reported activities. The following extracts further evidence how retirement is positively constructed by most participants.

#### 6.3.1 Attributions of retirement

In this short extract, Bella (67) compares her life as a retiree to when she was in employment. At the end of the interview, she sums up her perceptions about retirement.

#### Interview: Bella (67) female retired senior Government TV producer

Bella retired when she was 60 (cf. Extract 3, Chapter 4.2.2). Before this extract, she has been reiterating that it was important to her to be perceived as being younger than her chronological years (cf. Extract 10, Chapter 4.3.1). She is asked if there is anything else she would like to mention:

#### **Extract 35**

193 I well I've asked you everything that was on my list is there anything else you  
194 would like to (.) speak about (.) that I haven't (.) about being older at work or  
195 retirement? =  
196 Bella = no no I mean that retirement is (1.0) wonderful 'cos it it (.) when you've got a  
197 full-on job (.) you can't have a proper social life really and er (.) er (.) working  
198 for the Civil Service you didn't have time off (1.0) you you went straight on to

199                   the next piece of work and er (.) now I'm enjoying going to the theatre the cinema  
200                   and art galleries and doing all the things that I never did  
201    I               (2.0) well thank you very much (.) much appreciated

Bella enthuses: “retirement is (1.0) wonderful” (line 196), positioning herself as a retiree, and justifies this perception by explaining: “when you’ve got a full-on job (.) you can’t have a proper social life really” (lines 196-197). She explains: “working for the Civil Service” you didn’t have time off (1.0) you you went straight on to the next piece of work” (lines 197- 199). She compares this busy time at work to her retired lifestyle where she is now “enjoying going to the theatre the cinema and art galleries” (lines 199-200), and uses these activities as examples of the “things that I never did [whilst at work]” (line 200). She is constructing retirement as a time of opportunity (Bernard and Meade (1993a:146) by using examples of Extreme Case Formulation (ECF) (Edwards and Potter, 1992, in Edwards 2000: 348) to highlight the contrast between when she was still at work, and her life as a retiree.

This extract summarises Bella’s description of retirement as being ‘wonderful’. In the next extract, Rosie, in her second interview which took place one year after she retired, (cf. Rosie’s 1<sup>st</sup> interview this chapter, Extract 32), is also asked to sum up her retiree status and lifestyle. She strongly advocates a positive attitude towards retirement.

#### Interview: Rosie (59) retired female senior Government technical officer

The first interview, where Rosie spoke about how she envisaged she would spend her time in retirement, took place 6 weeks after she retired. This extract comes at the end of the

interview after Rosie has been explaining how her interpreting work (cf. Extract 32) has now increased enough to provide a substantial source of extra income.

### Extract 36

175 I so okay so (.) all I er (.) really have to ask you in conclusion is how would you  
176 sum up your retirement?

177 Rosie (2.0) well I would say if anyone has the chance to apply for early retirement (.)

178 I think they should go for it (1.0) ‘cos you only live once (*laughs*) (2.0) yes and

179 er (.) er (3.0) I think the secret to a successful retirement is to (.) keep active

180 (2.0) otherwise I think people can get (1.0) quite depressed (1.0) I think the the

181 (1.0) the idea is to have a plan of what you want to do what you enjoy doing and

182 just go and do it because you only live once

Although she has only been retired for one year, Rosie indicates that she has no regrets by suggesting that: “if anyone has the chance to apply for early retirement (.) I think they should go for it” (lines 177-178): “just go and do it” (line 182), connoting retirement as a time of opportunity. She argues that the “secret to a successful retirement is to (.) keep active” (line 179). She justifies this proposition of the importance of activity by suggesting that: “otherwise I think people can get (1.0) quite depressed” (line 180). She advocates having “a plan of what you want to do what you enjoy doing” (line 181). She uses the expression “you only live once” (lines 178; 182) to support her argument that people should take advantage of the opportunity to retire early (before State Pension Age).

Respondents in these two extracts demonstrate a positive attitude towards life as retirees and illustrate how retirement enables the fulfillment of interests that were not realised

during their working lives. In the next section, I will again draw upon the topic of leisure [activities] to illustrate how Bob constructs his age-identity as a retiree.

The following extract comes from the second interview with Bob approximately one year after he retired (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> interview Extract 31, this chapter 6.2.1). He uses temporal comparison strategies to construct his age-related retirement identity, speaking about when he was younger and his children were still at home.

Interview: Bob (66), retired male construction worker

The first interview with Bob took place three weeks after he retired. This extract comes at the start of the [second] interview where the interviewer is asking him if his retirement is proceeding as he envisaged. He has been explaining that he is still working on his house renovation project which has taken longer than he anticipated, but that he has also had time for some holidays. During the extract, he makes reference to a male friend of a similar age to himself, who is known to the interviewer.

**Extract 37**

- 1 I okay Bob thank you for the tea (1.0) um (.) I came last year I think it was about  
2 three or four weeks after you retired  
3 Bob just before Christmas that was  
4 I yeah oh (.) and you sort of said how you thought the year was gonna (.) pan out  
5 you had things to do in the house =  
6 Bob = yeah

7 I and I just wondered (1.0) it's now nearly a year later (.) you've been retired  
8 nearly a year =

9 Bob = yeah

10 I how's it been?

11 Bob (1.0) it's been fine really it hasn't gone as quickly as I expected (1.0) you know  
12 the doing in the house (.) the DIY (1.0) though quite a lot of it has been done...  
. *(Bob continues to explain that his house renovation project has taken longer*  
. *than he envisaged partly due to the fact that he and his wife have problems*  
. *in choosing colour schemes and new [fittings].*

20 ... but (.) it's gone pretty well really I had a fairly good year really a few  
21 holidays

22 I a few holidays?

23 Bob yeah well *[name of male friend]* (.) you remember him?

24 I yeah

25 Bob well me and *[friend's name]* had a week in er (.) Mahon (1.0) 'bout a month back  
26 (1.0) first time I've been away without *[wife's name]* since I was (1.0) married

27 I right

28 Bob so wife says "why don't you and *[friend's name]* have a week away?" (1.0) so  
29 we done that and it was (2.0) it was very nice you know (1.0) a couple of old  
30 gadgies (*laughs*) walking round Mahon it was alright yeah (2.0) aye different  
31 from family holidays again (1.0) and of course different from when we were  
32 young single men (2.0) you know what I mean just two old men (1.0) not doing  
33 anything in a hurry and pottering away it was quite good (*laughs*)



(Bob then continues to describe the weather on this holiday before explaining how he is able to maintain the leisurely routine at home that he established straight after he retired (cf. Extract 31, Chapter 6.2.1).

