

“I’m Still Part of the Crew”: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Meaning of Professional Identity in Later Life

Master’s Thesis Presented By:

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ABSTRACT

The population of seniors in Canada is increasing, and the numbers of seniors who remain in or return to the workforce rather than retire are also on the rise. However, work experiences of older individuals have been understudied in research. This study explores the meaning of work to a group of individuals over age 65 in Thunder Bay, a city in Northwestern Ontario. The researcher conducted ten interviews following phenomenological methods of inquiry. Using identity theory, life course perspective, and continuity theory, the study also sought to understand the importance of continuity to older individuals' experiences of work. Findings revealed eight themes that influenced older workers' experiences: socio-historical trends, the work environment, health, financial circumstances, purpose, choice, life beyond work, and perceptions of age. Ultimately, continuity of behaviours, life stories, and self-understandings are important features of older workers' experiences and may influence whether this important group will continue to work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Problem Context

Traversing the complex terrain of the life course involves ascribing meaning and value to experiences, relationships, cultures, changes, and ideologies that will comprise one's identity. This ongoing process of assessing "what it means to be who one is" is an inevitable, commonplace feature of the human condition and it is a matter of sifting through, adopting, and discarding existential possibilities (Burke, 2003, p.1). Identity is both a social and individual construction in that "the means by which we differentiate ourselves from other people in our lives as well as from our own organic functions constitutes the very core of our experiences of personal identity" (Kroger, 2004, p.10). While scholars have yet to agree on one precise definition of what identity is, the term is often applied to describe a state of self-awareness about the components that make up the unique "I" ensconced within one's physical body and cognitive functions. Furthermore, this "me" is said to emerge as a result of both personal reflection and broader societal influences, one of which includes work.

A basic definition of work is proposed by Pieter Drenth (1991), which states that work consists of "engaging in activities to acquire goods and services necessary for survival" (p.126). However, its significance transcends the necessity to procure material goods and monetary benefits. Work is an outlet through which people obtain a handle on their likes and dislikes, their talents and limitations, their passions and disinterests, goals for the future, and errors in judgment (Gini, 1998; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). According to Al Gini (1998), "work is that which forms us, gives us a focus, gives us a vehicle for personal expression and offers us a means for personal definition" (p.708). Drenth (1991) echoes this outlook, adding "in working we develop, enrich, and recognize ourselves" and also become known to others (p.127). Work is one of the most unifying imperatives that most people spend the majority of their lives preparing

for, seeking out, participating in, longing for, and possibly despising, resenting, avoiding, delaying, or tolerating (Gini, 1998). In light of the amount of time and energy dedicated to constructing and reshaping this aspect of the self, “it is therefore quite justifiable to speak of a career identity as a (more or less autonomous) part of the entire personality” (Meijers, 1998, p.199).

One’s career identity can become so deep-seated that his or her job title becomes synonymous with the person claiming it, as well as a determinant of one’s standing in social interactions. That is, posing the question “what do you do?” in social exchanges is a means of sizing up the other participant, allowing one to identify his or her counterpart by a profession, and fashion a reply and subsequent conduct according to the prestige or stigma attached to the profession offered in response to the initial inquiry (Hockey & James, 2003, p.179; Josselson, 1994, p.81). However, there comes a point when people stop asking the question “what do you do?” That is, although professional identity is a common component of most people’s self-definitions, it is also an *aged-based* identity that people are expected to relinquish upon reaching the socially-imposed limit on years allotted for participation in the workforce (Hockey & James, 2003). While many people revel in the abundance of time and choice afforded by the opportunity to “clock out” for the last time, there are also those who defy previously established patterns of human development and remain active members in the labour force well into their later stages of life.

The work experiences of aging individuals have been relatively understudied in academic research. For example, Danielle Quinodoz (2009) insists that the experiences of older individuals are often overlooked, which may be done in favour of a younger focus. As a result, she calls for more research that explores “the uplifting side of old age” – of which professional

identity may be a significant part – “because modern society, with its focus on efficiency and performance, tends to see it in a decline” (p.84). There is an apparent need to avoid clustering the experiences of older individuals and to seek a deeper understanding of their diverse experiences of identity within and outside of the workplace. Similarly, as Stefan Sveningsson and Mats Alvesson (2003) state, “the understanding of specific processes and situations of identity construction in and around work and organizations is thus somewhat poor” (p.1164). In concert with Sharon Stone (2003), who acknowledges that “popular discourse suggests that people work because they have to, not because they want to”, they call for additional research that explores the rationale and significance underpinning people’s assumption of professional identity that permits the voices and perspectives of respondents to be heard directly (p.7). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) urge researchers to attend carefully to participants’ stories, the “discourses and roles they are constituted by or resist – and to do so with sensitivity for context” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1190). In addition, Joanne Altschuler (2004) advocates that older workers should be granted the opportunity to step back and reflect on their practice, and “speak for themselves in order to define, describe, and explain the meanings of their lives and the people and events therein” (p.225). As a result, the value of this thesis can be judged in its potential to offer “a more personalized and holistic understanding of one’s work experience” with a specific focus on a rapidly growing population demographic that is scarcely found within literature pertaining to identity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p.11).

Further probing into the maintenance of professional identity in later life is necessary particularly in countries like Canada where census data reports that the population of older individuals across the nation is rising drastically. Since 2006, the population of individuals over the age of 65 has swelled to approximately five million in 2012, which constitutes a 14.1%

increase (“The Canadian Population”, 2012). At the same time, Canada is experiencing a “graying of the workforce”, as baby boomers are expeditiously approaching “the twilight of their careers, reconsidering their options, measuring up their savings, and recalculating their years left in the nine-to-five world of traditional work” (Noonan, 2005, p.238; “Canada Has Higher”, 2012). In fact, the national employment rate for males over the age of 55 in 1997 was 30.5%, which jumped to 39.4% in 2010 (Carrière & Galarneau, 2011). The employment rate for females who opted to remain in the workforce beyond age 55 in 2010 was 28.6%, a considerable increase from 15.8% in 1997 (Carrière & Galarneau, 2011). Population analysts and industry experts speculate that the concomitant trends of delayed retirement and “semi-retirement” are on the rise because employers regard older workers’ skills and experience as a valuable complement to young employees’ energy and enthusiasm. In turn, the continued income allows older individuals to maintain a comfortable lifestyle, and they remain attached to the “intrinsic rewards offered by work (challenging tasks, social contacts, sense of purpose)” (Carrière & Galarneau, 2011; Foot, 2012; Schellenberg, Turcotte, & Ram, 2005, p.15-16).

With the expanse of an aging workforce comes the unique social, mental, physical, and emotional needs of those who comprise it, such as diminished access to services, deterioration of physical and mental health, and economic uncertainty, which will affect policy, research, and service provision (Noonan, 2005). The challenges for government assistance systems generated by the aging baby boomer generation, as well as their capacity for increased independence, financial autonomy, and productivity, remain to be seen (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005; Carrière & Galarneau, 2011). As a result, consultations with older workers will likely yield insights regarding “what motivates mature individuals to seek employment” that will enhance knowledge important to researchers and policymakers in sociology, gerontology, and various levels of

government (Lui Ping Loi & Shultz, 2007, p.275). Inquiries into the meanings of professional identity for older individuals may also spur policymakers and employers to turn their attention to ways of “making the workplace attractive to their needs” (Lui Ping Loi & Shultz, 2007, p.275), such as increasing the employment rate of older workers, offering retraining to existing staff, fostering work environments that align with their capabilities, or “crafting recruitment and retention efforts aimed at older employees” (Smyer & Pitt-Catsoupes, 2007, p.28), thereby allowing them to remain in the workforce as long as they desire and are able (Greller & Stroh, 1995; Riach & Loretto, 2009).

However, to better understand the needs of older workers for the future, one must acquire a deeper understanding of the experiences that brought them to such a point in their lives (Thompson, 1992). This notion is clearly conveyed by Glen Elder Jr. (1994), who asserts that “the later years of aging cannot be understood in depth without knowledge of the prior life course” (p.5). Scholars recommend that researchers with a particular interest in conducting identity work among older individuals should consider human lives in their entirety, as identity is not formulated and congealed in discrete stages such as childhood and adolescence (Hockey & James, 2003; Shenk, 2002). Instead, older individuals “formulate and reformulate personal and cultural symbols of their past to create a meaningful, coherent sense of self, and in the process they create a viable present” (Kaufman, 1986, p.14). Viewing one’s identity in old age as an extension of one’s past “self” reframes aging as a transitional process in more favourable terms. In addition, to suggest that “our present is nourished by our past” (Quinodoz, 2009, p.18) avoids positioning old age as a “culminating chapter” in one’s life (Andrews, 1999, p.313).

My own research into the significance of assuming two seminal identities – that of “old” and a “worker” – to participants’ sense of self derives from an inherent passion to work with

older individuals that I inherited from my mother. Her long career as a social worker and psychogeriatric resource consultant entailed improving seniors' quality of life and extending education to health care providers regarding elders' unique needs. My research was also borne out of a personal anxiousness to begin the next phase of my life as well as uncertainty as to what that would be – continued academic development in the form of a graduate degree, or pursuit of employment that would allow for immediate application of the skills and knowledge amassed throughout my academic career. However, the latter course would require me to relinquish the responsibilities, privileges, challenges, and rewards of a student identity that had comprised a significant part of my self-concept thus far. As a result, my research interests evolved to incorporate a desire to explore how the prior experience of older individuals could serve as a source of inspiration for members of younger generations, like me, who are beginning to chart their own courses of professional identity development.

I was also prompted to consider the context in which I would formulate my professional identity if I opted to return to my hometown of Thunder Bay upon the conclusion of my studies. Thunder Bay has been portrayed as a place where a “working-class culture” reigns and in which one would scarcely want to discover him or herself unemployed, due to the “strength of the work ethic and the idealization of the self-reliant worker” which are resonant discourses among local residents (Stone, 2003, p.8). Many “workers live in the region because it is where they were born and raised, and they have strong ties to the people and the land”, so they live out their working lives in the area to fulfill a socially and self-imposed responsibility to contribute to the local community in a productive manner (Stone, 2003, p.8).

As I thought about how a worker identity is extolled in secluded regions where community solidarity runs high, a jarring thought struck me in that professional identity may be a

frightening proposition for older individuals for whom its renunciation is an impending possibility, and who subsequently may or may not be able to envision their futures without work. As a result, I united my interests in working with seniors, gathering rich descriptions of experience, and doing so within the context of my hometown of Thunder Bay which “provides a specific social, cultural, and economic context mediating the ways in which workers participate in contemporary, postmodern society” (Stone, 2003, p.8). In addition, recent census data revealed that Thunder Bay’s population growth patterns were congruent with those occurring across Canada, and a burgeoning wave of aging seniors and surge of an “ever-aging workforce” were dominant in the city (“Seniors’ Numbers Booming”, 2012). As a result, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of a group of older individuals who chose to maintain professional identity in later life, beyond the conventional age of retirement, in a relatively isolated region of Northwestern Ontario.

1.2 Theoretical Perspectives

A unifying theme among the three theories of human development that frame this study, life course perspective, identity theory, and continuity theory, is that work is meaningful for older individuals because it fulfills a need and desire for coherence between a lived past and current reality. Life course perspective explains the contextual forces that affect individuals’ abilities to construct a coherent life story across time, identity theory asserts that one seeks coherence between self-perceptions and those of others, and continuity theory describes how individuals endeavour to achieve coherence between their lived pasts and future directions to adapt to age-related changes.

Since my research explored how one’s identity, experiences, values, and relationships transcend formative years into later life, it was conducted within the logic and framework of life

course perspective which considers “the changing contexts of lives and their consequences for human development and aging” (Elder & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2003, p.52). One of the central premises of life course perspective suggests that human lives are in a constant state of flux, whereby people begin developing at birth but they never reach a final stage at which development ceases (Elder & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2003; Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2002; Kaufman, 1986; Settersten, 2003). In line with this view, chronological age serves as an “organizing principle” according to which groups and societies can establish expectations for social conduct and prohibit or sanction behaviour (Elder & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2003; Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2002; Settersten, 2003). This “timing of lives” also implies that people go through similar events and experiences in sequential, age-related stages according to tacit timelines (Elder, 1994, p.5). Widely-held societal expectations dictate that certain roles be fulfilled or tasks performed by a certain age, such as marriage or childbirth, or in the case of this thesis – retirement. That is, social perceptions of older individuals establish expectations as to when people’s quotas for useful years spent in the workforce have been reached, and put pressure on workers to cease participation in this area of social life.

Life course perspective also illuminates the malleability of human lives in that individuals’ life stories are “framed by historical time and shaped by the unique social and cultural conditions that exist during those times,” which suggests that people are bound to the historical context in which they are born, creating cohorts of generations separated by significant events, conflicts, and changes (Elder, 1994; Elder & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2003; Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2002; Settersten, 2003, p.22). While broader social occurrences hold significant implications for wider communities, important idiosyncratic events such as education or retirement cause delays, shifts, or interruptions in independent trajectories and

individual life courses are increasingly divergent from others' (Settersten, 2003). However, human experiences are not comprised of a series of arbitrary coincidences. As people navigate the complex terrain of their life courses they exert "human agency" and conscious choice over their own behaviour (Elder & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2003, p.60; Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2002; Settersten, 2003). In the case of the participants in the current study, they are the sole arbiters as to how their personal histories will unfold, individually determining when their working lives will end rather than yielding to a socially-imposed deadline. Ultimately, life course perspective illuminates how transitions and social context influence human experience, coping mechanisms, and resultant development and thus may yield a better understanding of the ways in which a worker identity is formed, valued, maintained, or relinquished for different individuals over time. Following life course theory, the influence of socio-historical and geographic location, timing, variability, social relationships, personal choice, and past events in the lives and career trajectories of a group of older workers will be explored in Thunder Bay, a new area of empirical investigation.

My research also explores the relationship between work and identity. Identity has been described as both a personal and social construct (Grotevant et al., 1994). For example, in terms of the latter perspective, social identity theory suggests that one's social identity is based on membership in particular groups, and focuses on "group processes and intergroup relations," such as the assembly of like-minded individuals on the basis of communal goals, characteristics, or values, the interaction between individuals within and outside the group, and the sense of self-esteem that can be derived from in-group membership (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p.255; Stets & Burke, 2000). According to social identity theory, inclusion in a particular group is so important that people will seek positive reinforcement from fellow members to ensure that their

behaviours and perspectives align, because “to define oneself in terms of a social category is inherently to accept its common attributes as prescriptions for behaviour” (Stets & Burke, 2000; Turner, 1982, p.35). Essentially, “having a particular social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group’s perspective” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p.226).

Social identity theory also suggests that self-esteem is primarily derived from favourable social comparisons between in-group and out-group members, which place value on in-group membership and dissociate from out-group members. However, self-esteem suffers when membership in a particular group is criticized or belittled, and people will strive to restore it or portray themselves in a more positive light through strategies such as joining different groups with a higher status or attempting to change others’ negative perceptions of the group (Desmette & Gaillard, 2012; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

One particular reason group members may feel negatively about their group membership is because there may be stigma associated with it. In fact, literature reveals that stigma is a familiar concept for the social group specific to this thesis – older workers. For example, studies have shown that from an organizational or management perspective, older workers are regarded as demotivated, difficult to train, unable to adapt to change or novel tasks, and less physically and mentally healthy than younger employees (Buyens, Van Dijk, Dewilde, & De Vos, 2009; Tougas, Lagacé, De la Sablonnière, & Kocum, 2004; Walker, 2006), and as a result of such assessments, employers may be less inclined to hire older workers, opportunities for older workers’ training and development may be limited (Walker, 2006), and older workers may be more likely to succumb to pressures to exit the workforce even though they may not desire to do so yet (Desmette & Gaillard, 2008). In addition, older workers have also been found to have

rather critical perceptions of themselves, as they experienced lowered self-esteem when they applied characteristics associated with being “old”, such as uselessness or loneliness, to their self-definitions (Tougas, Lagacé, De la Sablonnière, & Kocum, 2004).

In line with social identity theory, it is expected that older workers may practice creative strategies in response to stigma to elevate their own status or that of their group, or to distance themselves from the abhorrent characteristics associated with their group membership. For instance, they may go above and beyond their call of duty while on the job to contradict negative stereotypes that depict fellow older workers as slackers, or they may emphasize their desirable qualities, such as a wealth of experience, to demonstrate their value over that of their younger counterparts (Desmette & Gaillard, 2008). In addition, for many older workers, the very act of continuing to work is a strategy to cope with stigma, because in doing so they can continue to think of themselves and be regarded by others as independent, useful, and productive members of society, or as Mary Simpson, Margaret Richardson, and Theodore Zorn (2012) summarize, as “assets rather than costs in relation to the ‘problem’ of ageing societies” (p.432).

While stigma, stereotypes, and ageism are unfortunate realities for older workers, and it is important to acknowledge the social milieu they contend with as they strive to participate in environments where they are not always welcomed or valued, a focus on group membership, how group members relate to each other, and the strategies group members will employ to achieve a positive self-image for themselves and their group as a whole takes a backseat in this thesis. Instead, I seek to explore “the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance”, and thus identity theory aligned better with this objective (Stets & Burke, 2000, p.225).

Identity theory is an extension of symbolic interactionism, which suggests people do not learn in isolation but rather make sense of their surroundings through interaction with others, assigning labels and symbolic meanings to objects, people, and ideas they encounter (Burke, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Through this socialization, individuals incorporate relevant “role identities”, such as that of a worker or older individual, as part of their self-understandings (Burke, 2003; Burke & Stets, 2009; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000). However, experimentation with a range of multiple identities may also entail self-identification and disidentification, where the latter involves dissociating with identities, not necessarily because they evoke negative connotations or responses, but because they simply do not seem applicable to one’s self-definition. As a result, arranging identities in a salience hierarchy will subsequently prompt individuals to enact behaviours they assume to be consistent with societal expectations regarding a particular identity (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). In line with identity theory, the participants in my study will be probed on their view of worker identity in relation to their self-concepts, and how remaining in the workforce despite their chronological age attains congruence between outward projections of identity and their internalized self-understandings.

Lastly, continuity theory, though controversial, suggests that older individuals strive to preserve and draw on former identities, structures, and experiences in order to adapt to and cope with changes associated with aging such as health decline, widowhood, or retirement (Atchley, 1989; Atchley, 1993; Atchley, 1999; Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). Atchley’s continuity theory has drawn criticism among gerontologists for firmly drawing a line between “normal” and aberrant aging, thereby reducing the experiences of aging individuals to two extremes of either healthiness or decline (Diggs, 2008). “Normal,” “healthy,” or “successful” aging, generally

suggests a lack of chronic, debilitating illnesses that impair cognitive and physical capacities, which explains why some older individuals can continue to engage in the rewarding activities they have always done. However, some researchers attest that this line of thought fails to consider that people's abilities to remain physically active, intellectually stimulated, and connected with others may likely diminish as they age (Mobily, Lemke, & Gisen, 1991). In the face of such overwhelming changes, some scholars argue that continuity may be impossible for many older adults to achieve (Fry & Debats, 2010; Kleiber & Genoe, 2012). In addition, according to some researchers, Atchley's habitual focus on changes that only result from "loss" prevents him from acknowledging how older individuals may adapt to positive change and derive fulfillment from novel activities (Mobily, Lemke, & Gisin, 1991; Victor, 2005). However, it has been shown that maintaining consistent behavioural patterns and routines makes it easier for people to retain a semblance of their past, envision their future, and set goals for the type of people they want to be or lifestyle they want to lead as they age (Atchley, 1989; Atchley, 1993; Atchley, 1999; Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). As a result, older individuals surround themselves with familiar people, engage in familiar behaviours, and immerse themselves in familiar environments "to diagnose situations, chart future courses, and to adapt to change" (Atchley, 1999, p.100). Proponents of continuity theory do not deny that people's lives inevitably change, but rather propose that continuity is possible in spite of and occurs concurrently with life course transitions. While specific details change, the "general themes" that characterize one's life course tend to remain consistent (Atchley, 1999, p.106). For example, one is still a worker even though he or she occupies various roles and performs different jobs during his or her career.

According to the theory, older individuals are "motivated toward inner psychological continuity as well as outward continuity of social behavior and circumstances" (Atchley, 1989,

p.183). The former, internal continuity, means that individuals seek to ensure the “persistence over time of mental constructs” pertaining to self-identity and self-understanding such as beliefs, morals, values, attributes, and skills (Atchley, 1989; Atchley, 1993, p.15; Atchley, 1999; Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). Conversely, external continuity refers to individuals’ tendencies to gravitate towards well-known environments, relationships, and activities (Atchley, 1989; Atchley, 1999; Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). The competence, control and self-esteem people experience due to internal and external continuity serves to enhance their adaptive capacity as they age (Atchley, 1989). However, “continuity theory is *not* a theory of successful aging” in that it does not prescribe what people ought to do in order to prevent physical and mental decline in later life (Atchley, 1993, p.6; Atchley, 1999). Instead, continuity theory refers to what people *will do* “to adapt long-standing individual values and preferences to new situations as adults experience life course changes, aging, and social change” (Atchley, 1999, p.97-98). Drawing from continuity theory, this study explores a group of Northwestern Ontarians’ views on the meanings ascribed to their worker identities, and the importance of a continuing link between past working histories and current working histories to their experiences in later life.

1.3 Research Questions

The central research questions my study explores are: 1) How do a group of older workers in Northwestern Ontario experience work?, and 2) What is the importance of continuity in work experience for older individuals?