Bob comments that in the year since he retired, the work on his house (Extract 31, this chapter) “hasn’t gone as quickly as I expected” (line 11). He sums up his first year as a retiree as: “fairly good” (line 20) and that he had managed to take “a few holidays” (lines 20-21). Elaborating on this fact, he relates that, at his wife’s suggestion (line 28), he had: “a week in er (.) Mahon ‘bout a month back” (line 25), with a friend (who was known to the interviewer). Bob reflects that it was the “first time I’ve been away without [wife’s name] since I was (1.0) married” (line 26), indicating that retirement had provided the opportunity to do something new. He laughingly labels himself and his friend (who is in the same age cohort) as “a couple of old gadgies (lines 29-30); using lexis from the Northumbrian and Cumbrian dialect (Bob is Cumbrian) which is said to derive from a Romany term for a non-Roma man: ‘gadjo’ (Wales Online 2006) to describe “just two old men” (line 32) who may also be described as eccentric ‘old codgers’. His laughter may indicate that even though he is constructing his age identity as a retiree in this manner, he is alluding to the perception of other people who would label him thus (Sherman, 1994). It is possible that he himself perceives other men of his age as ‘old gadgies’. He recalls that: “walking round Mahon it was alright yeah” line 30); distinguishing this holiday as being “different from family holidays” (lines 30-31), and comparing it to a time when he and his friend were “young single men” (line 32). He may be drawing upon a common perception that ‘old men’ take life more leisurely by relating that he and his friend were “not doing anything in a hurry and pottering away” (lines 32-33): he is again supporting the narrative from his first interview, where he asserted that now he has retired, he can take things more easily. He is demonstrating his own perceived physical change relating

to slowing down as he ages. He summarises that [his holiday] “was quite good” (line 33): the laughter that follows this comment denoting his remembered enjoyment.

This extract also demonstrated how the male respondent constructed his older age-identity by comparing himself as an ‘old gadgie’ to when he was a ‘young single’ man, using the example of taking holidays and the activities therein. He also speaks about ‘pottering’, an activity he first mentioned earlier in this chapter (Extract 31: 105), which may be said to be an archetypal behaviour associated with older people.

#### 6.4 Summary

This chapter examined how people spoke about the experience of being retired whilst constructing their identities as retirees. As illustrated in Table 11 (below), the theme of keeping busy and active after leaving work was represented as being fundamental for a ‘good’ retirement. This view mirrors the perceptions of older people still at work who argued that inactivity after leaving work resulted in ‘bad’ retirement (cf. Chapter 5). However, newly-retired participants appeared to place more importance on having a daily routine and structure to their days when compared to people who had been retired for some years. It may be that new retirees are in a transitional period between a work-related structure imposed upon them by being employed and not having any routine imposed upon them in their non-work status. By constructing their own programmes for the day or week, they have found a way to manage this transition. They are demonstrating a continuity of purpose: ‘Continuity Theory’ (Atchley, 1989; Nimrod and Kleiber, 2007), which contends that continuity of purpose and patterns of activity in retirement may lead to a positive sense of ‘self’.

It should be noted, however, that ‘keeping busy’ and ‘keeping occupied’ (as stated by the newly-retired respondents, cf. 6.2.1) suggest that they are seeking ways to fill their time (which could otherwise lead to boredom). This contrasts with ‘being busy’ which connotes having to manage one’s time so that all planned activity can be accomplished. People who had been retired for several years, represented planned activity as being more leisurely (cf. 6.2.2), indicating that life in retirement may be taken at a slower pace when compared to still being at work. Retirees drew upon the theme of activity when demonstrating how they spent their time; for example, going to the theatre and art galleries, and going on holiday (cf. 6.3.1). The ability to engage in activities such as these is contingent on having the financial capability, and will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

An older-age identity as a retiree was constructed by one male respondent who labeled himself as an ‘old gadgie’, and compared himself to when he was young and single (cf. 6.3.1). This temporal comparison strategy is similar to one identified by Linde (1993: 107) who argues that “temporal continuity of the self” forms an integral part of the cohesiveness of a narrative to construct an identity through time. This echoes Atchley’s (1989) ‘continuity theory’ when related to the transitional stage from work to retirement. Continuity between life stages may be linked to constructing a sense of an ageing ‘self’ during this transition, and may form a cohesive representation between self-identity, age-identity, and retirement identity.

Positive representations of retirement in this chapter (cf. 6.3.1) which included comments such as: ‘I absolutely love it’ (Extract 34); [retirement is] ‘wonderful’ (Extract 35); and ‘go for it- you only live once’ (Extract 36), diverged from the perceptions of retirement by people still at work who articulated concerns that this life stage may be associated with physical and cognitive decline. Many of these negative

perceptions of decline in retirement were related to inactivity after leaving work, again demonstrating the theme of the importance of keeping busy and active to achieve successful ageing.

**Table 11: Representations of being retired**

Theme	Extract	Participant	Age-identity discursive strategy	Data
<u>Adapting to retirement</u> Keeping active and continuity of purpose	31	Bob (male: 65)	Positions himself as an active retiree by giving non-specific examples of activities.  Represents the theme of continuity in retirement by describing his daily work routine, but at a more leisurely pace.  Illustrates how he feels it is important to keep busy to achieve 'good' retirement and successful ageing.	"pottering about with this and that and the other ran messages done this done that done the other"  "I don't get up now 'till half past seven ... I have a <u>leisurely</u> sort of breakfast... I'll come in for an hour mid-day... I don't <u>rush</u> around"
	32	Rosie (female: 58)	Constructs her age-identity in retirement as a busy person.	"I make a programme for the day... I go to the gym... I have two book clubs ... there are various language groups"
	33	Lucy (female: 56)	Demonstrates agentive control of her actions by giving examples of her daily routine.  Constructs a positive sense of well-being as a retiree compared to when she was at work.	"I just do what <u>I</u> want to do now ... family history ... time to see family and friends... keep fit ... I walk the dog every day"  "I just feel a <u>hundred</u> times more relaxed... I feel more content in myself... I hardly <u>ever</u> get irritable now"
Embracing change				

<p><u>Life as a retiree</u> Attributions of retirement</p>	34	Nick (male: 65)	<p>Positions himself as someone who wishes to emulate his father (in retirement).</p> <p>Constructs a positive age-identity as a retiree.</p>	<p>“my father retired when he was fifty... [he] never <u>regretted</u> it <u>loved</u> every minute being retired... we wanted to be like him”</p> <p>“five <u>years</u> of enjoyment ... I <u>absolutely</u> love it... there is no <u>way</u> that I can or <u>want</u> to go back no way at all”</p>
	35	Bella (female: 67)	<p>Positions herself as a retiree by comparing her busy time when working to her more relaxed retired lifestyle.</p>	<p>“retirement is <u>wonderful</u>... when you’ve got a full-on job you can’t have a proper social life really... now I’m <u>enjoying</u> going to the theatre the cinema and art galleries and doing all the things that I never did”</p>
	36	Rosie (female: 59)	<p>Constructs her age-identity as an active retiree who advocates early retirement as a time of opportunity for other older people.</p>	<p>“I think they should <u>go</u> for it ‘cos you only live once ...the secret to a successful retirement is to keep active ...have a plan of what you want to do what you <u>enjoy</u> doing”</p>
	37	Bob (male: 66)	<p>Positions himself (and a friend of the same age) as an older person by using an age-related label and comparing his relaxed lifestyle to when he was younger.</p>	<p>“a couple of old gadgies... two old men not doing anything in a <u>hurry</u> and pottering away... different from when we were young <u>single</u> men”</p>

This chapter concludes the data analysis for this study. In the next chapter, I will draw together the findings from all three analysis chapters which addressed the three Research Questions (RQs), and discuss how and why representations of ageing and retirement may be affected by salient age-related influences from media discourses and texts.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the findings of the three analysis chapters, discussing how [the analysis of] older workers' and retirees' talk relates to the central Research Questions (RQs): How is older age-identity constructed through discourse? and the main theme of the study into how the over 50s speak about their age relating to work and retirement. I will argue that the results demonstrate that my study into older workers and retirees using a discourse analytic approach has extended previous research. Discourse Analytic (DA) methodologies and Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), have allowed different dimensions of ageing to be identified during older age-identity construction. This methodology differentiates my work from other research in this area.

The analysis focused on the two main themes that emerged: the discursive constructions of older age-identities by people over 50 who were still working or who had already retired; and the discursive representations of how successful ageing and retirement can be achieved. Within the main themes, several sub-themes were also identified: how perceptions of age-identities may 'shift' as people grow older; accepting or resisting age-related changes that relate to physical, psychological, chronological, social and performative aspects of ageing; positive or negative values of being older in the workplace; perceptions of 'good' and 'bad' retirement; and retirement as a time of opportunity and new challenges. The findings of other qualitative research into older

workers and retirement [cf. Chapter 2] will be compared to my own findings for evidence of support or divergence of views.

The last section in this Chapter discusses the implications that may be drawn from the findings: (the ‘so what?’ factor), explaining what the theoretical aspect of my study adds to the existing body of DA research, and the practical application that the results may be used for.

## 7.2 Older age-identity constructions

Within the over-arching focus of this study into older age-identity construction, I will first discuss the findings that relate to the first specific Research Question (RQ1) (cf. Chapter 4): What discursive strategies do older workers use to construct their age identities?

Results indicate that several factors may have influenced how older age is manifested. The most salient theme that is evidenced is a desire not to be perceived as having negative attributes that may be linked to certain archetypal characteristics and behaviours associated with growing older. Perceptions of age-related attributes may result in constructing an archetype of an ‘older worker’, where certain collective behavioural patterns implicitly form mental images that can be generalised to all people in that category (Jung, 1968). This factor, together with other aspects of age-identity construction, such as how the context of a situation may affect how age is ‘performed’, and the different dimensions of age (Laslett, 1989; Arber and Ginn, 1995), will be discussed in the following sections.

### 7.2.1 'Shifting' perceptions of ageing

Logan, Ward and Spitze (1992: 464) contend that, as people grow older, their perception of age boundaries may 'shift', so that they align with a younger age cohort by extending the chronological age of an age-related category. An example of this is evidenced in Extract 1, (cf. 4.2.1), where a 50 year-old female states that she thinks 'new middle-age' starts at 50 instead of 40, thereby positioning herself as a member of a perceived younger age category by distancing herself from an older age group. Constructing a personal age-identity by identifying with a younger age cohort may be aimed at achieving two objectives: firstly, to promote a personal positive sense of 'self', and secondly, to project an identity to other people as a younger person.

The question that needs to be addressed is why do some people try to construct an age-identity as a younger person? I suggest there are two possible aspects to this explanation. Firstly, negative perceptions of ageing that reflect ageist societal attitudes may influence how we wish to be perceived, both physically and cognitively. In much of the western world, media and other publications that promote the use of products to stay 'looking younger for longer' have perpetuated the negative view of how 'wrinkles' and other signs of physical ageing are not to be desired. The cognitive aspect of ageing and negative perceptions of age-related decline will be discussed later in this chapter.

Secondly, as evidenced in Extract 7 (cf. 4.3.2), people may not 'feel' or 'see themselves' as being old. In this extract, the 67 year-old male participant justifies this perception by adding that he does not think that he 'looks old'. This apparent conflict of a sense of younger 'self' with an ageing physical appearance, (the 'mask of ageing': Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991), may also represent wanting to distance oneself from being associated with negative perceptions of growing older, as mentioned above.



Participants demonstrate contradictory perceptions when constructing Chronological Life-stage Categories (CLCs) (cf. 4.2.1). ‘Old’ is said to describe people in their 70s and 80s, however, ‘ancient’ is also attributed to people in their 60s. The divergence of these perceptions may be attributed to the contexts in which they were made: workplace roles and environments may affect how age is perceived, (Logan *et al*, 1992: 453). For example, younger people who may work in the media spotlight, such as in TV, compared to people working in retail, who may be older. How we perceive age may change as we ourselves grow older (Garrett and Williams, 2009), constructing ‘layers of ageing’ that describe people older than ourselves. For example, someone aged 50, (which was described by a participant as being ‘new middle-age’ (cf. 4.2.1)), may describe people in their 60s as ‘middle-aged’, in their 70s as ‘old middle-age’, in their 80s, as ‘old’, and in their 90s, as ‘very old’. By contrast, anyone who is younger than we are is just classified as being ‘younger’. This theory would work for any age, however, the older we grow the length of time for each CLC becomes shorter.

The use of age-related labels, such as ‘grandpa’, is given as an example of how one participant in his late 60s was labelled by younger colleagues (Extract 4, cf. 4.2.2). He claims that this categorisation was friendly and non-threatening. However, he does not categorise himself in this way: in a further extract (Extract 7, see above) he distances himself from being ‘old’, demonstrating a conflict with the perception of younger people and the age-identity he wishes to project. This apparent resistance to ageing will be discussed in the next section.

### 7.2.2 Age-related change

The physical and cognitive effects which may be associated with growing older were found to be discursively accepted or resisted by participants. People who appear to resist ageing by constructing a 'younger' age identity may have been influenced by the desire not to be associated with perceived negative age-related attributes. Some respondents demonstrate this by stating that they do not 'feel old' or 'look old' whilst accepting that they are growing older (Extracts 7; 9): the "cultural adage" of being 'as old as you feel' (Logan *et al*, 1992: 451). This echoes the argument that people may draw upon their social or psychological age rather than their chronological age during age-identity construction (Arber and Ginn, 1995:5). Laslett (1989) supports the concept that there are different aspects of age that may affect how age-identity is manifested: he distinguishes between chronological, biological, social, personal and subjective age. These dimensions appear to mirror those of Arber and Ginn's: however, I suggest that Laslett's chronological and biological age may relate to the existential aspect of identity; that is to say the characteristics that are 'fixed' from birth.

My study demonstrates how participants drew upon different aspects of ageing when constructing their older age-identities. For example, participants alluded to their chronological age by revealing how old they are (Extract 1, cf. 4.2.1); their social age, by claiming membership of an older age cohort by comparison with younger colleagues (Extract 4, cf. 4.2.1); and their biological age, by comparing their current physical ability to when they were younger (Extract 5, cf. 4.3.1). I also suggest that the different dimensions of age may work together during age-identity construction as demonstrated below, where a 'dual' age-identity is discursively represented by a participant (Extract 8, cf. 4.3.2).