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The review outlines scholars' understandings of the features that may comprise one's "identity", how they may be enacted via identity theory, and potential connections between identity and work. Subsequently, the meaning of work across the life course is discussed. In addition, this chapter examines work as a source of continuity for people as they age, followed by studies about different aspects of older individuals' experiences of work. Lastly, attention is drawn to areas that warrant further investigation and the ways through which the present study will address these gaps.

2.1 The Connection Between Work and Identity

The topic of identity is a burgeoning field and identity researchers are rarely hard-pressed to unearth an area that has not been extensively covered. Many scholars perceive identity to be a cognitive understanding of an internal "self" composed of mannerisms, attributes, and classifications that offers an answer to a fundamental question of human experience – "who am I?" (Graafsma, 1994, p.47; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Some authors consider this essential self to be distant and imperceptible, while others maintain that it is possible to be in tune with "some valuable, esteemed character or essence to which one feels attached" (Graafsma, 1994, p.159). Coming to terms with "who one is" is a "lifelong task" (Graafsma, 1994, p.22) and "ongoing, embodied project" (Hockey & James, 2003, p.18) that lacks a decisive end point or final developmental stage.

In its application to this research on older workers, identity is best discussed in relation to behaviour using identity theory. According to identity theory, identity is a product of internalizing meanings and enacting behaviours associated with many roles, which can be as broad as mother, friend, and worker, or as specific as police officer, blood donor, and goalie

(Burke & Stets, 2009; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). There are social expectations attached to each role and people who categorize themselves as an occupant of a particular role interpret the meanings associated with it, and subsequently display the expected behaviours in various scenarios and environments (Burke & Stets, 2009; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). However, some identities may be more relevant than others, depending on the extent of support that others offer, the situational stimuli or cues, or the positive feelings derived from the identity. As a result, people arrange their various identities in a salience hierarchy, which is a central tenet of identity theory. The salience hierarchy dictates that it might be appropriate to enact characteristics and behaviours of a certain identity in a particular situation, but not in others (Burke & Stets, 2009; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Another important concept of identity theory is the notion of commitment, which affects where an identity may lie in the salience hierarchy. If a particular identity enhances people's self-esteem, or many of their relationships are predicated on their occupation of a certain role, they will likely be highly committed to it and demonstrate it often (Burke & Stets, 2009; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000). However, people can only claim an identity if others confirm that they in fact occupy the role and exhibit the characteristics or behaviours associated with it. If one senses that others' perceptions do not cohere with internal understandings, he or she may choose to abandon the identity, or actively change behaviour to bring them into alignment (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Since people can claim multiple identities, it follows that the experiences involved with one identity will affect and inform another (Burke & Stets, 2009). For example, in the context of older workers, if an individual spent his or her career as a labourer, it is likely that he or she

characterized him or herself as industrious, diligent, and dependable. Upon adopting the identity of a retiree, according to identity theory, it is reasonable to assume people will continue to value these characteristics and behave accordingly in other areas, such as volunteering in their communities. However, although conventional expectations exist regarding certain roles, there are also “distinctive interpretations that people bring to their roles” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p.39). This means that identities are idiosyncratic and people may behave in ways that may be personally significant, but that are not typical of a particular role. Evidently people can customize the ways they enact their identities based on their environment and the feedback they receive from others (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Many connections can be drawn between identity theory and work, since work is both an important environment in which one can enact identity-based behaviours and a source from which one can acquire characteristics associated with a worker identity. In their research focusing on how organizational members construct their work identities, Kate Walsh and Judith Gordon (2008) determined that a person’s professional or work identity could generally be defined as one’s “work-based self-concept, constituted by a combination of organizational, occupational, and other identities that shapes the roles a person adopts and the corresponding ways he or she behaves when performing his or her work” (p.47). To Michael Pratt, Kevin Rockmann, and Jeffrey Kaufmann (2006) this “work-based self-concept” could be realized by “doing”. Their qualitative research explored the processes of identity construction among a group of physicians. They found that initially, participants “struggled to reconcile their professional self-conceptualizations with the work that they did” (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006, p.245). That is, the study participants were reluctant to perform tasks that they considered to be beyond the scope of their identity as a professional, such as putting down a

patient's toilet seat. However, as their residencies continued, they received feedback from peers and superiors, and they understood the breadth of responsibilities they were required to take on as physicians. As a result, in line with identity theory, respondents engaged in identity customization processes whereby they changed their perceptions of their physician identities and subsequent behaviour to be in line with the work that they did and the feedback they received from others (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006).

For some authors, enacting identities at work or constructing identities through work is less task-specific and more contingent upon roles that individuals occupy throughout their careers (Allen Collinson, 2006; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). For instance, Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) qualitative study interviewed a participant from a large organization who discussed the meanings she derived from her managerial role. She explained that her professional identity concomitantly connoted authority, which she valued, and responsibility for menial tasks, for which she felt disdain. That is, there were roles that she considered more salient and was eager to occupy, such as figurehead, whereby she was a representative of her sector of the organization. However, "janitorial roles" that required her to do things like organize office cleaning were lower in her salience hierarchy (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1184). She also indicated that she told stories about her life on her farm to her team, which she felt rendered her more relatable to subordinates. As a result, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) write that "the non-managerial identity seems to have a particular impact on the cultural aspects of the managerial identities", meaning that she sought to imbue her professional identity with aspects of her identities outside of work, which relates to the idea of identities' capacities to interact and influence each other outlined earlier (p.1186).

David Sluss and Blake Ashforth's (2007) conceptual research can also be linked to identity theory because they explore how individuals define their professional identities through relationships at work. According to Sluss and Ashforth (2007), "the purpose and meaning of a given role depends on the network of complementary roles within which it is embedded" (p.10). That is, one's role is only brought into meaningful existence if there is someone else to occupy a corresponding role and acknowledge the shared relationship, such as worker and client or manager and subordinate. The authors also add that professional identity is developed through relationships with others in the workplace. Friendships and interactions among co-workers allow people to empathize with and support each other regardless of their various capacities in the organization, observe the meanings others ascribe to organizational values and how they are enacted on a daily basis, and perhaps behave in a similar manner (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

While some authors prioritize examining professional identity development in terms of mutual role-relationships fostered with fellow organizational members, others examine individual professional identity in relation to an organization as a whole. For example, Walsh and Gordon (2008) examine how an individual work identity is created, its influence in shaping behaviours demonstrated on the job, and the level of commitment that employees exhibit toward the organization's identity. In their view, individuals fashion their work identities according to positive associations drawn from membership in esteem-enhancing groups of colleagues within the organization. In addition, Walsh and Gordon's (2008) research closely relates to the principles of identity theory as the authors assert that organizational members assess the extent to which their personal values are congruent with organizational values, and ensure that their behaviour in and outside of the workplace is "consistent with the organization's expectations" (p.56).

The importance of identities that are “formed through workforce participation” (Howie, Coulter, & Feldman, 2004, p.448) has also been made clear by research that describes work as an indispensable source from which individuals can derive a sense of self-esteem, “social usefulness” (Drenth, 1991, p.126) and emotional, mental, and physical well-being (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005; Doherty, 2009; Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007). For example, several studies suggest that people gain an understanding of the importance of a worker identity to one’s self-definition and self-esteem especially when it is lost or absent (Riach & Loretto, 2009; Stone, 2003). Stone’s (2003) qualitative study examined the impact of an injury and subsequent loss of work on individuals’ identities and self-esteem. Participants described how they endured the sting of societal stigma attached to the “less socially valued identity” of injured worker from those they expected to be pillars of stability and support – friends, family, and worker’s compensation boards – and in an isolated region in which work was implicitly understood to be an obligation to give back to the broader community (Stone, 2003, p.9). Participants felt less valuable as workers and re-evaluated their sense of identities as productive members of society. As a result, the undesired appendage of “injured” to the status of their worker identity caused individuals to lose sight of one of the key sources from which they derived a sense of self-worth and purpose. Thus, Stone’s (2003) research reveals that “when individuals are deprived of the opportunity to engage in occupations that they find meaningful, their sense of well-being suffers” (p.7).

Even professions regarded by most people as repulsive and humiliating confer a “badge of identity” that inculcates positive feelings in those who practice them (Gini, 1998, p.709). For instance, Blake Ashforth and Glen Kreiner (1999) focus on “dirty workers”, or those who occupy roles or engage in tasks that others are likely to deem “disgusting or degrading” such as funeral

directors or exotic dancers (p.413). Their extensive literary review explores how dirty workers are able to view their professions with a positive outlook and attain high-levels of self-esteem. Their results reveal that dirty workers are not too proud to fulfill unpleasant duties to benefit the wider community, and they do so in spite of the derision with which society views their line of work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In the event that dirty workers' self-respect falters, empathy is easily found among other fellow workers whose professional identities are also stigmatized, who are regarded as residing “in the same boat” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p.419). Dirty workers are also able to rebound from the injurious effects of societal stigma by reframing their professions in a positive light, illuminating the redeeming qualities rather than the “dirty particulars” and the rewards so that they dwarf the shortcomings (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p.421).

However, it is Gini (1998) who effectively summarizes the importance of work to identity in his reflective paper on the meanings of work to self and society. Few people are able to avoid engaging in some form of work to earn the material goods and prestige that attain a satisfactory quality of life, and according to Gini (1998), even fewer actually want to do so. While people imbue various professional identities with different meanings – a means to procure a living, a duty to contribute to society, or a vocation for which they were destined – work is an activity in which people will participate for a significant portion of their lives. As a result, their professional identity will eventually come to partly represent who they are and thus “work is that which forms us, gives us a focus, gives us a vehicle for personal expression and offers us a means for personal definition” (Gini, 1998, p.708).

In summary, at the heart of identity theory is the notion that people internalize meanings and enact behaviours associated with a particular role as a means of expressing identity.

Identities highest in the salience hierarchy are most likely to be enacted, especially when the individual's level of commitment, support from others, and positive feelings derived from the identity are high. Much of the literature reviewed revealed how closely identity theory could be linked to work, as professional environments offer ample opportunities to enact role-based and task-based identities, encourage people to bring their self-perceptions in line with others' expectations, and allow people to acquire self-esteem, skills, attributes, and values that form a cornerstone of their overall self-identity. While an understanding of what scholars understand identity to be, how it is expressed, and how this occurs in the context of work is important for this analysis, the following section focuses on the changing meanings of work in the context of life course perspective, and the implications for individuals' identities.

2.2 The Meaning of Work across the Life Course

Because this research explored the importance of work to older individuals, it made sense to conduct it within a life course framework, which takes participants' whole lives into account while considering several main principles. Life course perspective suggests that human development is a lifelong work-in-progress, people make choices to control their own lives, historical and geographic contexts affect people's trajectories, the same experiences may affect individuals in different ways depending on when they occur in the life course, and the interdependent nature of the life course means people have the potential to alter the social structure for others as changes to normalized behaviour become patterned over time (Elder, 1994; Elder & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2003; Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2002; Settersten, 2003).

These principles mean that traditional understandings as to how lives were said to unfold – with a beginning, middle, and conclusion – are no longer accurate (Dorfman et al., 2004;

Kaufman, 1986; Quinodoz, 2009; Shenk, 2002). Instead, life course literature suggests that while people struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self across time, they are subject to the forces of context, change, and time and their “biographical experiences” cannot occur in a vacuum (Hockey & James, 2003, p.10). As such, people forge personal narratives that are integrated in a collective history. For example, individuals may experience the same “nominal identity”, event, or transition in different ways, such as parenthood (Hockey & James, 2003, p.201). As a result, the potential for individual, idiosyncratic experiences in the face of conventional, contextual influences gives credence to the notion that identities across the life course are characterized by “diversity and fragmentation of paths, rather than a commonality and continuity of experience”, which is another premise that is frequently found in life course literature (Hockey & James, 2003, p.11).

Some of the identity scholarship scrutinized indicated that since people individually negotiate circumstances, choices, and relationships, their experiences will vary accordingly, thereby rendering the possibility of a “typical life” unrealistic and illogical (Kaufman, 1986, p.32). In fact, life course literature suggests that widely-held beliefs regarding the age at which individuals should encounter crucial social experiences and choices are being disregarded. It is entirely possible for people to deviate from prescribed paths, contradict expected outcomes, engage in activities that are not among the repertoire of behaviours that are acceptable for one’s age, and ignore the “social obligations and expectations” that accompany age-based identities (Hockey & James, 2003, p.3). Instead, individuals may “assume identities which their age belies or which are somehow out of step with such a ‘naturalised’ sequence”, such as becoming a teenage parent or in the case of this thesis, working in old age (Hockey & James, 2003, p.82). For Jenny Hockey and Allison James (2003), the uniqueness of the human condition and

idiosyncratic experiences of time suggest that human development “may not conform to popular representations but instead reflect[s] the contingencies of an individual’s historically and generationally specific biography” (p.85).

Although researchers’ claims of a conventional life course have given way to assertions of uniqueness and individual choice, the idea that people harbour an inherent desire for a coherent life story whose intricate parts remain connected across time despite change remains a significant theme throughout life course research (Kaufman, 1986; Quinodoz, 2009). For instance, in her memoir chronicling personal experiences of aging as well as patients’ stories, psychoanalyst Danielle Quinodoz (2009) effectively captures the implications of inconsistency or fragmented selves, asserting that people cannot accept the end of their “internal life-history without first having made it into a coherent whole” (p.6).

However, in their pursuit of coherence between transitions from one identity to another, such as worker to retiree, individuals are alerted to another shift in identity – from a spry individual to someone who is “old”, and time quickly becomes a commodity of which one can scarcely get enough. While the passage of time and the process of aging were previously “imperceptible to the self”, so much so that they seemed to gradually occur “behind our backs” (Hockey & James, 2003, p.41), upon realizing that claiming an “old” identity is a possibility within reach, “we get a shock” (Quinodoz, 2009, p.183). Sustained interests to remain physically active, intellectually stimulated, and connected with others in order to stave off chronic, debilitating cognitive and physical illnesses typically associated with aging may become pressing concerns.

Conversely, despite exhibiting the physical telltale signs of “oldness”, older individuals may also fervently reject the applicability of an “old” identity to their self-definitions due to a

disconnection between their personal experiences and conventional understandings of what it means to age (Hockey & James, 2003). That is, they fail to become the bad-tempered, rambling, frail, cognitively impaired, depressed people that stereotypic assumptions often paint older individuals to be. Consequently, one may be of the opinion that while the body ages chronologically and weathers the effects of time and decline, the spirit is resilient and thus it is possible to feel “young at heart” within the confines of an “old” body (Bytheway, 2000; Hockey & James, 2003; Hurd, 1999; Thompson, 1992). As a result, the age one “feels” is a psychological state and should be the basis on which people establish their estimations about what is achievable in old age rather than chronological age. Since there are no conceivable points at which people should start to “act their ages”, it is understandable that the importance of professional identity does not fade, even though prescribed patterns of “scheduled development” dictate that they should (Hockey & James, 2003, p.100).

In terms of practical application to this thesis, the principles of life course perspective can also be applied to people’s career trajectories. Understandings of individuals’ rationale for selecting their respective professions, the significance of work in their lives, and how this component of identity aligns with the vision they have of their overall sense of self have been reinterpreted due to changes in the historical and social landscape over time. For example, previous understandings of the life course illuminated that individuals’ lives were governed by an “ideological imperative to ‘get a life’ by a certain age – and to ‘take life easy’ when we reach another” (Hockey & James, 2003, p.58). However, support for the proposition that people’s lives are arranged according to a prescribed schedule is gradually waning among scholars. The portrait of a generic life course – where childhood entailed education and play, adulthood meant leaving one’s childhood home, pursuing paid employment, marriage, and childrearing, and later life

involved retirement, leisure, and decline – has been repainted as a “much more fluid endeavour” (Hockey & James, 2003, p.58; Noonan, 2005; Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphe, 2007). Instead, contemporary interpretations of the western life course indicate that “people now enter, leave and re-enter the classroom, the private home, the university, the factory, the sheltered home and the nursing home, as their *individual* life circumstances dictate” (Hockey & James, 2003, p.105; Noonan, 2005; Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphe, 2007). It can even be said that the fabrics of one’s private and professional lives are woven together to the point where the latter begins “seeping into every aspect of the individual’s life”, thereby rendering the possibility of clocking out, escaping to one’s home, and leaving the day’s concerns at the workplace to be addressed the following day a difficult task (Hockey & James, 2003, p.190; Rhodes & Scheeres, 2004).

It has also been proposed that, much like their life course, individuals’ career trajectories do not unfold in linear, sequential patterns (Greller & Stroh, 1995; Meijers, 1998; Noonan, 2005). Professional aspirations established during childhood are frequently changed or abandoned throughout adolescence and adulthood (Meijers, 1998). In addition, workers do not often make securing employment, ascending the ranks, and retiring as a loyal, high-ranking member of the same organization throughout their entire working lives their concern (Noonan, 2005; Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Instead, the current arena within which people pursue their professional identities is characterized more by competition, short-term commitments, the development of transferable skills, and vacating one’s position in favour of more rewarding opportunities or environments (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Due to the interplay of “disjunctions, discontinuities, and transitions” occurring throughout one’s life course, the assumption of other important social identities may eclipse career identity as the focal activity around which other interests are organized, and meanings ascribed to professional identity have changed and will

continue to change (Greller & Stroh, 1995; Howie, Coulter, & Feldman, 2004, p.447; Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007).

In addition, contemporary understandings of the professional identities of the current generation are very different from those of that preceded it. For example, the work of Carl Rhodes and Hermine Scheeres (2004) about worker training and learning practices in organizations yielded insight regarding the evolution of professional identity. Through a qualitative analysis of a training program in a large Australian manufacturing firm, they examined the ways in which pre-modern, modern, and post-modern learning discourses framed the ways workers understood the tasks and value associated with their positions, thereby producing “particular notions of worker identity” (Rhodes & Scheeres, 2004, p.176). Each discourse stressed the ideal “type” of worker people should strive to be and the ideal organizational climate in which they would work, which changed in light of the introduction of different employment opportunities, roles, and regulations across time. Pre-modern learning discourses dictated that workers inherited their craft from respected experts who sought to impart traditional crafts to subsequent generations. Due to increasing reliance on technology, increased specialization of the labour force, and standardization of procedures, modern discourses sought to train efficient workers with specific functions within the organizational hierarchy and who staunchly adhered to policies stemming from a “managerial elite” (Rhodes & Scheeres, 2004, p.178). Finally, postmodern learning discourses bestow workers with an empowered identity whereby they gain knowledge through performance, collaboration, and reflection. Organizations subscribing to the postmodern discourse regard “workplaces as organisms and systems” in which workers are flexible, creative innovators as opposed to systematic cogs and thus worker identity is based on more influence in decision making, self-direction, and lax regulation (Rhodes &

Scheeres, 2004, p.178). Evidently, the era during which one entered the workforce played a part in the formation of worker identity. It can also be said that the dominant discourse and organizational milieu produced a spectrum of “class-based identities” and the respect, solidarity, or pride experienced as a result of work was contingent upon one’s position within it (Hockey & James, 2003, p.178).

In summary, research on life course perspective indicates that neither one’s life nor one’s career trajectory unfold in a sequential, linear manner. In addition, life courses are simply too diverse and affected by too many factors so contemporary conceptualizations of professional or worker identity have evolved, and the concept of work is bound to take on different meanings and varying degrees of importance to different people. This is especially important when people reach certain ages and relinquishing a particular aspect of their identity appears to be an imminent possibility, such as in the case of workers and retirement.

2.3 Meanings of Work and Professional Identity in Later Life

While life course research conveyed the notion that the latter years of life beyond retirement should be reserved for leisure, studies of the meanings of work in later life suggest that if given the choice, many older individuals would opt to remain gainfully employed until their bodies failed them, they made the conscious choice to quit, or their presence was no longer needed (Gini, 1998). As a result, it can be proposed that individuals working in later life are concerned less with enacting or constructing career identity and more with preserving it – a key concept of continuity theory (Atchley, 1999; von Bonsdorff et al., 2009)

Continuity theory states that as their lives continually change as they age, people will adapt to transitions by maintaining continuity in familiar routines and patterns of behaviour so the effects of such changes do not seem so abrupt or overwhelming (Atchley, 1989; Atchley,

1993). Continuity has been likened to a defense mechanism or preventative measure, taken to mitigate or minimize any negative age-related social, psychological, or physical changes (Atchley, 1999). However, “the goal is not to remain the same, but to adapt long-standing individual values and preferences to new situations as adults experience life course changes, aging, and social change” (Atchley, 1999, p.97-98). The manner in which individuals practice such adaptation can take two forms – internal or external continuity. Internal continuity concerns individuals’ attempts to retain aspects of their past that will serve to remind them of what will stay the same as change occurs, such as deep-seated experiences, skills, knowledge, and morals (Atchley, 1989; Atchley, 1993; Atchley, 1999). External continuity entails efforts to maintain consistency by actively seeking out familiar environments, practicing familiar skills, and maintaining relationships with familiar individuals (Atchley, 1989; Atchley, 1993; Atchley, 1999). By having a handle on their past decisions, likes and dislikes, and strengths and weaknesses, people can make informed decisions about what activities, people, and places will best allow them to maintain a coherent connection between their past, present, and future selves (Atchley, 1993; Atchley, 1999). Ultimately, as they age, people want to maintain the lifestyles to which they have become accustomed and in which they have invested much time, attention, energy, and effort. Continuity strategies present the perfect opportunities to do so.