When demonstrating a resistance to ageing, however, it may be that it is change itself which people find problematic. Dweck (2013: 2) argues that all change is “uncomfortable”, as it is “unpredictable and unfamiliar” and makes people feel “insecure”. I suggest that change relating to age is even more ‘uncomfortable’ when it is associated with negative perceptions of decrement and decline. There is also an element of wishing to be seen by others as we see ourselves. For example, one retired female participant stated that, whilst still at work, she did not want colleagues to be influenced by her chronological age (56): she wanted them to ‘see’ her for herself (Extract 6, cf. 4.3.2). This demonstrates a contrast between how she viewed her ‘outer’ [chronologically-defined] self and her ‘inner’ [contextually-defined] self. We may accept the biological signs of ageing (such as wrinkles), thus aligning ourselves with others of our own age cohort, yet resist being identified with people older than us with whom we do not share the same social proclivities, for example, in the way we dress or the music we like.

Another example of contextually-influenced age-identity construction was evidenced by a female participant aged 64, who demonstrated her resistance to ageing by altering her details on an internet website to construct an age-identity as a younger person (Extract 9, cf. 4.3.2). She argued that this strategy was designed to protect her business, where a ‘public’ image was said to be fundamental to success, and where an older person could be viewed as being less effective: negative archetypal views of the capabilities of older people again influencing perceptions. The apparent contradiction of constructing a younger and older age identity simultaneously was demonstrated by another female participant aged 62, who tried to construct her age-identity as a more youthful person by saying that she was able to interact well with younger colleagues at work (Extract 8, cf. 4.3.2), challenging the perception that some older people may find interpersonal

relationships with younger people problematic; however, she then continued to explain that these younger colleagues often referred to her as a 'mother figure'. She may have perceived that her life experience as an older female (and mother) helped to facilitate her good relationship with younger colleagues. This example of a 'dual' age-identity construction indicates her perception that she has a social identity as a mother figure and a personal identity as being (more) youthful. Our social identities are contextual, and relate to the roles we play in society, whereas our personal identities are influenced by how we relate to perceived attributes of people in our own age cohort, and how we compare ourselves to people of other ages: 'as old as we feel'.

By applying an age-related symbolic interactionist approach (Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1981), which argues that older age-identity may be constructed by a self-reflexive evaluation by an older person measured against a younger former self, I identified how one male participant aged 53 (Extract 5, cf. 4.3.1) demonstrated a positive orientation to ageing by measuring his current physical performance to when he was younger. In this extract, he spoke about going skiing at 53 instead of playing football and squash. These activities are all physically strenuous: is the participant's own personal view that skiing is less so. It should also be stated that this example of older age-identity construction does not relate to being an older worker. However, I suggest that making age salient in other contexts, such as in social situations, is as relevant as in the workplace. How people may try to disassociate themselves from being old, (and reject being identified with negative ageist perceptions), may occur in any context (Bultena and Powers, 1978; Jamieson, 2002).

### 7.2.3 Ageing at work

The perceptions (of some people) that our cognitive ability declines as we age, may influence how older people view themselves. This negative view appears to have influenced one female participant aged 64, who adopts the discourse of decline by voicing concerns about her ‘ageing brain’. She perceived herself to be less able than her younger colleagues to learn new technology (Extract 11, cf. 4.4.1), and claimed group membership with other older people who, she suggested, may take longer to learn something new.

This concern appears to be supported by results of a study by Brooke and Taylor (2005) (cf. Chapter 2.3), who found that older people were ‘unsure, uncomfortable and a bit nervous’ about learning something new, with respondents observing ‘it was because of our age’. This demonstrates their negative perceptions of themselves as older workers. Brooke and Taylor (2005) argued that management perceptions that older people were not as capable as younger people to learn new technology may also have resulted in a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’, whereby older people themselves suggested that training should be left to ‘the young ones’ (ibid: 421).

The participant in my study did not appear to have been influenced by the perceptions of other [younger] people, but spoke from personal experience of attending training courses at work and possibly how she viewed her social role as an older worker. However, another female participant aged 69 (Extract 2, cf. 4.2.2), also speaking from personal experience, gave an example of positive self-presentation by challenging the negative view that older people are less effective at work. She out-grouped younger

colleagues by commenting that they never ‘stick’ at the job, and that one co-worker in her 40s has less ‘stamina’ than her older counterparts in their 60s and 70s.

Negative perceptions of declining cognitive ability in older people do appear, however, to have influenced a female participant aged 56, who spoke about the pressure to perform her tasks as effectively as when she was younger (Extract 13, cf. 4.4.1). She spoke about being concerned that younger colleagues would think she was ‘past it’ and that she tried to ‘pull her weight’ at work. She may have been trying to counter the effect of the ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ that Brooke and Taylor (2005: 421) speak of, in the sense that she perceived she was less efficient than when she was younger, because she was working even harder. She is also constructing her age identity as an older worker by aligning herself with possible negative perceptions of failing ability.

Discourses of positive ageism were represented by participants in the retail blue-collar sector who perceived that experience and reliability are the most important assets of older workers (Extracts 14 and 16, cf. 4.4.2). This was demonstrated by participants whilst constructing their age-identities, by out-grouping younger colleagues who were not perceived to be experienced, and by aligning with older colleagues who were perceived to be reliable. A negative view, however, was expressed by participants in a government office, who suggested that an ageist attitude had been demonstrated by their employers. This had resulted in older workers being encouraged to take early retirement (Extract 15). These perceptions were supported by findings from the study by Brooke and Taylor (2005: 423), who concluded that age and experience were not valued by some employers, who had reportedly ‘let all the good ones go’ and were losing their ‘best staff, experience-wise’. It is interesting to observe in my study, that the over 50s in the blue-collar retail sector represent a more positive orientation to being

older at work than those in white-collar employment. This may be due to the fact that many people in their 60s, 70s and 80s worked in the blue-collar sector, whereas only one person over 60 was an employee in a white-collar job, possibly suggesting that organisations may be more willing to employ blue-collar workers over 60, often on a part-time basis. This may indicate that employers have the perception that older workers over 60 are more suited to less pressured jobs in retailing than jobs in white-collar positions; however, it may also indicate that older people themselves prefer positions with less responsibility. This suggestion is echoed by one female participant aged 53 (Extract 21, cf. 5.2.2) working in a senior white-collar position, who stated that she would like to be less pressured by the time she is 60, even though she had not yet considered leaving work. She justified her position by constructing her age-identity as someone who distanced herself from other 50 year-olds who may be nearing retirement. One practical approach to preparing for retirement could be engaging in 'bridge employment' (Alcover, Topa, Parry, Fraccaroli and Depolo, 2015), which is defined as patterns of work designed to aid the transition from full-time employment to full retirement. This could present the opportunity for older workers to move to less demanding work roles.

In summary, the discursive strategies that older workers in my study used to construct their age-identities are primarily designed to distance themselves from negative perceptions associated with ageing. Examples include the definitions of Chronological Life-stage Categories (CLCs) to demonstrate how perceptions of ageing may 'shift' as a person grows older; drawing upon different dimensions of ageing, such as personal, social, chronological and biological; claiming membership of a younger age cohort by out-grouping older people of the same chronological age; and self-categorisation by

identifying with the attributes of younger people, such as not ‘looking’ or ‘feeling’ old. In the next section, I will discuss how older workers viewed retirement.

### 7.3 ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ retirement

The second specific Research Question (RQ2), How do people over 50 represent their views about retirement?, was addressed in this section, which illustrates the possible influence of negative age-related perceptions of being retired. Sneed (2005: 376- 377) argues that ageist attitudes (that may be associated with retirement) are ‘myths’, and that older people do not all become ‘frail and dependent’ as they grow older, (see also Hurd, 1999; Thornton, 2002; Ory, Hoffman, Hawkins, Sanner and Mockenhaupt, 2003). Examining how people speak about their perceptions of retirement can help to confirm or challenge any negative views about this life-stage (Coupland, 2009: 851). In my study, data relating to views and opinions about retirement identified two main themes: how negative perceptions of this life stage may influence how people feel about becoming older; and how keeping busy and active may be seen to defray the effects of detriment and decline that could accompany ageing.

Negative perceptions about retirement appear not to have influenced some of the participants in my study. For example, two senior female white-collar managers aged 60 and 63 spoke about this life stage as a time of opportunity and not ‘the beginning of the end’ (Extract 19, cf 5.2.1), metaphorically framing life as a journey, with birth at the beginning and death at the end. They explained that retirement would afford them the time to spend with grandchildren and look after an aged parent, and one manager stated that she would be returning to work part-time as a consultant. Another example of ‘good’ retirement is evidenced in Extract 17 (cf. 5.2.1), where a female office worker reported that an ex-colleague who had already retired was ‘doing something every day-



it's great', suggesting that keeping busy after leaving work is important. These views were expressed whilst participants constructed their older age-identities as prospective retirees who will keep active in retirement, and who distanced themselves from negative attributes they associated with growing older.

Positive perceptions of retirement are also found in a study by Sargent, Bataille, Vough, and Lee (2011: 319) who examined the use of metaphors by retirees to describe the meanings of this life stage. One retired executive framed his life as a book: "okay, let's turn the page". Bernard and Meade (1993a: 146) also speak of retirement as a 'time of opportunity' for personal development; and Hockey and James (2003: 102) describe retirement as a positive time of 'transitions to a new life rather than the end of an old one'. The use of metaphor in my study by some participants when representing their views about retirement is further demonstrated below.

A negative view of retirement was constructed by one female office worker aged 56 who stated that the thought of finishing work was 'a bit daunting' (Extract 17, cf. 5.2.1). She argued that this life stage connoted being 'past it', conflating being retired with negative perceptions of decline. Another male sales advisor, aged 80, gave an example of decline in retirement. He spoke of knowing people who had become ill after they retired (Extract 18, cf. 5.2.1). He argued that people should keep active after leaving work to defray gradual decline and decrement, suggesting that inactivity leads to being on a metaphorical 'downhill slope'. The suggestion that not keeping active and busy in retirement could lead to decline was echoed by several participants. One female sales assistant aged 66 commented that 'people do die' if they just sit about at home (Extract 24, cf. 5.3.1); another female office worker aged 49 suggested that retirees should 'keep the brain active' and the 'body going'. The ages of these participants ranged from 49-80: it is interesting to note that this wide age gap has not resulted in differing views

about retirement. It may be that once a worker is over 50, the cohort group membership of an older worker has no chronological age demarcation. People may construct their age-identities as workers or retirees without relating this self-categorisation to their actual chronological ages. This suggests that being 'old' does not mean being 'retired'.

Participants implied that keeping busy and active after leaving work, results in 'good' retirement. They also explained that they wanted to stay at work for as long as they could, because they felt they needed 'something to do', or 'therapy' (Extract 25, cf. 5.3.1). The theme of wanting to keep active in retirement was echoed in a poll sponsored by a retirement council on ageing in the USA (Ellis and Velten, 1998:162), which found that most people nearing retirement age would not want to stop work unless they had other activities to occupy their time. In my study, one male self-employed writer and broadcaster aged 62 argued that he will keep working as long as he is able (Extract 27, cf. 5.3.1). He stated that he will work until he 'drops', metaphorically indicating that the only thing that will prevent him from working is 'dropping' dead. He also distanced himself from perceived archetypical behaviour of some other retired people who take cruises or beach holidays, when constructing his age-identity as an older worker. The stance [to keep on working for as long as possible] was supported by other creative professionals in a study by Parry and Taylor (2007: 588), who observed that they could not visualise themselves stopping work; and by one male employee in local government who stated that he 'never planned to retire' as he could not visualise himself 'ever not doing anything'. However, it should be noted that the writer and broadcaster in my study, rationalised his reasons for not retiring as long as he has 'a function and a purpose' in his career, and not because he wants to keep busy, suggesting that his self-image as being socially engaged is important to him.

The perception of archetypal retiree behaviour of taking holidays is, however, supported by data from one male participant aged 67, who spoke about travelling in retirement (Extract 23, cf. 5.2.2). He constructed a positive view of this life stage. However, he suggested that when he finished work he will also have to ‘help around the house’. This sentiment is echoed by another male participant, aged 73, who said that he will be ‘at his wife’s beck and call’ (Extract 22, cf. 5.2.2). Both participants constructed their prospective retiree identities as married men, which could indicate that managing the husband-wife roles and responsibilities after retirement may be an issue that impacts on daily life at home. It could also be that other male retirees, who do not have partners, may envisage a different prospective life-style after leaving work. This study has not focused on the relationship statuses of participants, (both male and female), which is a variable that could result in different findings, and could be explored in future research.

By contrast, female participants both married and unmarried, did not speak about holidays or travelling in retirement, but appeared to focus on activity centred in the home. One female participant aged 53 talked about being quite leisurely and ‘tootling about’ after leaving work (Extract 21, cf 5.2.2). Another explained that she will work in her gardens (Extract 20, cf. 5.2.2). Both females constructed their older age-identities as prospective retirees by speaking about how they envisage spending their time in retirement. It would appear that ‘good’ retirement may be achieved by females in my study by having some level of activity in the home, with ‘bad’ retirement resulting from having nothing to do.

#### 7.4 Retirement is ‘wonderful’

This section addressed the third specific Research Question (RQ3): How do the over 50s who are retired construct their identities as retirees? Teuscher (2010: 91) concludes that retirement is not an ‘attractive social category’ after an investigation into how retirees defined themselves when compared to people who were still working. In Chapter 6, these findings are challenged by the analysis of retiree data, as will be discussed below. Respondents demonstrated how they constructed their age-identities whilst echoing the perceptions of older workers that keeping busy and active after leaving work is important for ‘good’ retirement and successful ageing. I will also discuss the concept of continuity and purpose to achieve a cohesive identity in retirement.

The transition from work to retirement may be helped by continued patterns of activity that mirror working life (Continuity Theory: Atchley, 1989), and may be especially important during the early days and months after leaving work when the experience of being retired is ‘new’. Carter and Cook (‘Role Theory’, 1995: 67) also argue that the adjustment from an identity as a ‘worker’ to that of a retired person may also be made successfully by ‘pro-active’ strategies, such as planning for the day. This course of action was adopted by two recently-retired respondents who construct their positive age-identities as busy retirees by speaking about a daily work routine of non-specific tasks (Extract 31, cf. 6.2.1), and how a ‘programme for the day’ was planned (Extract 32, cf. 6.2.1). Keeping busy to avoid being ‘bored’ was another theme that was echoed by a male retiree aged 65, who commented that his ‘days are full’ (Extract 34, cf. 6.2.2).