Continuity theory has been directly applied in the study of older workers and their decisions to exit the workforce, re-enter the workforce, or remain in the workforce. Monika von Bonsdorff, Kenneth Shultz, Esko Leskinen, and Judith Tansky (2009) studied the factors that influence older workers to either disengage fully from working life or to take on bridge employment, which is some form of work after retirement. The authors surveyed hundreds of middle-aged and older workers in the U.S. federal government and asked participants to rank the

factors that would be most influential to their retirement decisions according to a Likert scale. They also sought to determine whether continuity factors, such as the desire to maintain social networks or to continue doing something they had dedicated their lives to thus far, would play a role in their decision-making processes. They found that those respondents sincerely considering retirement were the oldest and those considering bridge employment were youngest. In addition, non-work interests were a strong push factor in favour of retirement, and better use of one's skills, more so than continuity, was the strongest reason for engaging in bridge employment (von Bonsdorff et al., 2009).

Other research exploring the meanings of professional identity and work in later life also convey elements of continuity theory. Through nostalgic recollections of the experiences, skills, and life lessons amassed during their involvement in the workforce, older individuals in several studies who have long departed the professional domain demonstrated the firm foothold one's past professional identity retains in their present lives. For example Dena Shenk (2002) and Lorraine Dorfman et al. (2004) investigated how a rural context shapes the values, identities, and lived experiences of elders residing in it. Interviews with participants in both studies revealed that they considered support networks, maintaining independence and autonomy, and religious faith to be important. Although the authors did not explicitly focus on the meaning of work, the participants indicated that it is not possible for older individuals to sunder all connections to their former working selves, as their life stories positioned work as "primary organizing themes" (Shenk, 2002, p.408). Participants sought to draw values and lessons from their working lives to retain and enact in their current lives, such as self-reliance, autonomy, solidarity, practicality, and industriousness (Dorfman et al., 2004; Shenk, 2002). Their ruminations about the labour they exerted in their working lives conveyed an air of satisfaction, achievement, and self-respect, as

they had to work hard to earn a stable income and satisfactory quality of life but they were especially appreciative of the material goods, lessons, and skills they accrued in turn. Whether they were referring to decades passed or current realities, older individuals' work identities and professional values came to represent a significant portion of the whole person and remained a reassuring and consistent source of identity to which they could turn long after the end of their last working day (Dorfman, et al., 2004; Shenk, 2002).

The meaning of professional identity in later life could also be realized through its loss, and as the following study suggests, a possible response to its absence includes mourning. The qualitative work of Kathleen Riach and Wendy Loretto (2009) focused on the lived experience of older individuals in limbo – those who previously enjoyed lengthy employment but currently relied on government assistance to cover expenses. However, participants clung to the promise of eventually returning to work in order to alleviate the frustration caused by idleness and the monotonous passage of time. Focus group participants described how they retained a semblance of their professional identities by rejecting labels of disabled, old, ill, injured, or redundant that they felt were socially imposed, and reinterpreting them as temporary impairments that were “compartmentalized rather than constituting a permanent feature of who they are” (Riach & Loretto, 2009, p.109). In connection with continuity theory, this desire to recover or relive an irretrievable, yet still significant way of life demonstrates that people to “‘hang onto’ an identity or the symbolic resources attached to that identity even when it ceases to be actualized in their current daily practice” (Riach & Loretto, 2009, p.106).

While individuals may not retain a job-specific identity when they leave the workforce, they still possess the versatile, abstract qualities that are indicative of a worker and may seek to carry these characteristics into other areas of their lives. Research suggests that older individuals

employ other strategies, “albeit not within the confines of traditional notions of labour” to highlight their necessity as “integrated (and valuable) members of society” (Riach & Loretto, 2009, p.110). For instance, to prove “they were the ‘type’ of person who was potentially employable”, the participants in Riach and Loretto’s (2009) work would perform services and activities for which they did not receive monetary compensation and that were typically not regarded as “work”, such as independently accomplishing activities of daily living, maintaining one’s home, taking on beneficial hobbies, volunteering, caring for ailing friends and family members, or doing odd jobs (p.110).

In addition, other research also calls for the expansion and redefinition of traditional parameters of work to include activities that are outside the realm of paid employment, because it produces value for the community and older individuals derive some value from it in turn. Patricia Bambrick and Bette Bonder (2005) prefer to apply the term “productivity”, which “incorporates all that older adults do that has economic value” (p.78). Their interviews with older adults sought to discover how older individuals characterized work, and the results indicated that it was productivity that allowed them to retain a sense of usefulness, self-worth, and connectivity with others. Informal activities that were not carried out for financial gain, such as volunteering or community engagement, still produced valuable economic returns for the recipients of such services (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005). As a result, participants were entitled to continue to classify themselves as valuable contributors to society even though they were no longer in the paid labour force, thereby allowing for seamless continuity between their past working and present non-working selves.

However, it may be possible to overestimate the extent to which older individuals may desire to carry aspects of their working lives with them into retirement. A study conducted by

Christine Price (2000) differs in that while participants chose to bring about the end of their working lives by means of retirement none referred to this period of their lives “as an ending” (p.95). Price (2000) interviewed older women to explore the meanings they ascribed to making the identity transition from a waged-worker to retiree, and while participants lamented the loss of their professional title, social prestige, challenging job-specific projects and dilemmas, and the ease of maintaining social networks, they generally “did not reveal a negative impact of this loss of professional identity on their self-esteem or personal identity” (p.84). For some of these older women, their career identities were meaningful due to the “newly discovered freedom and choice” they enjoyed in exchange for relinquishing the challenges and structure provided by their occupations and they actively sought out other meaningful activities to compensate for the void left when they retired (Price, 2000, p.95). While there were some exceptions for whom retirement was tantamount to abandoning a project on which they had exhausted countless amounts of energy and time to achieve, to the majority of respondents, loss of professional identity was “just another step in life”, or another transition among many (Price, 2000, p.88). As a result, the participants in this study bring to light their ability to “[identify] themselves beyond their professional occupations” and “maintain their personal identities despite the loss of the worker role” (Price, 2000, p.97). Thus, the meaning of professional identity in later life may be that this component of identity is not as significant as some researchers might think; rather, it is contingent on the individual’s unique circumstances and other mitigating factors in their lives.

In summary, continuity theory suggests that to cope with change as they age, individuals will try to sustain familiar routines, relationships, and environments that they value, that provide a sense of reassurance, and that persist across different contexts and stretches of time, and such sources of continuity can stem from both their working and non-working lives. Continuation of

former selves, regardless of their professional nature, could serve as a means to display positive and healthy tendencies, resist behaviours and attitudes of aging individuals in decline, and contradict the idea that people of certain ages should be put out to pasture, regardless of skills, talents, or knowledge.

2.4 Experiences of Older Workers

To situate the current study within the context of existing literature, it was important to review other studies that explored the experiences of older workers and the importance of work in their lives. Michael Smyer and Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes (2007) explored older workers' reasons for remaining in the workforce, which included desires for financial stability, feelings of satisfaction and usefulness, and continued opportunities to apply knowledge or achieve professional goals. In their opinion, a "sustainer" abides by the mantra "work to live" and maintains his or her professional identity to secure financial resources to cover living expenses once benefits are lost (Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007, p.27). A "provider" alludes to an individual in relatively good health who continues to work in order to support dependent loved ones who are not. When people seek to maintain their professional identities as an "indicator of adult competence, accomplishment, and contribution to society", they are "connectors" who intend to stay in the workforce due to the sheer enjoyment derived from the tasks assigned to them and the organizational environment in which they are immersed (Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007, p.26). Lastly, the value of industriousness appears to be central for "contributors" who "live to work". These workers want to live up to self-imposed expectations as productive, hardworking contributors to society and will remain employed as long as they remain able and welcome (Noonan, 2005; Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007).

In the same vein, Anne Noonan's (2005) work sought to describe older workers' "current employment situations against the backdrop of their work-related histories and their own development" and their current employment status was rooted in equal parts necessity and choice (p.213). Some respondents likened continued employment to a means to an end – the resolution to a constant struggle to earn enough money for retirement, to augment social security, and to take care of dependents. Informants also worked because it was all they knew for the majority of their lives and would be disoriented by the lack of structure that came with retirement. For other participants, work consumed much of their energy and thus health became a frequent cause for concern, while for others, experiences of ageism were a reality as they referred to instances where they felt unwelcome at work (Noonan, 2005). However, "a sense of not having found one's 'niche in life'" also prompted individuals to reframe their continued presence in the workforce as opportunities to pursue new roles and responsibilities and spend time doing what they truly wanted to do (Noonan, 2005, p.238).

Wendy Loretto and Phil White (2006) conducted a focus group with older workers in Scotland to explore their lived experiences of extending their working lives, which revealed very similar results when juxtaposed with those of Smyer and Pitt-Catsouphes (2007) and Noonan (2005). For example, respondents primarily worked for financial stability and to supplement pension, they sought to maintain connections to social networks, and some experienced better health outcomes when they continued to work. However, some respondents wanted to retire as soon as possible due to work-related stress, and others indicated that pockets of ageism cropped up when they believed their employers preferred younger workers. However, the consensus among participants was that older workers still had a lot to offer the working world (Loretto & White, 2006). Similarly, the participants in Altschuler's (2004) work mentioned similar

meanings they ascribed to their professional occupations; however her study was unique in that the respondents were all women. Her findings were unique in that while work was still considered a means to secure financial security, it was also a way to obtain financial security *independent from men*. In addition, the women considered their work as more than “just” a job in that an innate “sense of responsibility, care, and commitment to others” inspired them to perform duties that were beyond their official job descriptions (Altschuler, 2004, p.234).

In addition, some research indicates that concerns about the future, rather than desires for connections to the past as continuity theory might suggest, play an important role in older workers’ decisions to maintain or relinquish their professional identities. Research indicates that access to health care services, loss of benefits, deteriorating physical health, caring for loved ones, ageism, and financial stress constitute some of the shared concerns that workers believe will become part of their realities as they negotiate the processes of aging. As a result, from a motivational standpoint, older individuals are attracted to work that offers financial benefits, structure and routine, social interaction, productivity, and satisfaction from performing tasks they enjoy (Kooij et al., 2008; Lui Ping Loi & Shultz, 2007).

Lorna Porcellato, Fiona Carmichael, Claire Hulme, Barbara Ingham, and Arvin Prashar (2010) also conducted their study with a view to understand older individuals’ experiences of work, however their results illuminated important ways in which their experiences are constrained. Upon interviewing over fifty older workers in England, the authors found that participants were consistently at risk of stagnancy in that they could become stuck in a job they did not enjoy or for which they were ill-suited, due to a lack of self-confidence about their abilities to perform tasks well. Also, they were frequently assigned jobs that did not align with their wealth of experience and knowledge due to employer misunderstandings about their

capabilities. In addition, the authors discovered that many barriers prevented respondents' abilities to enter the workforce, such as employer reluctance to consider older workers since they would not remain in the position very long. Lastly, their work experiences were not always gratifying due to pressures to retire early because of real or perceived health concerns, intimidating technological knowledge requirements or reluctance to undergo complicated training (Porcellato et al., 2010).

Lastly, Simpson, Richardson, and Zorn (2012) interviewed 25 older employees and 10 of their managers in New Zealand to explore the meanings ascribed to "encore careers", which means that rather than bracing for retirement, older workers continued to participate in working life, albeit in another job, role, or different field entirely. Some participants viewed encore careers as their opportunity to "engage in work they *want*, rather than *have* to do" (Simpson, Richardson, & Zorn, 2012, p.431, emphasis in original). For the most part, encore careers afforded older workers a platform to continue contributing to their communities, enabled them to derive a positive identity and sense of self-esteem, and presented continual opportunities to employ skills and experience they highly valued in order to make a difference in their communities. However, an interesting perspective emerged that criticized encore careers for imposing unrealistic expectations on older individuals and hindering from enjoying retirement, and suggested that they "must work or do something that resembles work to be seen as contributing to society" (Simpson, Richardson, & Zorn, 2012, p.441).

The opening section of this literature review described what scholars believe identity to be and how it is enacted across contexts, in particular, in the work environment, with specific reference to identity theory. The focus of the literature review then shifted slightly to investigate changing meanings of work across the life course. The subsequent section explored continuity

theory, or the adaptive behaviours older individuals enact in response to age-related changes to ensure continuity is maintained in as many contexts as possible, and how older individuals may take similar measures to preserve the meanings attached to their worker identities. Lastly, current research on the experiences of older workers was put under the microscope to gain an understanding as to the multiple perspectives from which this phenomenon could be viewed, and any gaps that remain.

Existing research is not without its shortcomings, however. For instance, research such as that of Rhodes and Scheeres (2004) depict professional identity in terms of a worker's performance and learning ability. This view might be valuable for organizational leaders wishing to tailor training to produce a specific type of employee who will share organizational values and further organizational goals. However, those interested in the value ascribed to that identity on an individual level, the intrinsic benefits one derives from attaining it, and how he or she considers this identity in light of a broader self-definition are left wanting. In addition, while the work of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) offers a valuable exploration of the construction of role-based identities within an organization, they do not heed their own advice to listen "carefully to the stories of those we claim to understand and study their interactions, the discourses and roles they are constituted by and resist" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1190). That is, their work takes a "tunnel-vision" approach and focuses on how a single individual relates her work to her overall sense of self, and thus the inclusion of multiple perspectives would lend credence to their conclusions. Viewing role-related relationships as the primary source from which workers derive professional identities like Sluss and Ashforth (2007) is also symptomatic of "tunnel vision" and ignores other sources that impart a sense of worker identity, such as personal satisfaction or making a marked difference in one's community. Furthermore, research that focuses mainly on

older workers' motivation to remain in the workforce, including that by Kooij et al. (2008) and Lui Ping Loi and Shultz (2007), sidesteps the deeper values or meanings that older individuals attach to their working identities and instead tends to stress job-seeking behaviours among older individuals and the factors that attract them to certain jobs, how hiring organizations can tailor their recruitment strategies to appeal to their desires and needs, and how one's age may deter motivation to work. In addition, while research such as that of Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) or Walsh and Gordon (2008) offer valuable descriptions of the processes of identity formation that can occur while on the job and within organizations, they shed little light on the significance of professional identity outside of the confines of a specific work environment and fail to acknowledge that for older workers, professional identity in later life involves building on existing, internally-held conceptions of their worker identity, rather than starting anew to suit the values of the organization.

While I had little trouble coming across literature pertaining to identity development in general, identity experiences of older individuals, and the significance people ascribed to professional identity, research that merged these discrete fields of study and sought to describe what it meant to be an active member of two categories simultaneously – “old” and “workers” was sadly wanting. Various authors acknowledged this paucity of research. For instance, Hockey and James (2003) suggest that an “absence of an experiential perspective” compels researchers to concede that they “know only relatively little about the variety of age-based identities which individuals *actually* take on across the course of their lives” and existing literature lacks solid theoretical underpinnings to explicate the “complex social process and experiences” driving “the shift from one identity to another” (p. 34; p.5, respectively; emphasis in original). In addition, Noonan (2005) asserted that “traditional models and assumptions about older workers” cannot

endeavour to adequately reflect the variety experiences of each person choosing to work beyond the conventional age of retirement or the “realities of the rapidly changing workplace” (p.239). Similarly, Kooij et al. (2008) concluded that “few studies examine the motivation of older people to work and to remain active in the workforce” and thus the call for holistic insight into older individuals’ work identities and experiences is justified (p.365).

There was also a shortage of research about the meanings older individuals ascribe to professional identity within a Canadian context, and I only encountered one study conducted specifically in Thunder Bay, which offered interpretations of worker identity from injured workers’ perspectives, rather than seeking older individuals’ input (Stone, 2003). As a result, my thesis will seek to fill these gaps in available literature and augment participants’ narratives using relevant theoretical perspectives, specifically focusing on older individuals active in the workforce in various fields within the Thunder Bay, ON area.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Since I sought to describe the essential characteristics of a particular experience for a group of individuals, a phenomenological research design was an appropriate choice.

3.1 Phenomenology: Key Approach, Husserlian Origins, and Basic Concepts

Phenomenology is a complex concept and approach that can be described as a philosophy, strategy of inquiry, and research method (Dowling, 2007; Giorgi, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). The driving purpose for conducting such research is elucidated by its prefix – phenomenon. That is, phenomenology aims to describe the meaning and fundamental essence of individuals' lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Phenomenologists seek a deeper understanding of the defining features of an experience that is personally significant to an individual. They pursue an answer to the questions “what is it that makes this lived experience what it is?” and “what meaning does it have in this individual's life?” (van Manen, 1997, p.4).

Phenomenology has developed into a valuable approach to qualitative research and a prosperous future lies ahead as a shortage of phenomena to explore appears unlikely. For instance, ideal topics for phenomenologists include major life events and transitions, formation or deterioration of important relationships, emotions or sensations, development and meaning of identities, or even mundane and taken-for-granted experiences. Researchers commonly employ phenomenology in the fields of social and human sciences, when they seek a deeper understanding of the essential characteristics of a profound, significant experience and when traditional, scientific, or behavioural methods of inquiry will not suffice (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). Those who opt for this method endeavour to offer insight and an extensive description about how a given person under certain conditions makes sense of an

experience. Phenomenological research is “discovery orientated” and generally does not seek to lend credence to theories, hypotheses, or speculation (Creswell, 2007; Dukes, 1984; Finlay, 1999, p.303; Giorgi, 2005; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997).

However, it is also important to draw attention to the historical roots of the phenomenological movement, specifically the work of Edmund Husserl, who is extolled by phenomenological researchers to be the founder of the field. Husserl was a philosopher who advocated that when attempting to capture the meaning of lived experiences one should “discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear” (Dowling, 2007; Giorgi, 2005; Moustakas, 1994, p.26). His maxim, “to the things themselves” (Dowling, 2007, p.132), suggested that to discern the essence of an experience one should “let the phenomena speak for themselves” (Moustakas, 1994, p.13), without embellishment or distortion on the part of the researcher. However, a hallmark of his philosophy was the notion of intentionality, or a concession that acts of consciousness are always carried out in relation to some external object – one “thinks *of* something, feels *for* others and imagines things *about* and *beyond*” (Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 1999, p.302; Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality is rooted in the idea that there is an irrevocable link between consciousness and an object, and thus neither can exist without the other (Dowling, 2007; Finlay, 1999; Giorgi, 2005). People constantly interact with their environment, and since “objects and subjects cannot be separated” their experiences of the phenomena within it are bound to be meaningful to them (Finlay, 1999, p.302). As a result, Husserl devised a strategy for researchers to temporarily suspend or suppress preconceptions or biases through processes of reduction, whereby “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p.34). Through reduction, the researcher offers a description of the

experience based on exactly what the participants convey, ignoring what he or she already thinks or knows about it (Dowling, 2007, p.132; Giorgi, 2005; Moustakas, 1994).

However, according to van Manen (1997), “the problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate but that we know too much” (p.9). In other words, for some researchers the phenomenon of interest may be too commonplace or too affecting such that detachment or a fresh perspective is difficult to achieve (Moustakas, 1994). Since existing knowledge cannot be effaced entirely, a technique to hold “in abeyance” what one already knows about a subject is through epoche (Creswell, 2007; Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994, p.86; van Manen, 1997). The epoche process should not be mistaken for an attempt to achieve complete objectivity and remove oneself from the research scenario (Creswell, 2007). Instead, Husserl-inspired epoche requires the researcher to “refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, p.33). One uses various techniques, such as a researcher journal, to allow participants’ descriptions to emerge in their own right, without the interference of presuppositions that dictate how he or she thinks the experience ought to be. The researcher probes personal knowledge of or involvement with the phenomenon and explicitly clarifies “understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories” (van Manen, 1997, p.9), in order bring the experiences of others to the fore and “meet the phenomenon as free and as unprejudiced as possible” (Dowling, 2007, p.132). Epoche or bracketing also discourages the researcher from unwittingly adding or imposing meanings that are not evident in the initial description, so he or she simply “allow[s] a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is” (Moustakas, 1994, p.86).

Upon committing to describe the phenomenon as it presents itself and revealing personal connections to the experience in question, the researcher is able to proceed with imaginative variation. In Husserlian terms, imaginative variation entails discovering the essential characteristics upon which an experience “hangs together” and that render it meaningful for individuals (Dukes, 1984, p.199). In addition, researchers engage in imaginative variation by distinguishing between its defining features that would remain constant across all situations or conditions and those that are simply “incidental”, isolated, or specific to an individual (Dowling, 2007, p.133; Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation leads investigators a step closer to discovering the essence that comprises an experience. As Dowling (2007) concisely states, imaginative variation involves asking oneself, “is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?” (p.133). Once the researcher garners an understanding of the ideas posited by those considered to be the original phenomenologists, he or she is at liberty to proceed with data collection and analysis.

Although scholars have yet to agree upon a universal way to conduct phenomenological research, several basic principles commonly appear throughout their various approaches. For example, phenomenology is predicated on the study of lived experience in the lifeworld (Creswell, 2007; Finlay, 1999; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Lived experiences arise from existing in, interpreting, and interacting with the lifeworld, which consists of environments, relationships, and internal psychological processes. Another assumption that is common across most forms of phenomenology is that the researcher participates in some form of bracketing whereby he or she refrains from importing personal insights into the research, mitigates the impact of personal knowledge or attitudes about the topic by remaining self-reflexive throughout the study, and allows the essence to appear from the participants’ narratives naturally (Creswell,

2007; Finlay, 1999; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Research is also constituted as phenomenological if it culminates in a detailed description of the thematic elements that comprise the essence of the experience. The essence is “the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is”, it reveals what it is like to experience a particular phenomenon, and it enables others to appreciate the significance it bears for those who experienced it (Creswell, 2007; Dukes, 1984; Moustakas, 1994, p.100; van Manen, 1997. In connection with my study, I sought to reveal “the underlying conditions, precipitating factors, [and] structural determinants” governing what one’s profession and its associated identity means to a specific group of older individuals over the course of their lives, and why it is important to maintain this aspect of their selves in their later years (Moustakas, 1994, p.60).