Keeping busy and active in retirement may also help to instil a sense of purpose for retirees, supporting the notion of Ekerdt’s (1986) ‘busy ethic’; however, different levels

of activity may be undertaken which are less strenuous for older people. One male respondent aged 65 spoke about having a 'leisurely' breakfast (Extract 31, cf. 6.2.1). Another female respondent, aged 56, described how she now has time to walk her dog and see family and friends (Extract 33, cf. 6.2.2), constructing a positive age-identity in retirement by comparing her sense of well-being as a retiree to when she was at work. Phoenix and Sparkes (2009: 231-232) argue that retirees may keep busy, even if their pace of life is slower, and contend that the activity [of being busy] is what is important to retain a sense of "making the most of life". It is also interesting to note that one of the respondents who, when newly-retired, was concerned about his regular routine, now had time to 'take holidays' after being retired for one year (Extract 37, cf. 6.3.1). This indicates that, as people become more acculturated into being retired, they are able to live a more relaxed lifestyle. This participant constructed his age-identity as a retiree by labelling himself as an older person who is able to take life at a more leisurely pace, compared to when he was younger.

Other benefits of being retired were described by some participants. Improved health and well-being are perceived to result from life in retirement by a female respondent who spoke about being stressed and 'under pressure' whilst working as a senior civil service officer (Extract 33, cf. 6.2.2). Jones, Leontowitsch and Higgs (2010:110) reported similar findings in their study into the experiences of retired people who had been employed in higher management and executive positions. Other respondents did not comment directly about their health, but the positive benefits of being retired may be implicit in the discourses of having more leisure time and having the freedom to enjoy social and cultural activities. This is demonstrated by one female retired TV producer who remarked that retirement was 'wonderful' as she now has the time to go to the theatre and art galleries (Extract 35, cf. 6.3.1). The financial implications of

being able to participate in such activities are not discussed: a contextual variable that may have resulted in different perceptions being voiced, and a possible topic for future study.

In the analysis of retiree data, there is only one explicit example of age-identity construction using self- categorisation by a respondent who labelled himself an ‘old gadgie’ (Extract 37, cf. 6.3.1). The negative connotations of retirement as a time of ageing and decline appear not to have influenced retirees’ positive attitudes towards this life stage. However, one female participant (Extract 29, cf. 5.3.2) spoke about taking early retirement as an indirect result of her mother dying at 61, without the chance to enjoy her retirement. The correlation between retirement and dying was also evidenced in a study by Loretto and White (2006: 499), where one male worker stated that his mother, who died aged 61, had been ‘healthy until she got her pension book’. In my study, the female participant whose mother died at 61 spoke of the opportunity to ‘enjoy’ being retired. The positive view of retirement as being ‘wonderful’ appears to be contingent on the ability to enjoy leisure activities and to be able to avoid the pressures of work.

## 7.5 Summary

This study demonstrates how people over 50, who are at work or retired, negotiated their older age-identities through discourse. Previous research into work and retirement has focused on quantitative surveys that were not contextualised, or qualitative studies which examined the content of participants’ talk and not the discursive strategies that were used to construct their views and opinions. In my study, an analytic approach which focused on interactive talk has allowed for an in-depth investigation of a specific

social group, (older workers), using Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), which will add to the existing body of research into older age-identity construction using Discourse Analysis (DA). Using this methodology, I was able to demonstrate how participants drew upon different dimensions of ageing when constructing their age-identities as older workers and retirees.

Findings indicate that several participants may have been influenced by negative perceptions associated with ageing and being retired. This was achieved by distancing themselves from other older people whom they perceive, conform to certain behavioural archetypes. The desire to not to be aligned with the [way retired people are] perceived [to] decline into senility is evidenced in much of the participant data in my study. Other discursive strategies to construct a more youthful age identity included claiming membership of a younger age cohort. Dimensions of age, such as biological, psychological and social influences, together with the context of a work role or other scenario, have also been found to affect how older-age identity was constructed.

Reasons for negative perceptions relating to age warrant further investigation. Growing older is part of the life-span course which eventually leads to death. Angel (1997: 39) contends that people are afraid to grow old and that ageing is a “negative phenomenon”. Bunzel (1973) has defined irrational fear of the elderly and ageing ‘gerontophobia’. I suggest that, as retirement is a life-stage that is associated with growing older, many people may resist ageing or retiring. They may be constructing a spatio-psychological ‘territory of age’, a social environment where how old a person ‘feels’ may resonate with other older people of the same age cohort who align with younger people. This is demonstrated in my study by some participants who said that they ‘looked’ or ‘felt’ younger than their chronological years. Angel (ibid: 90) argues

that “minds and bodies” may not decline at the same rate. For older workers, resisting ageing may be the prime motivator to keep on working after State Pension Age (SPA), and many examples can be found in the media of celebrities and other public figures in their 60s, 70s and even older who have announced that they intend to work as long as they can, thus supporting this concept.

Perceptions by older workers that keeping busy and active in retirement could delay decline and decrepitude again feeds into the self-perpetuating ageist attitudes which are generalised to apply to everyone who falls into the specific category of being older. This was demonstrated by participants who constructed their age identities as prospective retirees by speaking about the activities they envisaged doing when they left work, and by retirees who spoke about the continuity of purpose they perceived as being important for successful retirement. Perceptions by older workers and retirees may also be influenced by numerous ‘positive ageing’ policies (Biggs, 2001) and discourses of active ageing which advocate keeping busy and active (Rudman, 2006), to achieve successful aging and retirement. Rudman (2015: 11) further suggests that discourses advocating self-sufficiency and retaining personal agency after leaving work, (which were identified in a study to examine how people aged 45-83 prepared for retirement), may have been influenced by ‘positive ageing’ policies. Participants in her study, spoke about wanting to have “fit, youthful and capable bodies” (ibid: 18). It may be that the perceptions of needing to keep busy and active to retain youthful vigour, are perceived as being the only alternative after leaving work. This suggests a homogenised later life for all older people. Vickerstaff (2015, 302) cautions against research into older people and retirement, if investigating this topic results in the homogenisation of an “undifferentiated social group”. She speaks of a retirement ‘revolution’ (ibid: 297), where older people may feel that they have a moral duty to keep active and healthy, but



where new older-age identities may be negotiated. There may also be pressure to keep on working so that independent financial security is achieved, rather than depending on a government retirement pension.

The way forward is to challenge the negative perceptions related to ageing. This can be achieved by the findings of research, such as my own, helping to raise awareness amongst employers of how people over 50 speak about being older at work which could support anti-ageist policies; also to raise awareness to other older (and younger) people of the positive orientation to retirement that is demonstrated by retirees in this study. It is possible that beginnings of a changing attitude towards retirement have already been evidenced in a study of older workers who argued that the term 'retirement' was too generalised and 'past its use by date' (Holian, Hutton and Bellamy, 2013:80). This age salient label which appears to have negative connotations of gradual decline into old age should perhaps be renamed. There are many terms that have been used to describe older people, such as 'senior citizen' and 'silver surfer'. A label with positive connotations of worth and value, such as 'Golden Grafters' (Gewolb, 2015) could be attributed to older people who are working beyond State Pension Age, and help challenge the negative views that may be associated with this life stage.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

In this study, I have demonstrated how older workers and retirees negotiate their age identities and speak about retirement. Age-identity is a predominantly a discursive construct, and a qualitative approach allowed for the investigation to focus on talk. Discourse Analysis (DA) and a social constructionist framework that included Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) allowed for an examination of how micro-strategies were used to discursively negotiate an older age-identity in the macro-context of work and retirement.

These concluding comments will re-visit the effectiveness of using focus group and interview methodology to elicit data, and how the main findings may have been influenced by negative perceptions of ageing. I will also look at the implications of the study which was constrained by: a) the small sample size, and b) the focus on only two main analytic themes. Suggestions for future research, which emanate from the ‘narrowness’ of the sample demographic and thematic analysis, will be made. This chapter will also address the impact of the research and possible applications for the findings from this study.

Taking a discourse analytic approach to investigating how older people constructed their age-identities though talk and spoke about work and retirement, directed my methodology towards using focus groups and semi-structured interviews to gather participant data. This method resulted in many hours of audio-recordings, which had to be processed and analysed. I decided to manually-code rough transcriptions of data by

firstly identifying themes that were salient to my topic, and fully transcribing these extracts, which were then used for the subsequent interviews. This method worked well, however, the number of interviews (12) allowed for this manual process. A larger corpus of work for analysis would have required computer-assisted coding.

The discourse analytic approach in this study has enabled me to identify how participants negotiated their older-age identities, with constructions [of an older age-identity] being drawn from different aspects of ageing. Several examples have been given which demonstrate how ageing was resisted by drawing on the psychological aspect [of ageing], such as not ‘feeling’ old; the social aspect, such as being ‘forward thinking’; and the physical aspect, such as not looking one’s age. Having identified that many negative perceptions were evidenced in the findings, however, these were countered by other positive views about this life stage as a time of opportunity and new beginnings. One participant spoke about accepting that he was growing older, (again drawing on the physical aspect of age), by explaining that he was not able take part in strenuous sporting activities compared to when he was younger, and having to try ‘something new’. Other participants spoke about doing consultancy work when they retired and having more time for leisure pursuits and grandchildren. Another female participant appeared to construct a conflicting reason for taking early retirement. She was concerned about her age-related performance at work and how younger colleagues perceived her ability, however, she also explained that she did not need to work for financial reasons, and wanted less stress. She also had an ailing father, and her mother had died soon after she retired at 60.

The social constructionist approach in this study has allowed for an in-depth investigation into how participants’ ‘performed’ their discursively constructed older age-identities. This approach contrasts with an essentialist position that a person’s age

is 'fixed' and determines and restricts the identifications available (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). I suggest, that one of the positive and original outcomes of my study is to demonstrate the very fact that we are able to construct our older age-identities in a variety of ways, and also occasionally in contrastive ways, through talk. A qualitative, discourse analytic approach enabled me to access the 'messiness' of identity work in talk. Instead of asking participants to, for example, fill in a questionnaire with pre-determined choices on attitudes to ageing, working and retirement, I was able to tease out the complexity of identifications in focus group and interview talk. A close analysis of talk was necessary and beneficial to uncover the performative element of age-identity and to challenge a view of age as an 'essence'- but also to acknowledge that there are patterns in the performance, influenced by contextual, physical and social factors.

Exploring how people spoke about being older workers and retirement directed the focus of the study towards the workplace. Within the constraints of the study, which only allowed for a small participant sample, it was important to have as broad a demographic of employment scenarios as possible to include white and blue-collar workers working for an organisation or self-employed, with management and professional or clerical and sales assistant status. It was also important to include both female and male participants. This was not aimed at conducting a gender comparison of how the different genders negotiated their age identities as older workers, but to garner data from as broad a demographic as possible. It is interesting to note however, that although the focus of the study was not specifically looking at gender differences, the findings indicated that there were no differences. Discursive strategies, such as self-categorising as a grandparent, or 'looking' or 'feeling' younger than their chronological years, were used by both men and women alike. There were differences, however, in the prospective views of retirement by people still at work. Females envisaged

engaging in activities that were centred around the home, such as gardening, whilst men indicated that they would have broader interests outside the home, such as travel. Further research into gender differences in speaking about retirement could provide a much more in-depth examination of this topic. Another possible area for future research could be looking at how different marital status could affect findings. The male interviewees in my study were all married, and voiced the same prospective views of helping around the house in retirement. Future study into older workers and retirement which focuses on single males (and females) could produce different results.

Future discourse analytic work on this topic could also focus on other issues, such as health and finance, to increase the breadth of knowledge relating to the employment of older workers: a suggestion that is supported by Ekerdt (2010: 72). Being in paid employment may also affect how older workers view their worth and value when speaking about their sense of 'self' and constructing their age-identities. It may be that earning a wage is perceived by older people to place a monetary value on their contribution in the workplace which is lost once they retire, even though they remain active. This could be why retirement is resisted by some participants in this study. Belonging to a volunteer workforce as an older person may not produce the same findings as this study: another area for future research could be a comparative study of older volunteers and those in paid employment.

Social class is another variable that could influence how age-identity and perceptions of retirement are represented. Citing the example of a study by Weiss (2005), who examined what retirement was like for middle-class and professional older people, Ekerdt (2010: 78) suggests that further investigation into other classes of older people would provide useful insight. Sargent *et al* (2011: 91) contend that the retiree demographic needs to be extended beyond the middle-class to include studies into low

paid and manual workers. Participants in my study spoke about not feeling that they looked as old as their chronological years. How older people relate to their ageing bodies could also be a topic for further investigation.

The constraints of my study limited the analytic focus to two main themes: older worker and retiree age-identity construction, and views about retirement. Societal discourses of decline represented in some older workers' talk were mitigated by the perception that keeping busy and active after they left work helps to defray the decline and senility that may accompany ageing, and were perceived as being fundamental to successful ageing and retirement. Other themes that were identified from participant data could be explored, for example, how older workers speak about the financial implications of leaving work and leisure activities in retirement. These topics are particularly salient at this time when changes are being made to the State Pension Age (SPA) resulting in people having to work for longer before receiving their pension. It may be that in this context, personal agency has become important, as government legislation has now given people the choice of whether to stay on at work or retire. However, the neo-liberal discourse of 'choice' might be over-stated and there may be other considerations that could affect some older workers' decisions, such as needing to contribute to the family income or having caring responsibilities, where the benefit of 'choice' is questionable.

A further topic for investigation could be how 'positive retirement ideologies', which promote certain ways of behaviour for retirees, may influence how the over 50s perceive this life-stage. Rudman (2006: 199) argues that this is fundamental to the understanding of the future for older people. I suggest that any investigation into the possible influences of how retirement is perceived by both older and younger people

may help to challenge the negative ageist attitudes which may have influenced much of the participant data in my study.