3.2 Sample & Data Collection

Although phenomenological research designs generally lack “a clear recipe for how to do flawless research”, phenomenologists tend to adhere to a pattern whereby they choose a phenomenon of interest, bracket personal insight, experience, and biases, gather data from participants, scrutinize responses for significant themes, and close with a description that articulates the essence of that experience for that group of individuals (Dukes, 1984, p.202; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Regardless of the researcher’s preferred approach, purposeful sampling is used in phenomenological studies, whereby he or she intentionally samples a population that has experienced the same phenomenon. To be eligible for this study, participants had to engage in an activity they regarded as work, and be 65 or older, since 65 remains the traditional retirement age in Canada (Uppal, 2010). Since “the traditional definition of work as paid employment does not adequately reflect work as it is manifested by individuals in later life”, for the purposes of this study, “work” will refer to any activity that holds personal

significance for the individual, that offers value to the individual and society, and that is “an important part of the daily life of older adults no longer in the paid workforce and that make a contribution to society” (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005, p.78). This understanding asserts that “the value of that service can be measured in terms other than monetary such as personal fulfillment and meaning in life”, and thus I recruited individuals who engaged in both waged and unpaid work to participate (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005, p.79). Personal acquaintances forwarded my contact information to potential participants, who contacted me directly to express their interest in taking part in the study. I arranged interviews with ten participants as per Creswell’s (2007) recommendation for phenomenological research in order to “collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied” (p.126). The interviews took place over a five month period and in locations that were convenient for both the researcher and participants such as their workplaces, their homes, or my place of employment. The sample included six men and four women from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. While several participants overlapped in that they worked in the broader field of health care, all participants engaged in different professions. Table 1 (Appendix A) profiles the sociodemographic characteristics of each participant.

Since the “researcher must allow the subjects to speak, in their own way and their own time, about those aspects of the experience in question that seem relevant to them” my primary source of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (Dukes, 1984, p.200). I prepared an interview protocol to guide the interview process which consisted of a series of open-ended questions. The tape-recorded interviews varied in length, with the shortest lasting approximately half an hour and the longest lasting an hour and a half. Once data collection was complete, I began data analysis which entailed horizontalization, compiling a

textural description, generating a structural description, and synthesis of textural and structural descriptions into an overarching description of the essence of the phenomenon.

3.3 Data Analysis

My bracketing technique consisted of recording personal insights and opinions in a researcher journal before, during, and after data collection and analysis. This enabled me to remain self-reflexive throughout the entire duration of the study, as I considered my role in the study, relation to participants, and familiarity with the phenomenon, and identified potential impacts on the research process. The researcher journal also contained search terms and databases I consulted to obtain sources for the review of literature, observations of respondents' body language, critiques of my interview skills and suggestions for improvement in future meetings with participants.

Participants' responses were transcribed verbatim and subsequently analyzed according to the method recommended by Clark Moustakas (1994), as his approach outlines clear-cut, discrete steps to conduct data analysis. In line with his technique, I engaged in horizontalization, which is a thematic analysis guided by the question ““what statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the experience being described?””(van Manen, 1997, p.21). Horizontalization entails reading through the transcriptions and extracting significant statements regarding the “horizons” or “textural qualities” of the phenomenon that describe what was experienced (Moustakas, 1994, p.95). Each statement was initially ascribed equal value, but upon further review irrelevant, overlapping statements were eliminated “leaving only the *horizons* (the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon)” (Moustakas, 1994, p.97; emphasis in original). The statements, or “horizons,” were then clustered into broader categories, called meaning units or themes. Meaning units could be words, phrases, or

longer passages (Finlay, 2011). To delineate what constituted a meaning unit, the researcher identified distinct shifts in meaning that were “clearly differentiated from that which preced[ed] and follow[ed]” (Hycner, 1985, p.282). The researcher then scrutinized the clusters of meaning units to determine if a “central theme expresse[d] the essence of these clusters” under which they could be grouped together (Hycner, 1985, p.290). Themes that were non-essential to the phenomenon were eliminated after a process of questioning whether the experience of being an older worker would remain the same if the theme was removed (Hycner, 1985). The interpretive nature of the analysis process affords the researcher the flexibility to exercise a fair degree of “artistic judgment” or “creative insight” (Hycner, 1985, p.288). From the themes that remained, I compiled “a coherent textural description of the phenomenon” pertaining to “what” was experienced (Moustakas, 1994, p.97).

While Moustakas’s (1994) analysis is concerned with “what” happened, it also requires establishing “the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced” (p.99). In other words, I engaged in imaginative variation in order to arrive at a structural description detailing “how” the experience happened. During imaginative variation, the researcher considers imaginable possibilities, contexts, settings or conditions that brought about the phenomenon, such as “time, space, materiality [and] causality” (Moustakas, 1994, p.99). Finally, the last step of my analysis involved “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement” describing the common elements of experience for the group, which constitutes the “essence” of the experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994, p.100). Ultimately, the goal is for readers to come away with the sense that “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that,” or in my case, the

development, maintenance, and importance of professional identity over the life course, with a specific focus on the latter years of life (Creswell, 2007, p.62).

I relied on peer reviewing and clarifying researcher bias as validation strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2007). During the peer review, I defended my methodology and interpretation of the data for a colleague who was not connected to the study, who in turn kept written notes regarding the study's execution to corroborate that themes materialized in their own right rather than due to researcher distortion, and that the structural and textural descriptions, overall essence, and interpretive discussion were supported by the data. Lastly, before the study commenced and throughout its duration, I elucidated potential researcher bias via bracketing in a researcher journal.

Chapter 4: Results

Analysis of the data yielded 3,020 significant statements, which the researcher scrutinized further to determine “whether there seem[ed] to be some common theme or essence that unite[ed] several discrete units of relevant meaning” (Hycner, 1985, p.281). The researcher gathered the meaning units into clusters, from which the following 8 themes emerged. These themes are discussed in detail below.

4.1 Discussion of Emergent Themes

Theme 1 – Socio-historical Trends: The social, economic, and historical context they grew up in affected participants’ career choices as well as the degree of success they enjoyed as a result of such decisions. For example, one man, the former owner of a forest machinery production company and current golf course employee, recalled that social expectations required him to begin work as early as adolescence, which was simply “the way of life then”: “in England back then, you were put in what you were going to do for the rest of your life when you were eleven years of age”. He also came of age at the outset of the Second World War which shaped how he spent his early working years. In the midst of serving as an engineering apprentice and pursuing further education in the trade, “at that time, there was the National Service, that was conscription”. After two compulsory years in uniform with the army, he found that engineering was a valuable trade given the period of growth in aviation and space technology that occurred following the war. His versatile skillset allowed him to occupy various positions with the British Space Program and a Canadian auto company, until finally settling as manager of a forestry equipment business in Canada.

Historical context also played a role in one male respondent’s personal prosperity, as when he graduated from law school in Toronto and relocated to Thunder Bay, he was able to set

up shop without difficulty due to a lack of competition: “at that time, there were no big firms in Port Arthur, northward. And there were two firms in Fort William”. A male interviewee, the current maintenance manager at a shopping centre, found himself in similar circumstances. Early in his working career, he decided to cut his academic career short to secure a job with a paper mill, much to his stepfather’s dismay, who expected him to pursue post-secondary education. However, since “them days were different”, his decision turned out to be a fruitful one as work was in abundant supply during that period: “you could quit your job in the morning, go get another job in the afternoon...nobody ever said ‘oh I can’t find any work’”.

Sweeping historical events like war or economic downturn could be an invaluable stroke of luck as well as economic catastrophe for another male respondent, a cabinetmaker, whose personal livelihood depended upon the financial stability of others to purchase his merchandise. He explained, the “50’s were really tough, 60’s things got better because the war was over, young people needed houses, and so there was work coming from all directions”. However, within a matter of years, “interest rates started going up really high”, and “in the 80’s is when it started to get bad”. Though he showed incredible resilience and his business weathered such significant economic shifts, he “didn’t enjoy the times when it was tough. You had to lay men off, there was no work, you didn’t get paid, I didn’t enjoy that”.

On a more local level, fortuitous circumstances, opportunities, and incidents beyond their control influenced some participants’ career pursuits taken on late in the game. For instance, one male respondent, a former police officer and current fitness facility attendant, described the random events that led him to retire, obtain a job he detested, return for a brief stint in law enforcement, and finally settle in his current position. He insisted that a mysterious mood spell prompted his decision to leave the police force to test the waters with a media office:

I was in one of those doldrums, and all of a sudden, this green pasture was presented to me and I thought “yeah, I can climb the fence and I can go play in this green pasture and this’ll be fun!”

He quickly found that the opportunity was not what he expected, and he was lucky to secure a casual position as part of a returning retiree program that his former station established:

You were a casual employee and what they were doing was using those officers to relieve the full-time officers to be on the road and the retirees that were coming back, they were using them to do things like office work, entering reports into the computers, court officer work where you’re just sitting in a court room all day long you know, recording verdicts and cases, and shuffling papers, serving summonses and things like this which is very mundane, very time-consuming for active field officers.

However, misfortune struck again when his involvement on the police force was cut short:

“active officers who were hurt on the job couldn’t come back to work to do the mundane things and consequently the returning retiree program was washed”, he explained. He was not without work for long, as his current position “one day sort of fell in my lap”. Since he was a member of the gym and already familiar with the facility, the supervisor considered him an ideal candidate to join her staff and offered him the job on the spot, which he did not appear to have any misgivings about accepting: “it was offered to me, and I thought about it, I thought, that sounds like fun”.

A female respondent, an employee of the Italian consulate in Thunder Bay, implied that her position might not have materialized were it not for a chance encounter coupled with encouragement from her predecessor. She explained that at a meeting in Toronto, she “absentmindedly” filled out paperwork for the consul-general, who remembered her and asked her to assume the position several years later insisting that “I know you can do it”. Despite refusals that her “Italian was atrocious”, she eventually relented: “it was like Pierre Trudeau phoning me to say will you come and do this work for me, you know, I couldn’t say no to them”.

However, just as she began her current position at the urging of others, significant people will also help determine when she will leave it. That is, past experience caused her to vow not to imitate her father's example, who she considered a "workaholic":

He didn't get to enjoy anything...And I feel sad for that. Because he could have. He could have. But he was always saving for us. It's such a sad, sad feeling. And the times that we wanted to go for picnics and we waited, and waited, and he went from one job to the other. And my mom kept saying, "he'll come soon, he'll come soon." And he never did. Now he hates it. But it's too late.

Another instance of this theme emerged when participants discussed the effects of technological advancements within their respective fields, which the cabinetmaker succinctly summarized when he stated, "technology has taken over completely". For example, technology fostered a new form of competition that threatened to undermine and render obsolete the traditional workmanship at which the cabinetmaker was so adept, thereby ending his career as a business owner: "I decided that it was time to pull the pin and get out of it. Because in this industry, the hands on type of thing we used to do became a thing of the past". However, he did concede that introducing technology was not an entirely negative experience, since it allowed one to "put the kitchens out faster than the guy can the old way," and to demonstrate innovations that appealed to contemporary consumers:

I made the drawings with a pencil, and a square, and all the rest of it. So that's the big difference now. And he can show you elevations, pictures of the kitchen what it's going to look like. Where I had to do that by hand and now he can do it with the computer. To be a success in this business you've got to go that way otherwise you can't compete.

According to another male respondent, a physician, adjusting to and implementing technology meant a better prognosis for many patients: "as the progress in medicine has been [doctors] also have much more capacity in their armament, the medical armament to treat patients now than they used to". Access to new equipment, treatment methods, and medications

ensured that “the intensity of hospital care has gone up as well”. He commented on the evolving role of physicians in the expeditious recovery of patients in modern hospital settings:

We used to keep people in hospital for three or four weeks after they’d had a coronary from heart attack on the theory that we needed time to heal the heart muscle. And now the patient’s in and out within a week. They often have stress tests before they go out, the stress test is really the complete opposite of how we used to treat them, we used to really baby them.

In addition, telemedicine, or transmitting training sessions and seminars online, made remaining connected to other health care professionals easy, which in his opinion is “really quite a an advance”.

Theme 2 – The Work Environment: While technological advances substantially altered how some participants’ career trajectories unfolded, for other participants such developments were simply one of many factors in the context of their work environments to which they had to adapt. For instance, the fitness facility attendant regarded “being sort of made to keep up on things” as an inconvenient, albeit necessary, obligation. Consistent technological updates to systems and programs he used every day required continual instruction and practice, which was “forcing me to do something” that he preferred not to do: “if I didn’t have to do it, I wouldn’t do it”, he remarked.

In the same vein, several participants mentioned that keeping abreast of other developments within their professions could be difficult. A female interviewee, a palliative care nurse, explained that one might suffer repercussions for failing to do so: “you have to keep current, so I mean if you don’t keep current then you can’t practice”. As a result, she opted to “keep in touch with the paediatrics stuff as well so that I can practice and know what’s up and new on the market”, explaining that “there’s so much to learn and develop around those areas when you’re doing paediatrics”. Similarly, the lawyer noted that older individuals in his field

have to exert more effort to stay well-informed on industry trends and progress: “it’s harder to remain current, on the news, and on the things that are happening in the practice, it’s harder, you have to work at it”. The physician echoed this view when he stated that due to continual advancements in treatments, tools, and technologies in the health care field, “the simple physical ability to know everything that you need to know becomes difficult”.

Another important aspect of the work environment included task variety, which played in an important role in participants’ experiences as both young and old workers. For instance, the palliative care nurse advocated that health care providers’ approaches to treatment varied because “every case is different”. Due to differing patient conditions, “it’s all new, so you will have to have a different approach every time”, she said. The fitness facility attendant echoed this view, asserting that task variety facilitated a smooth transition to a new work environment when he secured a part-time job post-retirement: “this variety and problem-solving, and that sort of stuff, that kind of appeals to me, and that’s why the policing career appealed to me as well”. His current position involved completing administrative tasks, providing customer service, patrolling the facility, responding to emergent problems, and “anything else that we’re called upon to do, if it’s within our parameters”. He likened the tasks he was responsible for as a fitness facility attendant to the duties he was required to perform as an on-duty police officer:

In a policing career, you never know what you’ll face, when you jump in that cruiser and head out on the road you don’t know whether you’re going to a simple patrol, ride up and down the road, you’re going to a break and enter, domestic, a fatal accident and that was part of the thing with the job. Now this one here again it’s the same thing, only it’s not as serious.

Another respondent was also accustomed to relying on sharp wit and problem-solving skills to address unique situations during his work with the city’s environment division. While he responded to a broad range of problems in his current position as a maintenance manager of a

shopping centre, he described work as a lead hand with the city's water department as a "different, different, different job" in which "nothing was ever the same". From installing hydrants, to replacing sewer connections to homes, to repairing water main breaks, the variety of tasks and responsibilities associated with the work ensured "you never knew what you were going to do tomorrow".

Discussions of task variety also led participants to articulate their experiences of work in terms of the difficulties that caused their work environments to be stressful on occasion. For some respondents, work entailed operating in a fast-paced environment, as captured by phrases such as "it can be really stressful at times", "the nature of the work can be demanding", "labour-intensive", "I am go, go, go", and "I was always busy". The maintenance manager reflected upon how inclement weather conditions frequently impeded his ability to complete repairs as a lead hand: it "didn't matter, 35, 40 below you went out" despite "five feet of frost, six feet of frost", "the generators never start, the water pumps you could never shut them off", and once the leak was sealed, "bang! Another one would happen so you get another crew", he recalled.

The lawyer found the copious paperwork he dealt with to be particularly taxing as he explained how he had to "read three or four hundred pages to understand what's going on" in various hearings. For a female interviewee, a former occupational therapist currently working in her daughter's day care, complying with the restrictions and standards imposed by the local health unit was "too much of a nuisance", as the centre in which she cooked was subject to periodic inspection. Similarly, excessive report-writing constituted one of the reasons that led her to work in her daughter's daycare, rather than continue employment at a community health service centre:

You have to have your initial report, you have to have your discharge report, and sometimes your initial report and discharge are within the same week. And

always my fight with them was why can't I just write the initial discharge report, because sometimes one was it was all that was needed...It becomes double the work.

Unfortunately, she was unable to eschew micromanagement entirely, as the daycare in which she currently cooked was subject to periodic inspection from the local health unit, which she described as “a nuisance”.

Even though she could be considered a seasoned veteran in her field, the palliative care nurse remarked that her work could be emotionally draining. She explained that “working with dying children is very difficult”, largely because she could easily relate to the patients and their loved ones: “[it] breaks your heart and I do cry with the families, trust me, because you're human and I have children”. Tending to patients, especially terminally ill children, during the end stages of their lives was such a profound experience that she and her colleagues sought their own sources of closure, which was reflected in her comment, “I'm starting to find that when patients die, we also have to grieve”. She also added that to pursue a career in health care, one must possess a strong affinity for nurturing others, which might be effortless for some but impossible for others:

Nursing is, good ol' Florence Nightingale bless her heart, is a caring profession. And it doesn't matter what part of the profession you do, be it palliative care, medical surgical, ICU, whatever, some people are naturally born with that, and others acquire it...and others struggle with it.

Though he no longer had “the headaches of running the business”, the cabinetmaker summarized the unique challenges that were “on your shoulders all the time” as the sole proprietor of a business, stating that “bread and butter depends on *your* skills, you have to get the sales, you have to follow them through, you have to pay the men”. He also referred to the financial instability and hardships incurred in the woodworking industry and for business owners in general: “You had to survive, you know. Whatever you had to do to survive you did. But

that's the way business goes, in cycles, it's not always good, and it's not always bad". He also brought to light other challenges of operating a small business including fluctuating consumer demand, bleak economic climate, and customers' inability or unwillingness to pay for services, which were evident in statements like "if you turn down a job, there may be *nothing* next month", "when the economy goes bad you have to go roll with those kinds of punches", and "some customers no matter what you do they're never happy. So either you go to court, or you just take it on the chin".

An additional challenge included interacting with a broad spectrum of people, such as colleagues, customers, or members of the general public, which did not always make for a harmonious work environment. For example, the fitness facility attendant described the politics that dominated the media office where he worked after retiring from law enforcement. Since he was used to the camaraderie of the police station, the animosity he encountered in his new work environment was difficult to accept: "people that I started to work with full-time had huge egos, and I'm not that kind of a person, and we started to bump heads". Similar challenges arose for the physician when the hospital where he was chief of staff merged with another hospital. As a result, convincing all staff to adhere to the same organizational values was not an easy feat: "that was the difficult part of amalgamating two cultures. One believes that they do it the right way and others believe that they do it the right way", he explained.

Similarly, the maintenance manager concisely noted, "anytime you work with the public, it's difficult", which indicated that discourteous co-workers were not the only people encountered on the job who could be problematic. For instance, as maintenance manager he was responsible for maintaining the cleanliness of the building in which he worked and he found it especially frustrating when people disrespected custodial staff:

Some guys are in the restaurant there and they take their cup and throw it on the floor. You know the garbage can's right there, leave it on the table. I said 'you do that at home too'? Well they say 'job security for you'. I say that's not my job security.

The palliative care nurse came across fewer people who were impolite and more who were too inquisitive about patients' conditions, which posed a challenge nonetheless: "you have to be careful who you talk to about what, and people get to know one another and you know they'll meet you and want to talk about somebody, you can't. And you have to make them respect that".

When discussing challenges, participants also considered the physical toll of their work. For example, the Italian consulate employee acknowledged that staying on top of her professional obligations in the midst of other commitments affected her health "because I'm up all kinds of nights" and "sometimes I go to bed at four o'clock in the morning". Similarly, the fitness facility attendant attributed the physical effects he experienced to frequent graveyard shifts he was required to work at the media outlet:

My family life was suffering, my health was suffering, I wasn't sleeping, there were days I'd go home I'd sleep all afternoon, get up have supper and then go back to bed because I was so tired.

He also indicated that work could hinder his enjoyment of recreational interests within his social circle, since at times he had to reject invitations such as "going golfing with some of the guys, or going somewhere or partaking in something" because "I have the obligation where I've got to go to work". Another respondent, the physician, lamented the lack of time he dedicated to leisure as a result of continuing to work, stating "you don't do things that you might otherwise do. I suppose I might have taken up golfing more than I have". Social consequences were also apparent when participants described how difficult it was to prevent work-related concerns and problems from pervading their domestic spheres. The personal support worker, palliative care nurse, and maintenance manager commented, "I *never* bring my work home with me", "when we

leave there you leave it there”, and “don’t take your job home”. In addition, those working in health fields expressed strong opinions that care providers required self-control in order to distance themselves from the people they helped. The personal support worker reflected on her daily interaction with residents, and asserted that while “they grow on you, you can get really close to these people” she frequently reminded herself that “there’s the fine line too” in that she could not “get to the point where I go home and worry about them, or dwell on it”. Similarly, after a patient’s death the palliative care nurse extended support to the family because “you may feel sad for them” and “to try and move on at their pace with the grieving”, but she generally severed ties with the families because “it’s not healthy” to maintain a connection:

There’s one of the children that died last year I’m still in contact though with his mother because she’s just having a hard time. But I will gradually wean her off of me [small chuckle]. Yeah, because you can’t, you can’t keep that up, like you don’t build up that relationship with them that is a longstanding, ongoing, forever thing.