Johnson (2015) argues that in 10-20 years' time, more people working beyond retirement age could lead to a change in attitudes towards older workers. She suggests that legislation, recruitment policy and less ageism in the workplace could combine to affect this change, resulting in older workers themselves having a different attitude towards work and retirement. Results of my study could be used to raise awareness of how older workers speak about being part of an ageing workforce, which, in turn, could enable employers to ensure that they maximise the potential of their older employees and give older workers a 'voice' within their organisations. Older workers themselves, who may perceive that ageing in a work-related context is problematic, or who are concerned that retirement could lead to decrement and decline, (the older workers' 'dilemma')(Peeters and van Emmerik, 2008), may also benefit from these findings. Negative perceptions that surround retirement need to be challenged and reversed: this could be another impact of my research, as indicated by the positive discourses of retirement from retirees who spoke about how it was good to be in an older 'territory of age'.

In conclusion, my study into older workers and retirement has bridged the gap between current qualitative research into this topic and discourse analytic work into older age-identity construction. On the basis of my spoken data, I have argued how important it is to challenge negative perceptions surrounding retirement, and how a new positive attitude is needed towards this part of the life span to challenge negative perceptions and achieve successful ageing- however that is realised by individuals. A new cohort of 'Golden Grafters' (Gewolb, 2015) will pave the way for the generations that follow.

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## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS AND KEY

(Ochs, 1999; Atkinson and Heritage, 1999.)

(.)	untimed short pause
(2.0)	pause timed in seconds
?	rising intonation indicating questioning function
((syllables))	indecipherable data- number of syllables/best guess
“voiced”	speech of voiced ‘other’
=	contiguous (“latched”) utterances
[	overlapping utterances that continue
[ ]	overlapping utterance ending at right hand bracket
<i>(italics)</i>	non verbal/paralanguage
<u>no</u>	extra emphasis on word/syllable
° hush °	quiet utterance
↔	utterance that continues
...	words omitted from transcript
.	
.	data omitted from transcript
.	
gen	general agreement
M	Moderator
I	Interviewer

## Appendix 1

### Organisation contact letter

Dear .....

I am currently studying for a doctorate in Sociolinguistics at Cardiff University. This area of study investigates how people talk about how they feel on certain topics, and my specialist area is older people in the workplace.

As part of a larger project involving several organisations, I would like to run one or two focus groups at your place of work. This would mean involving between 6-10 people of all ages for each group, but with at least half of the group being over 50. Each group session would last for about an hour, and we would be discussing how older people relate to their work colleagues. The talk would be audio-recorded, however, the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of their contributions during the sessions, are guaranteed.

Statistics have shown that the number of over 50s in work has increased greatly in the past 15 years, and an awareness of how they feel about being older at work could benefit your organisation. The study is not looking to be critical of employment policies. A short summary of the research findings would be made available to your organisation.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing for some of your employees to participate in this research. I would like to hold sessions within the next few months, at a time convenient for you.

If you would be willing to help with this research, please contact me at any of the addresses above. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about this project.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Gewolb



## Appendix 2

### Participant recruitment poster

# **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**

**for research into older people at work**



If you are over 50 and would like to take part in a discussion for about an hour during work time, please let personnel know.

Younger people are also welcome to join the discussion.

All talk will be audio-recorded, but is anonymous and everything said is confidential.

This research is part of a larger study by a Cardiff University doctoral student.

## Appendix 3

### Focus group presentation material

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this focus group discussion about being older at work. As you know, I have asked for people over 50 to participate, and you may wonder why I have labelled 50 as 'older'. This is because most other studies that look at older workers have chosen 50 as the age they consider to be relevant to their research. I have also invited younger people to take part, as from previous experience, I have found that it is important for older people to hear younger people's views which may influence how they themselves say they feel.

One age-related factor that has recently been highlighted is that the government are proposing to abolish the law that says people have to retire at 65. Over the past 12 years there has been almost a 10% increase in the number of over 50s being employed, and this number could increase if the retirement age is abolished.

Just before we start to talk about how you feel about being 'older' at work, I thought you might like to hear what people who took part in other studies said during similar surveys and discussions.

In a survey by the University of Kent, people were asked "what age is old: when does youth end and old age begin".

Here are some of the responses:

- "I think it's down to health and how you tackle life."
- "It's one of the bonuses of age- being a 'know all' who actually knows most things!"
- "Why do people have to put labels on things, like being old?"
- "Young people don't know how to show loyalty or respect; it only comes with age."
- "What happened to 60 is the new 40?"

These are some examples of what people said in other studies that I have conducted into older people at work, both over 50 and younger:

- "Experience counts- the older you are the better the work ethic, more conscientious."
- "Older people are stuck in their ways of working- out of touch."
- "We joke amongst ourselves about having poor memories."
- "Being teased about being 'old and past it' - some people can laugh it off, but I can't."

I would also like to show you the Daily Mail headline from August 11<sup>th</sup> 2010: "**Over 50 and on the scrapheap**".

So having heard what other people have said, and what the headline said, this discussion is your opportunity to say how you feel about being older at work, or working with older people.

## Appendix 4

### Focus group introduction and participant declaration

Thank you very much for your interest in taking part in this workplace study about people who are over 50. To explain what it is about and why I am doing it, I have written a few questions and answers below.

Question: Who is doing this study and what is it about?

Answer: My name is Sheila Gewolb, and I am a mature part-time student at Cardiff University. To study for my doctorate, I am looking at the way the over 50s feel about being older at work. To do this, I am running focus groups in several organisations in London and Cardiff over the next few months. Your employers have kindly agreed to let me run a group here. The results of the research will be passed on to your employers at the end of the study.

Question: What do I have to do?

Answer: To take part all you have to do is talk about your experiences of being older in the workplace, or working with older people, and how this makes you feel.

Question: What happens to what I say?

Answer: I am audio-recording the discussion, but no names are put against what is said. I give everyone a number so I know who said what when I listen to the recording, but real names are not noted. Then I transcribe the recording at home onto a hard-copy so that I can analyse how people gave their views and opinions.

Question: What if I change my mind about taking part in the discussion after we have started?

Answer: Anyone can withdraw at any time. There is a short declaration to sign at the bottom of this page that explains this. Please sign this and hand it to me after the session.

### Now please complete these few details about yourself:

Are you male or female? .....

Your age .....

Your work-role or job-title .....

How long have you worked for this organisation? .....

**Declaration**

I consent to take part in this study into older people in the workplace.

I am willing for today's discussion to be audio-recorded and for the information collected to be used in the study.

I understand that my participation is not compulsory and that I may withdraw at any time without having to give my reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that my personal contributions are anonymous and will be treated in strict confidence.

Signature.....

Date.....

## Appendix 5

### Interviewee declaration

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

Please complete these few details about yourself:

Are you male or female? .....

Your age .....

Your current or previous work-role or job title .....

How long have you worked for or how long did you work for, this organisation?

.....

---

### Declaration

I consent to take part in this study into older people in the workplace.

I am willing for today's discussion to be audio-recorded and for the information collected to be used in the study.

I understand that my participation is not compulsory and that I may withdraw at any time without having to give my reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that my personal contributions are anonymous and will be treated in strict confidence.

Signature.....

Date.....