Furthermore, she acknowledged the importance of sloughing off the anxieties of the daily grind and taking time to recharge:

When I’m on call to my patients, then you’re on call to them. But when you go in and you do your visit for the day, you have to leave, you have to go home, go for supper, have a glass of wine, leave it behind.

The maintenance manager also advocated for firm separation between professional and private lives, and cautioned against the dangers of talking shop after hours which could put undue strain on significant relationships:

It doesn’t work out because then you give somebody else shit. Know what I mean, you’ll pick on somebody else if you have a bad day which you should leave it there. You know, throw your mind in the bag and leave it there, pick it up tomorrow.

However, attaining the right balance – in other words, being physically and emotionally present both on the job and at home when appropriate – was a work in progress, which the palliative care nurse pointed out when she said, “it takes a long time to develop that though”.

Such diverse challenges and circumstances required workers to rely on skills and strengths while on the job, which allowed them to acquire a sense of who they were as workers, what they were capable of, and what was expected of them. For example, the maintenance manager, golf course employee, cabinetmaker, and palliative care nurse asserted that work frequently put their interpersonal skills to the test. The maintenance manager stated that he kept his communication skills at the ready so he could prevent confrontations with or between patrons of the shopping centre from escalating: “You have to talk and get a few words out of them, then you know how to tolerate them or how to communicate with them”.

Refining his people skills was also paramount for the cabinetmaker, as customer service determined the extent of financial success he enjoyed both as a woodworker and as a landlord, another occupation he held in later life. In the day to day operations of designing and selling products for clients, “you tried to make them happy as you could”. Similarly, he endeavoured to adequately fulfill all of his obligations as a landlord: “the secret is to try to get good tenants and keep them happy, that’s another part, you know. If you’re happy as a tenant, you’re going to stay where you are”. However, the people skills necessary to lease property extended beyond maintaining renter satisfaction, and he insisted that one also needed to “be a good judge of character”:

You also have to be almost like a psychiatrist in psychology, let me tell you. You learn people like nothing else because you have to be able to sort through them, are they really honest or are they are they out just to get you.

Similarly, the palliative care nurse routinely drew upon intuitive skills to ensure patients' comfort and deliver the care they required. She often had to gauge the pain levels of patients who were reluctant to vocalize the discomfort they experienced and subsequently treat accordingly.

She described a particular case to highlight the importance of this skill:

She's got pain, she's been not telling me, but I can tell, I know, I've seen her little frown, I see her sitting up slow trying to change her position while I'm sitting there and I'm observing that. So she has pain now that she can't hide from me. She's hurting. She has morphine for it but she doesn't want to take it. So I go and do a little education talk about the addiction, because you don't get an addiction for taking morphine for cancer pain. And that's everybody's fear. So we had a little talk about that.

She also had to be incredibly perceptive of non-verbal cues when treating infants because "babies can't speak to you but you need to know when they are in pain". However, to be fully attuned to patients' needs she also had "to know when to back off". She explained, "when you come often they think they're sick", meaning that frequent visits could exacerbate patients' anxiety over their condition.

The golf course employee asserted that while he had "a good relationship" with colleagues at the club, social skills were also an important asset when interacting with customers on the course as he laughingly explained, "I'm a flirter. Chat up all the women, they all know me". He also recalled how as a business owner, he could summon problem-solving skills and quick wit in a bind. Rather than allow a problem to fester, he "could make an instant decision. I would get the input say from my salesmen and my service manager, if we were going to do something then bang! I would just make a decision". He also valued his willingness to accept responsibility and ability to promptly respond to errors: "the speed in making a decision and the speed if you make a mistake in correcting that decision, that's a successful way of running a business".

Taking the initiative to rectify problems was also demonstrative of leadership, which was another skill that many participants exemplified in their various professions. For instance, some respondents became pioneers in that they contributed to the development of their respective fields. The Italian consulate employee sought “to do something for the Italian community because literally there was nothing”, and thus she was responsible for establishing many services and initiatives that previously did not exist in the region including an Italian school, Italian entertainment, and Italian television program. The golf course employee “developed a lot of the products in the forestry industry” and considerably expanded the scope of operation to include an area that was “more than the whole state of Texas”. In addition, he increased revenue to the point where the company “dominated the market share” since “the sales at that time were about one and a half million, when I retired in 1989 the sales were up over twenty million”. Similarly, those in the health care field paved the way for the establishment of new departments within their facilities to allow patients to access cutting-edge technology and treatments. The palliative care nurse “was instrumental in starting up a palliative care program” while the physician collaborated with colleagues and “started up the hemodialysis unit”.

The cabinetmaker relied on leadership skills when instructing others; when an order came in, he then had to “apply the work to the guys that you’ve got working for you”. Similarly, the palliative care nurse was “trying very hard to train nurses to do paediatrics”. She invited aspiring young nurses to accompany her on appointments, as a way to “teach them and get them to come see what’s going on and mentor them”. However, the fitness facility attendant discussed how as a former police officer he did not have the luxury of enlisting the support of other colleagues. Instead, leadership in a law enforcement scenario meant that “*because* we worked by ourselves, and we were in smaller communities, you got to *handle* the *whole* situation. So if it was a

murder, *you* were the investigating officer, or if it was a fatality, *you* were the investigating officer” and “you took the whole investigation, start to finish”.

However, in other cases, workers supplemented extant abilities and acquired valuable skills through on-the-fly, experiential learning. For instance, the palliative care nurse asserted that the practical experience one gained from working in a bustling hospital could not be underestimated:

You have to work in it, go to one of the big hospital centres, like Sick Kids. I worked at Great Ormond Street in London, it's a world renowned hospital, and Sick Kids and, you have to work there and acquire the skill too.

Similarly, one could also acquire valuable competencies from the day-to-day operations of business ownership other than merely entrepreneurial savvy, as the cabinetmaker stressed:

“there's a lot of skills in business that you can't be taught anywhere else” and such experience “comes just by everyday dealing with people and the men that work for you”. Learning by doing was also the preferred approach for the former police officer and his instructors, as he explained why they were keen to “switch you over into uniform” and allow young civilian dispatchers to observe other officers serving in the field to gain “some sort of grounding in policing”:

You saw it from one side of it in the dispatching so that what they were trying to do was sort of groom you through a bit of a program in that okay, if you want to be a policeman, you know, I had a couple years to see what was going to happen or what type of job it was.

In addition, while he acknowledged that it was important to gain theoretical grounding in police work, he conceded that controlled education in a classroom setting did not entirely compare to the intense situations associated with active duty in which “you learned fast” and “you learned by the seat of your pants, no problem”:

Basically the three weeks of police school when I joined was that they were showing you the book work, they were showing you *where* to look for things in the law books...When you actually hit the bricks and were out on the street you

learned how to *do* things and, yeah, you know, it was a whole lot different than what was taught in the classroom.

In summary, this theme revealed that the task variety, challenges, and opportunities to employ skills associated with specific jobs and their environments infused participants' work experiences with meaning.

Theme 3 – Health: Participants rarely discussed their working experiences without discussing their health. For example, respondents frequently alluded to health as a primary indicator of “old age”, which would shape their lives as working individuals and for the lifestyles they hoped to maintain once they left the workforce. One female respondent, a seniors' personal support worker, acknowledged that physical ailments are a product of the aging process: “that comes with the age, the arthritis, so I might as well just accept it.” She went on to note that such conditions served as inherent reminders that she was growing older, stating “sometimes the body tells me that when I get my aches and pains.” Similarly, the day care worker asserted that her identity as an older individual became more apparent with the onset of health conditions like vertigo, as evidenced by statements such as “I think when I get sick or when I have my disease attacks, then I feel old,” and “it's when you get sick, that's when you see it.” In addition, the golf course employee expressed his frustration with the notion that later life entailed efforts to ward off potential health problems: “every time I'm going to have to go to the doctor's for something and buy a pill, I'll say oh my god, this is the Golden Years? This is a pile of garbage!” He also added that despite corrective or preventative attempts, declining health was a telling sign of old age: “once I got into my 65s areas, then my body deteriorated, I had two back surgeries, a knee replacement. And you don't end up like the bionic man, you just end up an old man with metal parts in.”

Several times, the conversation turned to how diminished cognitive capacity could betray people's aged identity to themselves as well as to others, and the potential consequences for their lives both on and off the job. The physician admitted that with advancing age, "the knowledge base may deteriorate". As a result, he acknowledged the importance of regular, formal assessments of his physical and cognitive capabilities:

Just like a driver's licence is over 80 I think they expect you to prove that you know the rules of the road. And I think that there's a certain realistic recognition of the facts of life when you get to be 70 or 80 you tend to, there is a danger of not knowing as much as you used to know.

Similarly, the day care worker recalled how in her experience as a former occupational therapist, "when you just talk to the elderly, they come across as being very competent" but "when you start digging a little deeper into their judgment, their judgment falters. And that means that their problem-solving skills are becoming very limited". Furthermore, the maintenance manager asserted that a loss of cognitive capabilities in later life was tantamount to a loss of independence and control and thus he stressed the importance of keeping one's brain agile and responsive to constant stimulation:

If you don't keep active, you slow down, but if you keep active you'll keep on the ball. And I think if the light bulb's on, you can see where you're going. But if the light bulb goes out, that's when you're going to end up sitting a chair going like this all day [rocks back and forth]. And I don't want that.

Participants also revealed the connection between health and work when they explained that they worked because their good health allowed them to do so. For instance, several respondents anticipated that the presence, worsening, or absence of physical and cognitive problems would affect their ability to remain in the workforce. The palliative care nurse attributed her ability to continue working to a lack of any debilitating condition, noting that "I'm lucky I'm healthy, and I can still get around". The seniors' personal support worker shared this

view, as evidenced by her claim that “I just feel good about myself, that I can still do, you know, I’m not physically or mentally like where I have to stay at home”. Conversely, the day care worker spoke about the severity of her health conditions, which sometimes forced her to temporarily cease working altogether: “the only time I think I feel it affect [work] is when I have a dizzy attack. Then I cannot work”.

Other respondents recalled changes they made in response to existing health problems that permitted them to continue working. The seniors’ personal support worker described how arthritis prompted her to transition “from full time to part time because it was painful”, while the golf course employee explained that his career change to a less stressful work environment was necessary as a result of major surgery:

I had a quadruple bypass. Even though I recovered 100%, my doctors, cardiologist, said ‘well, you’re going to be able to keep on working’, but there’s no way I could keep on working what I was doing.

Participants’ decisions to continue working in later life were also contingent upon a clean bill of health. According to the maintenance manager, “if I couldn’t do it, if I wasn’t feeling well I wouldn’t do it,” and in the cabinetmaker’s opinion, “as long as my I have the health I’ll keep working as long as I can”. The former police officer, current fitness facility attendant, and recipient of two liver transplants, reported: “I hope to be healthy enough to go until I’m about seventy years of age and then I figure I’ll reassess my health issues”. However, while he hoped to remain in the workforce, his intentions could change at the urging of loved ones, as he explained “my wife is very supportive that I’ve [gone] back to work and this sort of stuff but yet by the same token she also watches to see that my health is not being jeopardized by it as well”.

While participants voiced how their health might affect their willingness or ability to continue working, they also spoke of the implications work held for their health. For example,

facility upkeep provided opportunities to engage in daily exercise, and the benefits of doing so were obvious for the maintenance manager who claimed “I lost 35 pounds, by walking, a lot of walking”. In addition, work satisfied a yearning and a need for mental stimulation. According to the golf course employee, work “keeps you alert”, the maintenance manager noted, “I think it keeps your sanity”, and the day care worker insisted, “I honestly think your brain is much sharper as long as you’re working and thinking”. Similarly, the cabinetmaker elaborated that the intricate nature of woodworking “keeps the mind working”. He explained, “when we have to deal with cabinets and lay them out your mind has to have a little bit of sense about it”. In some cases, “it’s difficult, sometimes it isn’t but it keeps the mind working” and thus “anything that you have to think to do, helps your overall being”. In the same vein, the Italian consulate employee asserted that her previous work, editing a television show, required her to pay strict attention to detail. As the victim of a traumatic head injury many years prior, her “doctor says that it was actually very beneficial for me to be doing that work” since it helped to stimulate nerves in the brain. Likewise, the fitness facility attendant depicted his work as an ideal brainteaser since “it has that spin to it where it keeps your mind active, because you’re thinking all the time” about how best to assist customers, resolve issues, and navigate programs. He also discussed how the benefits of consistent mental stimulation he enjoyed at work extended into his daily social interactions:

It keeps me sharp in that issues, I want to say issues of the day, in other words worldly issues, things that are going on in the world... You watch the news, you read the newspaper because I want to keep up on current events so if somebody starts talking about something I don’t want to sound like I’m an idiot going, “oh, I don’t know *that!*”

Several participants also considered maintaining health as paramount to ensure the high quality of life they were accustomed to in their non-working lives. For instance, the golf course employee insisted that he “kept doing as much exercise as I could” while the maintenance

manager asserted, “as a rule I’m outside, I always like to keep going”. The palliative care nurse commented that one was sure to enjoy his or her later years “if you have your health and all that, and you can still do, and be independent”. According to the lawyer, maintaining good health in later life was a rather simple task that could be achieved “as long as you exercise and watch your diet.” However, in the opinion of the cabinetmaker, health issues barred some older individuals from enjoying the pleasures that should be afforded to them in post-retirement years: “unfortunately for a lot of people never get to that age, you know, never get there, you know for health reasons”.

As a recipient of two liver transplants, the fitness facility attendant could attest to the fact that maintaining health was a priority for both working and non-working older individuals. He effectively summarized this theme when he stated, “as you get older a lot centres around your health. And if you haven’t got it and I know now, if you don’t have your health, you haven’t got an awful lot”.

Theme 4 – Financial Circumstances: Participants’ experiences of work were closely linked to their financial circumstances. For instance, some participants acknowledged that work was a necessary activity to earn an income, attain basic necessities, and achieve a high quality of life. The cabinetmaker was a case in point who explained his rationale for renting out apartments, which he considered a second occupation: “I wanted to do it for investment, to make money, that’s the reason you do it”. This notion also rang true for the personal support worker who admitted, “all my life I’ve had to work, work, work”. Upon the death of her husband, she found herself “with five kids, a single parent”, “alone for a good eleven years” with a desire to “be more stable and more independent” and thus work was a necessity rather than an option.

The ability to maintain a financially-secure post-retirement lifestyle was another reason why she and others continued to work in later life as she declared “I like my money”, “I still need to try to put some money aside”, and “I’ve never had a lot of money in my life, and I just think that for me, this is time for me”. However, she did not regard her situation as unique and pointed out that “there’s so many single people or self-supporting people out there that they might have to work longer too”. The golf course employee agreed, stating, “some people, unfortunately, monetary, that’s why they have to go back to work, because all of a sudden you’re on a fixed income and the costs are increasing faster and your fixed income is dwindling away”. Concern regarding his individual finances led the golf course employee to also ponder whether retirement was feasible. He explained his viewpoint when the time came for him to bid farewell to the forestry equipment business: “you calculate how much money you’ve got and how much you’re going to earn from other, investments and, [I thought] oh hell I can retire and still keep my lifestyle”. Although his financial projections appeared promising, he jokingly reprimanded himself for retiring as he thought his finances could have fared far better had he continued to work when his children became self-reliant: “I wouldn’t necessarily have made a lot more money, but it would have been kept in my pocket instead of buying clothes for these kids!” Similarly, it was understandable that the cabinetmaker also worried about his post-retirement finances since as a business owner, he was no stranger to financial struggle. As a result, he touted the value of federally-funded retirement benefits, to which he did not have access and thus continued to work to earn disposable income: “I got no pension. You get a job like the city, or the hydro, or teacher, you got pensions, and in the end, that pension means a lot, let me tell you. It means a hell of a lot”.

On the other hand, a few respondents maintained that they continued to work in spite of attaining post-retirement financial stability. For instance, the golf course employee asserted that when he took on his part-time job, “it wasn’t for money, ’cause you don’t make any money at it”. Similarly, the palliative care nurse suggested that factors other than income compelled her to keep consulting on patients’ cases as she insisted “it’s not for money”. Money did not play a role in the maintenance manager’s reasoning either, which he made clear when he said “we don’t make a big wage over there, I didn’t go there for the money”. In addition, the Italian consulate employee reiterated that her decision to continue working was not financially motivated, stating “there is no money involved”, and “it’s not a paying job”.

However, several participants also could not deny that the continued income they garnered due to working in later life was useful. The personal support worker appreciated the flexibility to engage in leisure activities: “at least I have an income, if we want to go across to Duluth, I can do these things”, she said. The cabinetmaker added, “this little bit of a job here even though it’s not a big job, extra money comes in handy”. To the maintenance manager, some of the most important benefits that resulted from work included “paying your debts off, you know, like paying for what I own. Everything I own *I own*” as well as the fact that he “never collected unemployment insurance”. Furthermore, in his case, the supplemental income allows him to “go to the casino, help[s] pay for my cigarettes, [and puts] gas in my vehicle” without having to delve into other savings or investments. However, for the most part, the importance of money paled in comparison to intangible rewards one could derive from his or her worker identity.

Theme 5 – Purpose: Work afforded many participants a sense of purpose, which they exemplified in various ways. For some, this sense of purpose amounted to meeting a need. For

instance, the Italian consulate employee leveraged her position to address the lack of services available in her local Italian community. Given that “there were no television stations, no radio at the time that I was coming along” she launched her weekly Italian TV program. In her estimation Italian families were “doing so many other things with the kids they don’t have the time to teach the kids how to cook” and thus she established a school to do so. Finally when “the lady that was the Italian consulate quit” and “they needed somebody really badly”, she stepped in to fill the void. Similarly, the physician felt that the purpose of his continued involvement in internal medicine was to address a shortage of health care professionals in the field: “you are filling a need”, he commented. She went on to add that ensuring residents’ comfort and sharing in their joviality were reasons enough to continue working at the long term care facility. She reflected, “I love joking with these people”, and “if they’re happy and laughing, it makes me happy and I like that”. Other participants also commented that the opportunity to help people made their work meaningful and constituted a reason for remaining involved. While the physician acknowledged that his primary objective was to diagnose, treat, and heal patients’ ailments, at the same time he argued that it was up to health care providers to simply “do what you can do”. That is, he sought to empower people to gain control of their own health saying, “you help patients, but they really need to look after themselves as much as anything. So you try to help them but you try to help educate them as well as to what they can or cannot do”. In her role, the palliative care nurse extended comfort and support to both patients and their families because in cases of terminal illness, “people go through, client and family, emotional pain as well as physical pain”. She illuminated how her relationships with patients evolved using the case of a patient suffering from cancer, who began to rely on her visits for consolation: “it went from being ‘don’t want to see you every day’, to... ‘oh, it’s so comforting when you come’”. In

addition, she also revealed that the purposes of her role were the “need to love people” and the “need to care for people” when she described how she assuaged young patients’ fears of dying: “I had one thirteen-year-old boy say you know what is it going to be like, so I tried to tell him what I thought would happen”. She also attempted to alleviate families’ anxieties over the patients’ passing: “how do you prepare somebody for death, you can’t, you can guide them, tell them what to expect”. Upon the patient’s death, she offered assistance during bereavement process, as “it’s very solemn and very sad, but you’re there to support them and help them”. She revealed that a benefit to her lengthy employment as a health care provider included poignant moments and the bonds she shared with patients, as illustrated by the following anecdote about a young boy’s comment to his mother:

That little guy had told her, “I love my Aunt Jemima nurse”. Priceless eh? I *wish* he told me that when he was alive because he and I used to be on the floor some days I’d go. He had a hospital bed in his room, but you’d get down, you know you work with them wherever they are, they’re kids. And he always used to say “I love you,” “I love you”, you know, so cute. And he had a brain tumour bless his heart. But now, he was so cute and so brave right until the very end.

To her, the memorable time spent with patients outweighed the melancholic nature of the work. She was still able to find enjoyment in it, stating “good memories, good conversations, and sad conversations, a mix of everything but, the good ones are memories in my head, I remember them like I am there”.

The Italian consulate employee also cited helping people as the reason why she was hired and the reason why “I’d like to keep it”. She explained that “if I’m not there to help these people” they would have to carry out her responsibilities independently which would make obtaining their important documents considerably difficult. Her clients’ stories also resonated with her on a personal level because “every time I help somebody that was born in 1925 I feel

like I'm helping my mom". As a result, she asserted that "if I can just get one little old lady or one man that I help" then she served her purpose.

Similarly, for other participants, a sense of purpose manifested in the belongingness they experienced as a result of working closely with others, citing the "social aspect" to illuminate why work was important to them. In particular, some respondents especially valued the opportunity that work created to socialize with younger generations. For instance, the personal support worker stated, "I work with so many of the young ones here and it's good for me", while the golf course employee added, "what I really enjoy, really, really enjoy, I work with very young people". Furthermore, he continued to note how he appreciated the thoughtfulness of a young colleague who looked out for his well-being while on the job:

Oh this one young girl and she's one of the best workers out there. And she's a dream. She comes up, if I'm out then and I don't have my cap on she comes rushing out "[hey] get that cap on!"

In addition, the cabinetmaker was pleased that work allowed him to retain a connection to former social circles, noting, "I run into a lot of people, friends that I knew from the past, previous customers, and that's a nice thing you know, to be able to mix with people out there". Since he was employed in the customer service field, the fitness facility attendant described how his job encouraged him to engage with the community and keep abreast of local developments or current events:

It helps me you know maintain conversations with people, kind of keeps you in the day to day routine of what's going on and you just find out that the world is out there and it's spinning and you don't get locked in to a cocoon.

A couple of participants were adamant that work in later life was purposeful because it enabled them to remain productive members of their community rather than "sitting here breathing, taking up space sort of thing", since "if you just do nothing, basically, you're just wasting your time". The lawyer mused, "it's nice to be able to wake up in the morning, go and

do something of value, to you or the community”. Meanwhile, the fitness facility attendant was confident in his capabilities as an older worker, insisting that “I still feel that I have something to contribute, you know. For whatever reason and whatever it may be I can contribute, I’m going to try and contribute”. In addition, being regarded by others as able to perform a valuable function further elevated his self-esteem:

People still feel that I’m capable of being relied upon, which is nice to feel that they feel that I’m capable *of* contributing. My employer feels that sure, I’m as old as I am, but that I’ve still got something to contribute.

Another purpose he served in his role as a fitness facility attendant was “just being an example to younger people coming up” and for older retired individuals. He sought to remind older individuals that they “still have an awful lot to contribute to society”. Due to their wealth of experience and knowledge, older workers were valuable role models: “hopefully we can be a motivator you know for other people to say ‘yeah, let’s do the job’”. He also hoped to inspire “a little motivation for some people” to maintain their physical health:

They see me working in a fitness facility, they see that I’m familiar with the equipment, they see that I’m busy going here going there, I’m walking about the facility, up and down the stairs, then they see me walking out of the facility and hopefully, maybe what’s going through their mind is, “if he can do it, why can’t I?”...Maybe not working, but why can’t I do physical fitness?

Several participants described that they experienced a sense of purpose through work simply because it occupied their time. According to the maintenance manager, work was an ideal way to stave off boredom since it “makes your days go by, you know occupies the time”, “gives you something to look forward to”, and “you have something that you have planned in your life that you have to do”. Similarly, the child care worker believed that work was worthwhile since it “keeps you busy” and “there’s always something to get up for”. In addition, she thought work offered a means by which older individuals could maintain a familiar routine and monitor time’s

passage: “when you get old and you really are not working, keeping track of time becomes very difficult” in that “when it comes to the day, is it Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, if you’re retired, and you don’t read the newspaper, it’s really hard to know”, she explained. The cabinetmaker suggested that work “gave me something extra to do” that deterred him from indulging in activities he felt he should avoid: “it keeps me out of the coffee shops. Keeps me a little bit out of trouble”, he explained. Though the lingering effects of a head injury often kept her sidelined from certain social engagements, work gave the Italian consulate employee an ideal excuse to venture out: “I’m literally in the house, and if I keep working and I have to do things it gets me out of the house”, she stated.

This theme was also evident when participants described how their work aligned with their personal interests. For the golf course employee, joining the club as a staff member seemed the ideal way to mix business and pleasure. He described his reasoning when he made the decision to accept the job:

I would like doing that, because I love being outside. I said that’ll be good. And that’s basically why at least, that’s why I went back. It was as close to doing what I did when I enjoyed myself, as anything else.

Similarly, the woman employed with the Italian consulate stated that her enthusiasm for her personal hobbies bolstered her enthusiasm for her work. When she decided to organize events and bring in Italian singers, it was because “I love to do things like entertainment”. In addition, opening an Italian school seemed to be a logical step because “I always loved to teach kids”. She joined the consulate because “I really have this love of Italy” and the work “gives me the opportunity to keep it alive”.

In addition, work enabled participants to experience a sense of purpose in that they believed they were doing what they were meant to do. For example, the fitness facility attendant

discussed how he realized his love for his profession at a young age. He recalled how he pursued a policing career because he believed he was destined to do so:

My parents and others you know tell me that ever since they could remember, that's what I professed that I was going to be... I never went through this, doctor-lawyer-Indian chief-baker-candlestick maker sort of thing. Apparently when I was a kid I was going to be a policeman.

His childhood aspirations came to fruition and he did not deviate from the police force for thirty-eight years. His passion for law enforcement was apparent when he chastised himself for retiring at all: "I was stupid to retire in the first place". Another interviewee also indicated that he realized how important work was in his life once it was absent. The lawyer described how the more time he spent away from his law firm, he was only more eager to return to it: "after a long weekend, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, you're sort of getting itchy. It just didn't feel right".

Another instance of this theme emerged when several participants described how they derived a sense of personal fulfillment from their work. The majority of participants agreed that work, past or present, was an enjoyable pursuit, as illustrated by the following comments: "I loved what I did", "I'm very passionate about my job", "I love doing the work", "I really enjoyed doing that", and "I'm dedicated to what I do". In addition, the doctor asserted, "I think being a physician has been a very satisfying career". Furthermore, the cabinetmaker enjoyed reaping the financial fruits of his labour as evidenced by his comment, "there's a lot of personal satisfaction out of getting a job, customer's happy, pays you, that's something you can't buy". However, he also stressed the significance of intangible rewards:

I guess the biggest achievement could be said as having done something for people that they were happy with and that brought me personal satisfaction. That's about it. Whether it be music, woodworking, having performed what you're supposed to be doing and done it to an extent where the people were happy, and that brought the personal satisfaction.

Similarly, the fitness facility attendant illuminated a sense of pride stemming from his years of dedicated service: “I know that what I did and what I was called upon to do, I did to the best of my capabilities, that’s something important I’ve done”. Work was meaningful to the Italian consulate employee because it fostered an internal sense of completeness as she stated, “I think that it keeps me going” and “it helps me be me”. She added, “I find that if you don’t love your job, it’s easier to quit. But if you love your job, it takes awhile.” The palliative care nurse reinforced this notion, stating “if you love what you do, it doesn’t feel like work. And that’s the way I feel, I’ve never felt like I worked a day in my life”. To the cabinetmaker, the most important function of work was that it provided a constant source of motivation: “you have a reason for getting up every day. A reason for getting up every day”. However, it was the lawyer who succinctly yet eloquently appraised the sense of purpose that he and the other participants derived from work, stating “it makes life worth living”.

Theme 6 – Choice: According to several participants, going to work, especially doing so in later life, was ultimately a choice. For example, the cabinetmaker asserted that though one might feel the need to work due to a precarious financial position, the decision to do so or not is a matter of personal discretion:

Nobody can tell *you* that you’ve got to get up tomorrow morning, or don’t have to, even though you have to, but nobody can tell you. If you want to take a day off, you want to go to Duluth for a weekend, you can do it, and nobody can stop you from doing it.

Similarly, the fitness facility attendant concurred that while it was imperative to work to secure financial stability, he resolved to stick it out so as to not renege on his commitment to policing: “my family was younger, you’re the breadwinner. So, the option to say ‘shove it’, obviously was there, but that was a career that I had chosen, and I was staying with it”. However, while he acknowledged that a sense of responsibility bound him to his career, he conceded that he was

free to select a more suitable profession if he so desired: “I wasn’t forced into policing, I could have moved on to something else but again it was something I chose to do”.

His perspectives shifted post-retirement as he came to regard work as less of a make-or-break obligation. In fact, he did not hesitate to leave his job at the media office that he neither enjoyed nor needed in order to pursue his original career of choice, law enforcement: “that was one time where I did say to them, ‘hey you take this job and shove it!’ because I’m going back to what I know and what I love to do”. He hinted that he and other older workers also appreciated the option to vacate their positions without question in favour of more leisurely activities: “that’s something that you know for retired people is quite a stress relief off us of us that we have that option to say sorry, it’s time for an afternoon nap, and that’s what I’m doing”.

In the maintenance manager’s opinion, choosing to work was an obvious case of black and white, insisting that “what you want to do is what you want to do” and “if you don’t like it, don’t do it”. In addition, while he valued his current position, he also regarded work as an activity that he could cease on a whim: “I can phone in sick tomorrow and there’ll just be another guy in. Or I can say I don’t want to work tomorrow, which is the nice part”.

The luxury of choice enhanced participants’ work experiences in later life, as they indicated that they appreciated the freedom to design their roles and dictate how involved they wanted to be. Whether participants returned to work after a hiatus in retirement or soldiered on in their chosen profession, they rarely continued at the same pace or in the same role as when they first embarked on their career paths. For some participants, choosing to reduce their workload meant eliminating some of the complicated, hands-on tasks that they used to perform almost daily. For example, the nurse stated “I don’t do dressings and all those things anymore”, while the lawyer admitted “it’s the hands-on, that’s gone”. Others, like the personal support worker

asserted, “I don’t kill myself” since she dropped down to a part-time basis, whereby “in a pay period, there’s ten shifts for full-timers. I dropped down to about eight now” and she was content that “as I get older I’ll just keep dwindling down”. Similarly, the palliative care nurse took on fewer client cases directly and said instead that “I’m doing less, I’m only doing mostly consults”. The physician insisted that “I don’t work very hard any longer”, his “days are fairly free”, and “I don’t have an active schedule” because he kept direct involvement in patient care to a minimum and primarily assumed an advisory role. That is, in addition to attending the odd hospital team meeting or medical conference, he will “only take call after five o’clock at night, and then it’s mostly phone calls”. The cabinetmaker retained some of the responsibilities he carried out as a business owner, such as “the sales and if I get the job, I follow it up, make sure it’s done to the customer’s satisfaction”. However, at the same time, he was happy that the managerial duties fell to someone else: “the collection of the money, all that, the tough parts of the business, the hiring of the people, I have nothing to do with it”. He worked “strictly on a commission-sales” basis and was satisfied with the amount of business that he did or did not bring in: “if I get if I get an order here today, fine, if I don’t, fine too you know”. Similarly, once his fiftieth anniversary of law practice passed, an immediate decrease in responsibilities was in order for the lawyer, who “cut back right away”. This involved stepping down from a major role in his law firm and passing the torch to younger generations: “I gave up private practice really” in that “I’m no longer a partner, I got out of that end of it” and “let the young people in the office who wanted to do it, let them do it”. When he transitioned from retirement back to the workforce, the fitness facility attendant understood that “it’s a very limited part-time job”. He viewed his post-retirement employment in this way: “you are back, but not as much as what it was prior”. That is, the stressors he experienced in his post-retirement employment were minor since “you’re not

going back Monday to Friday eight to four, okay, but you're looking for something just to sort of keep the dust stirred up a little bit. Like I say I do two, maybe three days a week". In addition, the availability of day shifts and fixed schedule were appealing because "as a retired person it allows me to be there" and "my shifts can't be scheduled around which is what I love". The custodial position was ideal for the maintenance manager since "there was no pressure", he did not mind doing "stupid little things" like cleaning or repairs, he "didn't want to work fifty hours a week", and he "didn't want to do nothing physically". He also appreciated the "hell of a nice schedule" whereby he would "work four days on, six days off". Micromanagement on the part of supervisors was not an issue since "you did your own thing" and only "if you ran into a big problem, then you notify them". However, big problems were not likely to occur as he explained, "it's a relaxing job, you know. Like there's nothing that has happened over there that I can say I was excited about, other than a lady falling or you know somebody having an argument with each other". The fitness centre attendant effectively summarized how for the most part, while older workers cut back on specific tasks and vacated roles they previously occupied, their desire to be diligent workers remained unchanged: "although it may not be as I say at an executive type level, or running the ship sort of thing, but at least instead of being the captain, at least I'm still part of the crew".

However, the eventual choice to abandon ship was one that participants would soon face or possibly already had. As a result, they commonly spoke of how when the time came, they would intuitively know that permanent retirement was the right choice. For example, two interviewees expressed relief that they no longer endured the pressures of business ownership: the competitive market and dwindling consumer demand led the golf course employee to be

“glad I’m not in the business now”, while the carpenter reflected, “I got out just when it was time to get out”.

The day care worker described how uncertainty prompted her departure from psychiatry because she faced the potential closure of the building she worked in and she did not foresee an opportunity to retire in the near future: “It just seemed like I’d have to wait very long”, thus early retirement seemed like the ideal course. However, her decision to cease consulting shortly after was clear-cut; she decided to “back out because I don’t want to work” and “would rather help [my daughter] with the business than work out there”.

The personal support worker cited apathy and physical pain as “the signs I’ll look for” to signal to her that she should retire, as evidenced by statements such as “if my physical gets worse down the road” and ““oh darn it, I don’t want to go there!’ The day I start saying that, that’s the day I’ll quit”. Furthermore, she also mentioned she was likely to give up work if her compassion for those she was expected to help wore thin, stating “I think the day will come where I really find myself being short with these people, not having the patience with them”.

The palliative care nurse did not envision a firm target as to when she would withdraw from the workforce and insisted that doing so would be a fairly startling revelation as she explained, “I know one day, one day I’ll get up and say ‘okay, that’s it!’”. Conversely, other respondents preferred to bow out gradually as a scheduled end to a fixed term dictated their departures. According to the Italian consulate employee “you can only work ‘til you’re seventy” in the position she held, and “in two years I’m going to be seventy and I’d like to sort of go that way”. Similarly, the lawyer indicated, “I just don’t see me going past 2015”. An internal sense of readiness coupled with the impending deadline served to reinforce his belief that the right time to

call it a day was near: “it’s just a perception that I have that maybe by then it’ll be time...to say ‘asta la vista’”, he added.

Other respondents brought up unique circumstances that would delay or expedite their retirement. For example, the day care worker suggested that her choice to stop working would be based on the development of the centre: “I know my daughter wants to expand her daycare, and I think when it expands, then she’ll have to hire a cook”. In addition, the physician remarked that he would heed the advice of others if they deemed his performance to be substandard and subsequently encouraged him to retire: “I have a couple of friends that are younger people that I’ve said to them if you think I’m not practicing at a satisfactory level I want you to let me know”. Similarly, the cabinetmaker cited dwindling consumer demand as part of his grounds for retirement, stating “if the people don’t enjoy it it’s time to pack it up, quit you know”. In addition, he asserted that unpleasant clients could push him closer toward retirement as well: “you know sometimes you get a customer you’re not too happy with and things don’t work out too well and I say, do I really need this you know?”.

For the most part, participants conveyed that they had yet to establish a suitable time to retire and thus they intended to continue working until it arose. The personal support worker commented, “I think I’ll just keep plugging away” while the maintenance manager believed one should “go as long as you can go”. In addition, the day care worker and Italian consulate employee expressed similar intentions, stating “I’m going to work for as long as I can” and “I’ll keep doing it for as long as I can”, respectively. Giving up work did not appear to be an option for the golf course employee, who noted that he would quit “I suppose when I’m put in the ground”. The lawyer pictured retirement on the horizon, however not in the immediate future: “I’m in the pasture but they’re not making me eat yet”, he said. As for the fitness facility

attendant, he was proud of his willingness to continue “trying to do the best I can today”, explaining that “I just don’t feel that I am the type of a person that just wants to sit back and say that’s it”.

Theme 7 – Life Beyond Work: In this cluster, some respondents spoke from experience and others speculated about what the end of their working lives might entail. Some participants viewed retirement as a welcome opportunity to pursue other interests. For example, prior to accepting his position as a starter-ranger, the golf course employee asserted he would “golf four and five times a day” and enjoyed “fishing and travelling all over the place”. In addition, upon reaching his fiftieth anniversary practicing law, the lawyer suspected he “needed something beyond above and beyond the practice”. As a result, he began to “consider what else I might want to do” and decided that becoming a “small claims court deputy judge” would fit the bill. He also pondered leaving his current post with a law society and looked ahead to “a couple jobs, functions maybe, that I’d like to do”, such as serving on review boards or directorates. Similarly, the former lead hand took some time to try his hand at various forms of craftsmanship, explaining that “I used to work on boats, making lawn ornaments, ashtrays and all that” prior to settling in his current position as a maintenance manager. The day care attendant eagerly looked forward to her retirement from occupational therapy, because “my daughter back then was just ten years old, when I retired, and so I could do more things with her”. When she decided to vacate the casual position in her daughter’s care centre she would also enjoy “more time to myself” to pursue favoured pastimes such as sewing, reading, and gardening.

Participants also asserted that even for their friends and acquaintances, ceasing work did not equate to ceasing activity. For example, the physician was familiar with “people who have retired at sixty-five or even sixty” who have “been quite happy” and thus he was unconvinced

that “retiring is a bad thing by any means”. In addition, the fitness facility attendant described how his friends revelled in the free time that retirement guaranteed:

I remember fellas telling me, “oh look out, you know I’m going fishing, and I’m going golfing” and they do. Like they’re out there almost you know 365 days a year, they’re out there fishing. They could care less, they don’t want to go back working.

However, a sense of concern was also evident in some participants’ responses. There were fears that the novelty of the activities they highly touted would wear thin and according to the fitness facility attendant, over time retirement may lead to “sitting around, vegetating”. In the words of another participant, the lawyer, “you can only spend so many times going to the lake and into the water”. He went on to add that “you see a lot of people who just fall apart as they retire and they have no interests of any kind”. The cabinetmaker agreed, stating that some people may be ill-suited for retirement if they failed to maintain interest in hobbies or social connections:

When you get out of it you totally retire, you get into a shell, I know a lot of friends of mine that do nothing. And you can see it, like they don’t even get to mix with friends anymore because everybody is either passed on or they’re retired like they are, they go their separate ways. You’re not involved with the community as much, that’s the difference.

While he indicated that he did know some friends who were satisfied with their retirement, the physician also conceded that without work, isolation could be an issue for some people when he stated, “I certainly have had some doctors express the feeling that they have retired and they miss the contact that they had previously”. Similarly, the personal support worker assumed isolation would be the closing chapter to her working life, a fate that continued employment allowed her to avoid: “I’m not ready for that yet, I can’t see just sitting home in my apartment...what would I do sitting in my apartment, feeling sorry for myself?” In addition, according to the maintenance

manager, idleness could be an unanticipated consequence of retirement as he commented, “I think once that if you retire and you sit, that’s where you’re going to stay”.

However, some participants affirmed that life beyond retirement should be spent engaging in meaningful activities beyond one’s profession. For instance, the fitness facility attendant conveyed a sense of optimism when he considered how he would occupy his time in later years. He asserted that “just because I’m fifty-five plus” did not mean that he would “sit there and vegetate until the great, grim reaper calls me to the happy hunting grounds”. In the meantime, he was content with continuing to work, but had no qualms accepting that his working journey would eventually end: “yeah sure work and get prepared for retirement. That doesn’t mean that you’re going to die”. Similarly, the maintenance manager cautioned that one should devote his or her post-retirement years to activities that were personally meaningful, “because if you don’t do it you’re going to miss it. Then you say ‘oh shit wish I had done that when I was younger, or wish I had done that in my life now I can’t’, you know”. As a result, this theme reveals that while participants derived many benefits from continued employment, work was not all-encompassing to the point where its loss would impede them from enjoying their lives outside of it.

Theme 8 – Perceptions of Age: For some individuals, growing older assumed a negative connotation; aging was not a desirable process and thus they sought to distance themselves from the identity as an “old” individual. For example, the golf course employee was reluctant to admit to himself and to others that he was indeed old as he sheepishly said, “for some reason, I never put me in that category but I am” followed by “fortunately, most of the people they don’t think I’m as old as I am so I don’t tell them the opposite”. Similarly, the personal support worker implied a desire to retain mental and physical capacity as well as youthful vitality as evidenced

by comments such as “I hope I stay young” and “I hope I never feel like ‘oh my God, I feel so old’”.

In addition, some participants asserted that societal expectations abounded as to how people of certain ages ought to behave. For example, the personal support aide, palliative care nurse, and fitness facility attendant reported that upon discovery of their ages, people questioned their desire to continue working as if they believed retirement should have already occurred or they presumed plans to do so would materialize in the immediate future: “some people say, ‘oh when are you retiring?’”, “close to fifty years of doing this job you know people say ‘do you ever get tired of doing it?’” and “a lot of my friends will say, like ‘what!’ you know, ‘you’re retired! What are you doing?’”, they each remarked. The lawyer encountered similar assumptions within his social circle, and joked that his friends offered their thoughts on the type of job he was qualified to perform at his age: “they want me to become a greeter at Wal-Mart”, he quipped. While others offered opinions about what they believed were age-appropriate behaviours and professions for older individuals, participants also revealed popular assumptions that people of similar ages were bound to share similar experiences. For example, the Italian consulate employee speculated that most individuals reached a point at which they withdrew from community life and social activities: “once they’re home, they just sort of sit around” and “when they’re older and they give up, they won’t want to go anymore”. The personal support worker intimated that not only were there prescribed behaviours that characterized people of certain ages but also that these were abhorrent: “some of them [people] will even say to me, ‘oh my God you know well you don’t *act 65*’. Well I don’t want to act 65! I hope I never act 65!”, she said with disdain.

Conversely, a couple of participants asserted that age was not as significant as others made it out to be, and indifferently responded that aging was simply an inevitable, universal process. For example, the palliative care nurse frankly stated that aging is “just getting older, it’s the way it is” while the maintenance manager accepted the reality that age was “something that comes naturally I guess. Comes to you automatically”. In addition, from the perspective of several respondents, age as a concept had no meaning beyond numerical value. The palliative care nurse noted, “it’s a number, that’s all it is”, the day care employee asserted, “I think age is more, it’s a number”, and the fitness facility attendant elaborated that “as far as I’m concerned it’s a number” which “just tells me how long you’ve been here on this old earth”.

Furthermore, some participants voiced that they rarely, if ever, considered age in serious terms. Though he disputed the fact that he was “old”, the golf course employee also mentioned “age doesn’t bother me, I just never, never really think of it”. Another respondent who infrequently ruminated about her age included the day care employee who stated, “I don’t consider myself at 68 years old”. Similarly, aging did not appear to weigh heavily on the maintenance manager’s mind, as he said with a shrug that age should be a cause for concern among those many years his senior: “I think maybe if I was 90 I would be thinking about it. But in the age that I’m in right now, I don’t think nothing of my age really”. In addition, he denied that age would hinder his abilities or future plans asserting, “I don’t think age has, has no bearing on what I’m going to do”. On the rare occasion that he gave thought to age, the physician considered age in terms of its chronological nature and the blurred boundaries between milestones lessened their significance:

I don’t notice it myself, particularly. Somebody asked me that another time and I said ‘well I think of it as decades, but I haven’t noticed much difference between the fiftieth and the sixtieth decade and the seventieth and so I don’t really think of it’.

Some participants were convinced that one's mindset rather than the years under one's belt better described their lives as older individuals. For example, the maintenance manager asserted that asking individuals, "how do you feel" rather than "how do you feel at your age" was a more appropriate way to take stock of one's contentment in later stages of life: "I think how you feel, how you feel is better than age I would say. How do you feel. I wouldn't say how old are you?". Similarly, the personal support worker, day care employee, and Italian consulate staff member surmised that age was a subjective concept and that a positive attitude was enough to enable one to be chronologically old but not so in body, mind, or spirit. The personal support aide supposed that "age is just your frame of mind". The Italian consulate employee added, "I think it's what's in your head" that determines how age is enacted, and that "there's times that I feel I'm 25". Both she and the day care worker conveyed similar observations, stating "you're as old as you feel". Some interviewees insinuated that they expected to feel a certain way at their respective ages, and were surprised when such experiences did not transpire: "I don't even feel my age", said the palliative care nurse, while the day care worker noted, "I'm 68 and I don't feel I'm 68". However, a couple of interviewees remarked that their own awareness of their "oldness" came about when they considered their ages in relation to others. For example, the physician commented that one became alerted to his or her age when reflecting upon "your own social life, your friends are older and your children are grown up and have grandchildren". In addition, the day care employee insisted that she was alerted to symptoms of aging as a result of her daughter's concerns: "I start feeling old when my daughter tells me 'be careful, don't take the laundry basket down those steps'", or "do this, you going to fall, make sure you hold on to the banister when you're going down". However, she conceded that perhaps her daughter's

instructions carried some weight: “I think you know that kind of starts telling you, okay, you know what, you’ve got to be watching out it’s your age”.

However, some participants sought to contradict the notion that their age confined them to a fate of automatic deterioration and inactivity. For instance, the lawyer, fitness facility attendant, and maintenance manager called attention to the fact that diminished bodily capacity was not exclusively reserved for old age. They stressed that physical and cognitive deterioration afflicted even people considered “young” by societal standards, as captured by their comments, “people who are eighty act like fifty year olds, and some fifty year olds are like eighty year olds”, “I know a fair number of people who just don’t age very well”, “there are some people that you know in their forties that for whatever physical or mental reasons they’re not capable of doing what I’m doing”, and “there’s a lot of people that are forty years old that are no good, they can’t do nothing. You know what I mean they’re in rough shape” and they would “think we’re fortunate to be 65 and 75 and that age and be able to do stuff”.

In addition, the maintenance manager also contended that when people arrived at particular ages they did not share universal experiences: “[at] 65, how am I supposed to feel?” Furthermore, the Italian consulate worker offered a unique perspective regarding aging and long term care facilities, as she pointed out that not all older individuals opposed the idea: “I’m looking forward to going in an old folks’ home”, “I won’t mind going”, “I’m looking forward to somebody cooking my meals”, she explained. Likewise, the fitness facility attendant hoped that his experiences would compel people who might be too cavalier about dismissing older individuals as insignificant and unproductive to reconsider: “hopefully that helps the consensus that because you’re retired oh you’re an old folk, you know just push him off somewhere, put some slippers on him, wrap him in a blanket and that’s you know, let him go”.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Essence of Older Individuals' Work Experiences

The development and maintenance of professional identity during the course of one's working life occurs in the midst of intervening factors such as context, chance, and other people. When one discovers his or her niche, the meaning of work eventually evolves from something one has to do to become something he or she loves to do. Task variety ensures that work does not become mundane, and training opportunities as well as novel situations challenge one to acquire and sharpen invaluable skills. Continuing to work satisfies the needs to fulfill a purpose, engage in social interaction and to make a demonstrable difference in one's community, which are especially strong in later life. Although work becomes a priority around which one organizes his or her time and in which he or she invests much energy and emotion, the older worker strives to prevent work and home lives from intersecting because he or she considers the domestic sphere to be a source of respite from professional obligations. The significance of monetary incentives, once regarded as the primary reason to pursue work in order to support oneself and family, is eclipsed by other benefits derived from work such as the opportunity to maintain fitness. Preserving one's health comes to the forefront as fears of corporal and cognitive deterioration over time are dominant in later life. As such, work represents the ideal source of mental and physical stimulation required to keep age-related health problems at bay.

Whether they retire and return to begin a new occupation or linger in the same profession over time, older workers favour lax work environments in which they can provide input as to the terms of their employment, which include scaling back one's roles, responsibilities, and schedule. They also value the liberty to cease working at any time they deem appropriate, since they are not constrained by financial needs or unwavering allegiance to their occupations, and

they can be swayed to do so if work conflicts with other more important priorities and interests. Thus the experience of being an older worker is predicated on an inherent understanding and acceptance that it will eventually come to an end. Some older workers are reluctant to disengage from the working world, which they see as tantamount to forfeiting one's claims to ability and productivity, thereby bringing them closer within the territory of "old age". However, many older individuals are content to renounce work-based roles and responsibilities because after a full and satisfying career, they still retain the same determination to be hopeful, useful, and helpful in other capacities. To them, age is merely an afterthought and social perceptions that restrict age to a limited array of experiences, identities, or roles have no bearing on the way they intend to reinvent their identities as older individuals no longer engaged in the working world.

5.2 Findings in the Context of Literature

While it is clear from literature that experiences of older workers, and older individuals in general, continue to be negative largely due to the stigma and stereotypes that others rely on to assess their social usefulness and value (Tougas, Lagacé, De la Sablonnière, & Kocum, 2004), this was not as apparent for the respondents in this study. It may be noteworthy to some that the participants did not elaborate further on the unpleasant occurrences they experienced at work, or even the stigma they experienced or expected to encounter as they grew older. Indeed, some critics may question whether the participants really "chose" to work at all, since it follows that if one wants to be perceived as young, then one should do as the young do, which includes working. And, by their own admission, some respondents indicated that they did not want to be labelled as "old". However, when participants proclaimed that they did not want to be regarded as old, they did not mean they longed to be part of a younger generation that they revered and assumed would offer them more social prestige or respect. Instead, they wished to avoid bodily

and cognitive decline as they aged, and continuing to work enabled them to do this. As a result, for the participants in this study, continuing to work was not part of an elaborate strategy to resist their true ages and reclaim an unrealistic, unattainable, youthful identity, as social identity theory might suggest. As Simpson, Richardson, and Zorn (2012) put it, they were finally engaging in work that they *wanted* to do, rather than *had* to do, and they intended to do it for as long as they could. They did not seek consent from their peers to continue to work, they expected no validation from others for carrying on, and their decisions to resign would be solely their own, rather than driven by raised eyebrows among their employers or younger co-workers.

In relation to the theoretical perspectives framing this thesis, the study was grounded in identity theory, life course perspective, and continuity theory. What is clear from the results of this study is that work is meaningful for older individuals because it fulfills a need and desire for continuity between a lived past and current reality, which is a unifying theme among the three theories of human development that frame this study. These theoretical understandings are related because they each emphasize the idea of continuity – of behaviours, of personal histories, and self-understandings – despite the effects of change and time’s passage, social relationships, individual decisions, and contextual influences. Interview responses and emergent themes derived from the data revealed that maintaining continuity between personal understandings, others’ perceptions, outward behaviours, remembered selves and present realities were all at the centre of work experiences in later life.

Identity theory:

At the heart of identity theory is the idea that cognitive processes and social structure influence behaviour, which in turn is said to reflect identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). Stets and Burke (2000) write that “the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that

role and its performance” (p.225). Roles deemed to be important indicators of the type of person one wishes to exemplify become part of a salience hierarchy. This means that particular identities are more relevant than others because people endorse one’s occupancy of that role, or one experiences positive feelings as a result of claiming that identity, and these factors affect the likelihood that one will exhibit an identity in certain situations.

In this study, being an older worker certainly meant performing behaviours and displaying characteristics consistent with those expected of their worker roles across a diverse range of circumstances, such as responding to challenges, empathizing with others, and solving problems. For instance, even though his responsibilities were fewer in his new role, the fitness facility attendant was committed to meeting the standards set out by his employer: “the obligation *isn’t* as time-consuming, but yet it still *is* there, you know, that you’re expected to do certain things”. Additionally, being an older worker was about keeping the identity that participants believed best demonstrated their self-worth, value, and capabilities to themselves and others close at hand, or high in the salience hierarchy. In doing so, they could suppress the age-related doubts of others that questioned their capabilities and suitability in the work environment. For example, in the case of the personal support worker, the purpose of her position was twofold in that she provided an essential service but in doing so she enriched the lives of many others:

I feel like I’m useful to people, like you know, like some people will say to me, ‘I could never do your job. You know, I could never change somebody’s Depends and I can’t do this and that.’ And I say, I don’t even think of stuff like that, like to me, it’s a career, it’s a job, it’s a profession. Somebody’s got to do it, you know, and I’m glad I can help people, and I’m glad I can do this job.

Thus, the positive feelings and self-esteem older individuals derived from their worker identities, via filling a need, helping others, and contributing productively to society, ensured that

it remained salient. However, participants were also cognizant of the appropriate environments in which to enact their salient worker identity and thus they made sure to draw clear boundaries between professional and personal realms, which the palliative care nurse reflected when she stated, “in any job I’ve done or any place that I’ve worked, I learnt very early in my career that when I’m off that’s my time”.

Another way that the concept of salient identity is applicable to the findings involves older workers’ health. Though it was difficult for participants to admit, health concerns prompted them to acknowledge that their “aging” identity could also be as salient as their worker identities. In other words, since “the self is multifaceted, made up of interdependent and independent, mutually reinforcing and conflicting parts”, health problems, which they considered to be typical of an aging identity, affected their worker identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.286). For example, the fitness facility attendant indicated that he would interpret his body’s physical cues as an indication he should let his worker identity yield to his aging identity:

If I feel that it’s too much, things are too much to handle and I find that I haven’t got the patience or for whatever reason, I’m older and I’m finding that it’s just a little too stressful to handle, then probably I’ll back off.

“Backing off” meant dropping to a part-time basis, pursuing a less demanding field, or electing to retire altogether if health problems persisted. However, at the same time – worker identity continued to be salient because health allowed it to be, offering the intellectual and physical stimulation required to prevent the onset of decline participants perceived to be common to old age.

Finally, another important premise of identity theory indicates that if people detect that there is incoherence between the way they view themselves and the way others regard them, they will attempt to bring internal self-perceptions in line with the perceptions of others (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Burke, 2000). As stated earlier, to enact a worker identity is to display the

qualities one believes to denote a worker, to behave in ways that fulfill job-specific requirements set out by employers, and ensure that their characteristics and conduct are consistent with organizational or employer expectations. In this study, while participants did attempt to incorporate behaviours that were more in line with others' expectations rather than their own dispositions, such as adapting to technology required to perform their jobs, when external expectations and internal perceptions no longer aligned, participants focused more on changing the situation to suit their needs. They enacted their worker identities less often (reduced workload), they enacted worker identity elsewhere (got a new job), or they ceased enacting worker identity altogether (vacated roles or retired). It was this ability to remain in control over their worker identities, to decide whether they would work down to the wire or bow out gracefully on their own terms, which truly set their later life work experiences apart from those in their younger years. As the fitness facility attendant explained, for he and many of the participants, later life work is "not as stressful, because I don't have to be there, I've *chosen* to go back into the workforce, and I know that any morning that I wake up and I think, 'shove it,' I can".

Life course perspective:

Participants' experiences were also consistent with the central tenets of life course perspective. While this framework proposes that people grow and change from birth well into the later stages of life, at the same time, people exert control over their lives through deliberate action and choice (Elder, 1994; Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2002). Indeed, participants' decisions to remain employed, re-enter the workforce, or retire completely whenever they deemed appropriate for their individual circumstances demonstrate that "older adults are in a position to make choices about how they spend their time in later life" (Bambrick

& Bonder, 2005, p.78). For instance, in the maintenance manager's view, the decision to continue working or embark on the road to retirement boiled down to personal preference: "go, because you want to go. If you don't want to go don't go. You know, if I feel like it I will. If I don't, I won't", he commented.

Another life course proposition suggests that people's lives are irrevocably bound to the historical times and places in which they are born, but that "the same events or experiences may affect individuals in different ways depending on when they occur in the life course" (Elder, 1994; Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2002, p.12). Indeed, the interplay of chance, social relationships, and individual choice against a backdrop of broader historical context ensured that each participant's career history was unique. For example, social conventions across the pond required the golf course employee to commit to a career path and stick with it as he remarked, "when I was 15 years and two days old, I finished [school] on a Friday and I started work on the Monday". Conversely, the palliative care nurse enjoyed greater flexibility in Canada and she dabbled in different health care specializations, such as midwifery, until coming across palliative care: "I just got into it, I didn't know it was the field for me", she explained. Whether social expectations coerced them to begin work at a young age, tragedy prompted them to seek work to make ends meet, a friend's casual remark encouraged them to pursue a career, economic upturn and downturn rendered the future of their business uncertain, or they spurned academics and chose to work from the get-go, it was clear from the participants' stories about their working lives that "though people may share the same nominal identity they may have very different experiences of it" (Hockey & James, 2003, p.201). As a result, participants' experiences contradict the idea "that the life course has an inscribed and natural 'order of things'" (Hockey & James, 2003, p.84). Instead, their continued presence in the workforce and determination to

withdraw on their own terms are demonstrative of the “collapsing of age-based distinctions” that previously barred people’s access to social spheres or imposed certain identities on them when they reached a certain age (Hockey & James, 2003, p.102; Kaufman, 1986; Sherman, 1994).

Continuity theory:

Finally, literature and the findings in this study both indicate that continuity is an important feature of individuals’ experiences of work in later life. Continuity theory states that people are compelled to employ strategies to maintain the status quo in certain domains of their lives in which age-related changes are bound to occur. Much like identity theory, continuity is about people making sure how they think, feel, and act in later life is congruent with the ways that they have always done. However, in doing so, there is important recognition that “aging produces changes that cannot be completely offset, so there is no going back to the prior state” and thus the goal of ensuring continuity is embracing and adapting to change, rather than avoidance or prevention (Atchley, 1989, p.183).

Over the course of their lives, people accumulate a wealth of experiences, knowledge, skills, and memories that become part of their “remembered inner structure” (Atchley, 1989, p.184), “psychological patterns” (Atchley, 1993, p.7), and “mental constructs” (Atchley, 1993, p.15) that make up internal continuity. Maintaining this sightline with the past allows one to envision his or her future as “this evolving body of self-information is used to invest selectively in an array of activities that we expect to serve as part of our future self” (Atchley, 1993, p.15). At the same time, people endeavour to establish external continuity through behavioural techniques such as frequenting well-known environments, nurturing relationships with familiar people, and carrying out activities uninterrupted that they have done for years (Atchley, 1989;

Atchley, 1993, Atchley, 1999). Both inner and outward continuity render the changes that accompany aging, like retirement, more manageable and tolerable.

In the context of this study, work remained both a strategy to maintain continuity and a source of continuity for older individuals. In terms of external continuity, prolonged employment fostered continuity of relationships via social interaction with customers, supervisors, and colleagues, and also ensured that the routines around which participants structured their daily activities persisted. For instance, the external continuity of routine, interests, and relationships that could be derived from work was best exemplified by the golf course employee when discussing the reasons that compelled him to return to work: “I knew 90% of the people who golf there, and I love the outdoors, I love talking to people...So that was the primary reason, just to go back, and enjoy the outside and enjoy people”. In addition, extended workforce participation created opportunities for intellectual and physical stimulation, which prevented existing health complications from worsening and delayed potential conditions from arising, thereby enabling participants to achieve continuity as far as their health was concerned. While most participants were not obligated to continue working due to unstable financial circumstances, they were reassured to know that supplemental income would help them maintain continuity in terms of the lifestyles to which they had become accustomed. For example, according to the maintenance manager continuing to work strictly to earn money was futile, because in his opinion “when you get a certain age if you’re not a millionaire you’re never going to be one”. However, he did concede that “having things is the nicest thing” and work “gives you a little bit of spending money” required to obtain them. Furthermore, since they could hold a position that incorporated their preferred recreational interests, like golfing or Italian culture, work provided continuity between the activities they enjoyed as both working and non-working individuals.

Internal continuity also emerges when individuals elect to carry on with “business as usual” in later life. For the group in the current study, work experiences were enriched through continuity in that they could continue to consider themselves as productive members of their society rather than a burden on their communities. The importance of continuity in contribution is reflected in the fitness facility attendant’s comments that:

I’m still healthy enough and I still feel that I’m active enough and I still feel that I’m competent enough that I can contribute. Albeit not at the level I used to be when I was 25 or 30 years of age, okay, but I still can contribute.

As a result, continuing to work enabled them to remain attuned to the thoughts they had about their own usefulness and capabilities, thereby keeping a safe distance between themselves and what they thought the aftershocks of a significant age-related change like retirement might be, such as isolation, physical and cognitive decline, and boredom.

However, contrary to what the name and tenets of continuity theory connote, for the participants in this study there were limits to the extent of continuity they could derive from continued participation in working life. That is, work offered only a temporary connection to former selves and present realities; upon reaching a certain point, such as a self-imposed chronological deadline, dwindling interest or skill, or a sudden epiphany, participants would depart from working life and need to seek continuity from other sources. As a result, continuity could take on new meaning for some participants in that they thought “a strong and consistent sense of self, high morale, and consistent lifestyle structures” could endure age-related changes (Atchley, 1999, p.96). As the day care worker put it:

Your life is not just *working*. You’ve got to enjoy it. And I want to enjoy it while I can. If work was not there I would have found something else to do, volunteer work, or something else to keep you active and busy.

As such, there was no need to exert extra effort to maintain continuity as participants believed aging would restrict their lives no more than it currently did, and they would be able to explore new horizons of who they were outside of their work. In transitioning easily from one identity to another, such as worker to retiree, and seeking other enjoyable activities to fill the void, they showed that they embraced future uncertainty and prepared for change rather than fixated on the past.

Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks

This study was prompted by a desire to understand the experiences and meanings for older individuals actively involved in various forms of work beyond an age socially perceived as appropriate for retirement in a relatively small corner of the vast province of Ontario. My research set out to explore two research questions: 1) How do a group of older workers in Northwestern Ontario experience work?, and 2) What is the importance of continuity in work experience for older individuals?

Since my goal entailed “describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” the topic best lent itself to a phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2007, p.58). Interviews with a group of older individuals revealed “the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon” (van Manen, 1997, p.2). Ultimately, in response to the first research question, contextual forces influenced the construction and maintenance of participants’ professional identities throughout their lives. When participants discovered a position they deemed worthy of occupying, they became deeply attached to the variety of responsibilities, opportunities for education, skill-testing challenges, social interaction, and sense of purpose afforded by that work. Though disposable income was a welcome benefit to working, work also offered a means to exercise their minds and bodies. Without such mental and physical stimulation, participants feared imminent decline would occur with advancing age. They sought laidback work environments with fewer responsibilities that still enabled them to perform a valuable function, and appreciated the freedom to decide when they had enough. For the most part, professional identity was one aspect of the self among many others, and participants were confident that they would find as much meaning in their lives as non-working individuals as much as they did as members of the working realm.

In terms of continuity, what is clear from the current study's findings is that continuing to work was one available strategy that enabled older individuals to cope with anticipated age-related changes and those in progress. The individual career journeys of older workers seemed to centre on a common theme, which was continuity between how they felt and what they did. Work was meaningful to them because it created coherence between past and present experiences, routines, and identities, and allowed them to delay the perceived negative effects of retirement. They were appreciative of the skills they gained during their working lives and derived a sense of pride that arises from not only pulling one's own weight but also doing something "that had some inherent usefulness or made a contribution" to their community (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005, p.81). In many ways, older individuals still felt like the spry, productive, passionate workers that they were in their early years of employment so they wanted to continue to engage in activities that would expend their energy, time, and skills in a meaningful way. However, older workers generally accepted and by extension, welcomed, eventual retirement so they could discover continuity through other interests, thereby demonstrating their ability to "move on in life without having their eyes stuck to the rear-view mirror" (Quinodoz, 2009, p.92).

Overall, identity theory, life course perspective, and continuity theory were ideal choices to describe the experience of being an older worker and to explain why the participants in this study behaved the way they did at this point in their lives. In addition, while the proponents of continuity theory adamantly insist that it is not a theory of successful aging, this research demonstrates that the central tenets of identity theory, life course perspective, and continuity theory can be interpreted as a prescription for how to age well when taken together (Atchley, 1993; Atchley, 1999). That is, for the participants in the current study, the ability to enact

familiar behaviours, in familiar environments, with familiar people through work, to express who they were and who they have always understood and valued themselves to be over the course of their lives, enhanced their experiences in later life. Continuing to work was not a default choice they automatically made in order to cope with age-related changes; it was a deliberate choice because they felt continuity of their worker identities would support their physical and cognitive health as well as sense of self-worth, or in other words, help them to age healthily.

The study also advances my chosen theoretical framework in that it extends the boundaries of these theories' application to a unique context where they had not been previously employed, which encompasses both the geographical area in which the research was conducted and the sample from which data was collected. Thunder Bay is a somewhat isolated city in Northwestern Ontario that faces unique opportunities and constraints including a declining overall population, growing number of seniors, and a relatively low unemployment rate. My sample was an "in-between group", comprised of individuals who were not quite baby boomers, but who, with the appropriate precautions and supports, could potentially live well into their 70s, 80s, and 90s – a good 20 or 30 years beyond their eventual age of retirement, which is a long time to spend outside of the working world. As a result, this specific population is positioned to make substantial contributions to their local economy by remaining gainfully employed. Combining identity theory, life course perspective, and continuity theory offered a glimpse of how working in later life offered these participants "new pathways for (re)negotiating their continuing contributions to society and the economy" and what this experience meant to them, which is important in order to continue encouraging them to remain active in the community and ease pressures on local health services (Simpson, Richardson, & Zorn, 2012, p.431).

My study also advances communication research by shedding light on an infrequently studied group, seniors in the workforce, and by creating opportunities to further explore how their identity-related processes are connected to imminent health and policy interventions in Northwestern Ontario. Understanding more about older workers' identity in relation to work could help municipal and provincial governments better address their needs with respect to designing training initiatives, devising incentives for employers to hire members of this group, and creating positions that meet their expectations for both employment and enjoyment in later life (Walker, 2006). In addition, communication campaigns could be devised to motivate older individuals to continue to work based on key messages including: work helps inoculate against physical and intellectual decline, ensures active engagement in the community, and may serve to keep older individuals out of long-term or acute care.

From an organizational standpoint, this research gathered insight into older individuals' valuation of worker identity which may help employers develop strategies to best meet this group's needs and interests on the job and enhance efforts to assist them in adapting to contemporary work environments (Yeatts, Folts, & Knapp, 2000). The continued participation and adaptation of senior workers could potentially help employers avoid "added costs of hiring and training new employees and the loss of expertise that often is difficult to replace" (Yeatts, Folts, & Knapp, 2000, p.566). In addition, this research gives rise to further explorations of the meaning of worker identity to older individuals and subsequent implications for organizational loyalty and behaviour, which may counter literature that argues older employees are less physically and mentally healthy, are likely to resist change, are less productive, and are difficult to train (Buyens, Van Dijk, Dewilde, & De Vos, 2009; Walker, 2006).

This research also gives insight into other potential supportive interventions to help seniors get the most out of their later years. Additional research about older individuals in the workforce may serve to dispel stereotypes that seniors are merely drains, burdens, or takers of public services, and instead demonstrate that it is possible for them to “be seen as assets rather than costs in relation to the ‘problem’ of ageing societies” (Simpson, Richardson, & Zorn, 2012, p.432). Continuing to ask seniors about their experiences in later life shows that their participation in research is worthwhile, their insights valuable, and their ideas seriously considered. This in turn may change seniors’ lines of thinking that question whether “[they] are too old to be doing many of the things [they] secretly dream of doing”, including continuing to work (“Living Life”, 2009, p.1).

6.1 Limitations

From a design standpoint, while the researcher maintained a balance between male and female respondents, all participants came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, another potential limitation is the lack of consistency in the sample. That is, the results of the study may have been different had there not been such diversity in the types of work the respondents pursued in my sample (i.e., volunteer work versus paid work, the same profession versus a new field). However, this presents opportunities for expanding the research in the future. In addition, because of the contentious nature of continuity theory among gerontological researchers, its application in this study may be considered by some to be a limitation.

In terms of logistical limitations, while conducting interviews in their homes was convenient and comfortable for participants, environmental hazards occasionally occurred, such as phones ringing or pets entering the room which interrupted their train of thought and may have caused them to overlook an important part of their response to the interviewer’s question.

Unfortunately, one of the common pitfalls of interview research arose in the form of technological malfunctions during two of the interviews. Despite the researcher's best efforts to amplify volume and improve the quality of the audio, static interference in the recording made transcription especially difficult and rendered parts of some of the participants' responses inadmissible as they were inaudible, thereby causing the researcher to exclude potentially significant themes or insights.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Avenues for future research include replicating the study with baby boomer workers on the cusp of their retirement. Given industry experts' projections regarding the strains of an aging population on social systems such as federal pension benefits or housing for the elderly, and the subsequent increase of the age of eligibility for Old Age Security ("Old Age Security", 2012), baby boomers' perceptions of work and retirement may be different based on the socioeconomic climate in which they live. In addition, my study focuses on the meaning of worker identity to older individuals residing in an "advanced, modern industrial" city (Gill, 1999, p.726). As a result, it would be interesting to compare older workers' perceptions of work where the economic need to work may be direr.

Considering the ever-changing workforce, ever-graying population that comprises it, and the lack of research that allows older individuals to articulate what it means to identify as part of this group and make the transition beyond it, "the combination of social challenges, inadequate resources for conventional retirement and the growing number of older people invites reconsideration of the contributions older people make for themselves and to society" (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005, p.83; Hockey & James, 2003; Kooij et al., 2008; Noonan, 2005). As a result, more attention needs to be paid to what these contributions mean to older individuals' well-being

in later life, and how to cultivate more opportunities for these types of meaningful participation and engagement so that they can remain active in the community, which is often where they prefer to be.

6.3 Significance of the Study

The value of this study can be judged in its attempt to bridge a gap in existing literature pertaining to the “little-understood demographic group of older workers”, the processes of maintaining professional identity in contemporary work environments, and the importance continuity to their work experiences (Noonan, 2005, p.237). In addition, this study adds to a small pocket of research encompassing “different life stories and experiences that raise a number of issues about how work is defined and conceptualized” (Taylor, 2004, p.36). It reveals that older individuals’ “working lives do not necessarily end at retirement” or at any particular age and thus challenges traditional conceptualizations of workers that extol young professionals and middle-aged adults as the most coveted members of the labour force (Taylor, 2004, p.38).

Furthermore, policymakers are saddled with the task of reducing the pressure of an aging population on federal benefit systems, social services, and public programs. While it is ambitious to suggest that this study puts them closer to accomplishing this lofty goal, it does offer valuable, albeit limited, perspectives about what factors are likely to coax older individuals out of retirement or cause them to delay it, which is an ideal starting point. That is, participants in the current study illuminate some of the lived pasts, current realities, and needs or desires of older individuals at work as well as the value they ascribe to professional identities, which may help human resource departments or hiring managers to tailor specific jobs and “recruitment and retention efforts” to suit their preferences (Smyer & Pitt-Catsouphes, 2007, p.28). Furthermore, in light of the mental and health benefits participants in the current study derived from work,

research of this nature may also inspire caregivers, health and wellness centres, or long term care facilities to establish more opportunities for older individuals to engage in meaningful work, even if it is not within the realm of paid employment, in order to ensure “good health, life satisfaction, and longevity” (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005, p.77).

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Appendix A

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Each Participant

P#	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Health Conditions	Education	Current Profession	Past Profession(s)
1	Male	77	Caucasian (British)	Congestive Heart Failure	Technical College	Starter Ranger (Golf Course)	Army Service, Engineering Draftsman, Project Engineer (Heavy Equipment – Rockets), Engineer (Canadian Car Division), Retail Salesman (Heavy Equipment), Business Owner (Forestry Equipment)
2	Female	65	Caucasian	Arthritis	Partial High School, College (PSW Course)	Personal Support Worker	Teacher's Aide
3	Female	78	Black (Barbadian)	None	University (Lakehead, UK)	Palliative Care Nurse	Midwife
4	Male	81	Caucasian	None	University (Toronto)	Bencher for Law Society, Lawyer	Lawyer (Real Estate Law)
5	Female	68	Indian	Vertigo	University (India)	Child Care Worker (Day Care)	Occupational Therapist, Psychiatry
6	Male	75	Caucasian (Italian)	None	High School	Cabinetmaker	Cabinetmaker/Business Owner
7	Male	67	Caucasian	2 Liver transplants	High School, OPP Training School	Fitness Facility Attendant	Police Officer, Media Relations Professional
8	Male	78	Caucasian	None	University (Toronto, McGill)	Physician	Physician
9	Female	66	Caucasian (Italian)	Brain Injury	Elementary	Italian Vice Consul	Schoolteacher
10	Male	70	Caucasian	None	Partial High School	Maintenance Staff	Lead Hand (Sewer & Water), Paper Mill Employee, Property Maintenance

Appendix B – Composite Textural & Structural Descriptions

Composite Textural Description

Being a worker in later life included rejoining the labour force, often after one's initial retirement and in a different role than previously occupied, as well as continuing along his or her preferred career path. In either case, participants elected to reduce their workload by dropping to a part-time, casual, or consulting basis, by relinquishing managerial positions, and by avoiding labour-intensive or challenging responsibilities. In their redefined working roles, while respondents benefitted from training they received during their former careers, they frequently expanded existing knowledge by attending seminars, completing courses, and keeping up-to-date about developments in the field. However, some expertise could not be gleaned from a book, classroom, or course and only materialized as a result of immersion in the work and its associated environment. As a result, participants often relied on and expanded their repertoire of skills while on the job, including but not limited to sociability, intuitiveness, and leadership. Having prior knowledge, training, and practical experience in their arsenal prepared respondents to tackle the variety of tasks, circumstances, and challenges they encountered in a given day.

The interaction of various forces and a broad spectrum of people ensured that there were no shortages of adverse circumstances in which participants could apply their problem-solving skills. Challenges manifested in different ways, including taxing work environments, bureaucratic procedures, complicated technological innovations, discourteous individuals, and job insecurity. In addition, the consequences of such pressures often crossed-over to the home front, in the form of short tempers, weakened physical and mental wellbeing, and tense familial relationships. Participants then identified a need to reinforce boundaries between professional and personal realms and to employ coping mechanisms to alleviate stress stemming from work-related concerns. While weathering challenges was part and parcel of one's working experience regardless of age, so too was dedicating time, energy, and resources to a profession only to receive little to no gratitude in return. Though most participants were given financial compensation for their efforts, which some claimed they needed, the earnings were considered to be an additional perk of working rather than their bottom line for doing so. As a result, the motivation to continue working originated from sources other than desires for recognition or payment.

Composite Structural Description

Participants' experiences as workers were framed by the historical, social, and economic context in which they were employed. Social mores dictating the customary ages for people to begin work prompted some participants' entrance in the workforce. Others experienced financial success and failure in equal measure due to the economic climate of the time. Chance meetings, persuasive individuals, trial and error, and serendipitous circumstances also caused participants to begin, change, or abandon various professions. Regardless of the way they became involved in a particular career, participants generally worked over the course of their lives simply because it was an enjoyable activity.

The pleasure respondents derived coupled with passion for specific professions were sufficient to prevent them from throwing in the towel. Socializing with customers, instilling optimism in patients, and collaborating with colleagues enriched participants' experiences, and these connections were also important motives that impelled them to return to work each day.

The opportunity to showcase talents, disseminate wisdom to others, satisfy a demand for services, help others, and utilize time productively contributed to a sense of purpose and enabled participants to feel valued, which were also fundamental aspects of the experience of working in later life.

However, the experience of maintaining professional identity in later life was also shaped by personal and social perceptions of age that did not always align. Participants spurned and sought to dispel stereotypical depictions of older individuals as frail, dependent, and incompetent, and vehemently denied that their ages placed any limitations on their abilities as workers. Although others questioned whether older individuals belonged in the working world, participants chose to extend their stay in the professional realm because they remained capable of and dedicated to serving a valuable function in their communities.

While participants denied a connection between their ages and their competence as workers, the same could not be said of their ages and their health. Respondents regarded physical and cognitive decline as signs that they were gradually transitioning to old age. To prevent the development of such conditions participants relied on work to ensure their minds were stimulated and their bodies were active, and they would continue to do so as their health permitted. However, should their health begin to fail, participants could easily resign. Work for older individuals was an optional choice rather than a necessity and thus they could enter and leave the workforce as they saw fit. Decisions to permanently retire might be influenced by a multitude of factors, such as poor health, waning interest, or service term expiry, but participants would implicitly understand when the right time for their final exit arrived. Some respondents eagerly looked forward to retirement as the opportune time to explore other interests beyond work. Conversely, for other participants life without work was a disquieting proposition as they feared they would be unable to find prospects for social interaction and physical or mental stimulation elsewhere. Thoughts about post-retirement were accompanied by a sense of awareness that although work would no longer be a defining activity around which participants structured their time, their lives would not be entirely bereft of meaning without it and opportunities for fulfilment still existed.

Appendix C – Tables

Theme Clusters with their Associated Formulated Meanings

<p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health concerns become more prevalent in later life • Health problems cause one to “feel” older • Deterioration of cognitive capabilities are a common concern in later life • Health concerns influence decision to continue working in later life • Health problems prompt one to cut back on workload • Work is beneficial to help maintain mental activity and health • Maintaining one’s health is paramount to quality of life in later life
<p>Variety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job responsibilities varied according to profession • Work involves assuming other roles and responsibilities • Experimentation with different work environments reveals that people can be well-suited for some jobs but ill-suited for others • Work involves responding to different situations on a frequent basis
<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work sometimes meant working in a fast-paced environment • Work entailed completing excessive paperwork • Difficulties complying with regulatory policies • Dealing with sensitive or emotional topics was difficult • Competition, fluctuating demand, and financial hardship were common in business ownership • Difficulties encountered when adapting to technology • Workers are required to keep up with current events and developments in the field • Workers encountered difficult people on the job • Physical consequences can arise as a result of work • Work interfered with personal lives at times
<p>Love of the Job</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work was an enjoyable activity • Many of one’s pleasant memories are based on one’s working life • Inherent desires for a particular profession realized at an early age • Passion for one’s work may cause him/her to regret leaving • Absence of work can be discomfiting • People are likely to continue working if they enjoy their jobs • Work is an ideal way to pursue personal interests
<p>Life Beyond Retirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of work allowed more time for leisure activities • End of working life did not equate to end of life • The novelty of leisure activities can wear thin • Fears that retirement may lead to idleness and isolation • One should engage in meaningful activities beyond work during retirement
<p>Social Interaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work encourages one to socialize with younger generations • Forming relationships with patients is a significant part of health care • Enjoyment derived from interacting with customers and colleagues • Work encourages one to engage with the community

<p>Career Influences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social expectations require one to begin work at an early age • Historical, political, economic, and social context shape career choices and prosperity • Technological developments have both positive and negative implications • Work trajectories interrupted and shaped by chance • Career decisions sometimes made impulsively • Other people have a hand in how professional histories play out
<p>Right Time to Quit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision to leave the workforce is clear due to lack of interest in the work • Decision to continue working or not is influenced by physical capability & cognitive capacity • One is likely to leave the workforce when patience for those he/she is expected to help wears thin • Decision to leave the workforce may be sudden • Decision to leave the workforce may be dictated by a scheduled end to a set term • Decision to leave the workforce often prompted by the desire to pursue other interests • Decision to leave one's profession may be prompted by dwindling demand • Decision to leave one's profession is influenced by an internal sense of "readiness"
<p>Relying on Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers relied on interpersonal skills and intuition to be able to help others • Problem-solving skills were useful in many professions • Work involves making innovative contributions to one's field as a whole • Leadership is necessary in a managerial role
<p>Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One's ability to maintain a financially secure post-retirement life may affect decision to leave the workforce • Continued income is a benefit of continuing to work in later life • For some, reasons to work may not be financially motivated • Many people work because they have to earn a living
<p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work requires continual professional development, training, and education • Important skills are developed through hands-on practice
<p>Reduced Workload</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older workers rarely work at the same pace they used to • Reducing work to a part-time, casual, or consulting basis is common for older workers • Stepping down from certain roles is common for older workers • Preference for fewer responsibilities and flexible work environments is common among older workers
<p>Separation of Work & Home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-related concerns do not belong in the domestic sphere • Health care workers can become attached to people they help but need to disconnect at home • Focusing on work-related problems at home can strain relationships • Learning the appropriate work/life balance takes time
<p>Choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is ultimately a choice • There is less guilt when one leaves a profession he or she does not enjoy
<p>Recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awards received for hard work in the field are appreciated • One may dedicate a lot of time and energy to work only to receive no thanks in return
<p>Purpose</p>

- People may work to fulfil a need
- The opportunity to help others makes work worthwhile
- Contributing to the community is important to workers
- Through work one becomes a role model for others
- Work occupies time and gives one a sense of structure
- Workers enjoy the personal satisfaction that arises from a job well done

Perceptions of Age

- Aging is not desirable
- Older individuals are reluctant to admit they are in fact old
- Aging is a reality for everyone
- Age rarely crosses older individuals' minds
- Whether one feels the effects of age is determined by how he/she thinks about his/herself
- Age has no meaning beyond numerical value
- Age becomes more apparent when others express concern for your health
- Age becomes more apparent in comparison with others
- Social expectations abound as to how people of certain ages ought to behave
- Age has no bearing on how individuals choose to live their lives
- Even people considered young by societal standards can experience physical and psychological effects associated with age

Appendix D – Consent Form

Consent Form

Purpose of the study:

As part of her final Masters' thesis project, Jessica Backen is conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Rocci Luppicini (Department of Communication, University of Ottawa). I am invited to participate in her study entitled, "Rebuffing Retirement: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Maintenance of Professional Identity in Later Life."

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences and strategies of a group of older individuals who chose to maintain professional identity in later life, beyond the traditional age of retirement, within the unique context of the Thunder Bay region.

What participation entails:

My participation will involve attending an interview with the primary researcher (Jessica Backen), during which I will be asked to respond to questions about my personal experiences as an older, yet active, member of the workforce. The interview session will take place solely in English, will be scheduled at a place convenient to me, it may be tape-recorded, and it will take approximately 1 hour.

My participation in this study will add to limited existing research about the unique contextual factors that compelled older individuals to adopt their chosen professional identities, their self-perceptions as aging individuals, and the significance of assuming two influential identities – that of "older individual" and a "worker" – so that the experiences of members of this group are better understood.

Confidentiality:

I have received assurance from the researcher that my choice to participate or not in this study will remain strictly confidential. In addition, I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential. Anonymity will be ensured as any personal information linked to my identity will not appear in the research text, I will be quoted directly only with my permission, and if my responses are referenced in the text I will be referred to by gender and area of employment (for example: "one participant, a female travel agent, responded..."). The researcher will contact me after the interview to arrange for me to receive a copy of the interview transcript as well as her analysis, so I can relay my comments and observations to her.

Any data collected (audio recordings, hand-written interview transcripts, interview tape recordings, electronic interview transcripts) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet for the duration of the research, and all electronic computer files will be password protected. A copy of the research data will also be securely stored on the University of Ottawa campus, in the office of the researcher's supervisor. Data collected during this study will be retained for a 5 year conservation period after the study is complete. After the conservation period, any hardcopy data will be shredded, electronic data will be permanently deleted from the researcher's computer, and audiotapes will be erased. Also, any identifiable information about myself will be removed from audio recordings and written transcripts, and will not be published, so that any third party will not be able to link interview data with my identifiable confidential information.

Risks or Inconveniences

In terms of risks, discomfort, or inconveniences, the researcher anticipates that I may experience minor inconvenience due to the amount of time spent with her. However, should I wish to refuse to answer a question or discontinue the interview, I may do so without penalty or further contact by the researcher. The researcher will make every effort to stay within the allotted time frame that was established prior to the interview.

Withdrawal from the study:

I understand that I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without offering a reason and without suffering a penalty. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will not be included in the study without my permission, and it will be destroyed if I so request.

Participant permission:

I give the researcher, Jessica Backen, my permission to audio record the interview.

- Yes
 No

I give the researcher, Jessica Backen, my permission to use quotes from my interview responses in her thesis report, provided that no identifiable information is included.

- Yes
 No

I, _____ have read the above information and agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Jessica Backen of the Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. RocciLuppicini.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher at xxx-xxx-xxxx, xxxxx@xxxx.ca, or her supervisor, Dr. Luppicini, at xxxxx@xxxx.ca, or xxx-xxx-xxxx. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
 Tel.: (613) 562-5387

Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E – Letter of Information

Date:

Dear (*Participant*):

I invite you to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa under the supervision of Professor Rocci Luppicini. This letter will provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

While the factors and processes influencing identity development in general, individuals' identity experiences as older individuals, and the significance people ascribe to professional identity have been investigated in existing research, only a handful of scholars have merged these discrete fields of study to focus on the meanings of assuming two formative identities simultaneously – that of an “older individual” and that of a “worker”. As a result, exploring the unique experiences of members of this rising population is necessary in order to better understand how to tailor services, programs, and worker retention efforts to meet their needs in the future.

To summarize, my research will focus on the factors that influence the construction of a professional identity, the meaning of this aspect of identity over the life course, and the motivations to maintain this component of self-identity in later life. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences and strategies of a group of older individuals who chose to maintain professional identity in later life, beyond the traditional age of retirement, within the unique context of the Thunder Bay region.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview conducted solely in English, that will take approximately 1 hour in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time or pause for a break without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview and analysis have been completed, I will send you a copy of the interview transcript and my analysis to give you an opportunity to review, add, or clarify any points that you wish.

Your choice to participate or not in this study, as well as all information you provide will be kept completely confidential. Your name or any identifiable information will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study. However, with your permission, quotations from the interview may be used and your responses will be referred to by gender and area of occupation only (for example: “one participant, a female travel agent responded...”). Data collected during this study will be retained for 5 years in a locked cabinet in my home as well as in my supervisor's office on the University of Ottawa campus. Only my supervisor and I will have access throughout the duration of the conservation period. All electronic data will be password-protected during the conservation period. After the conservation period, any hardcopy data will be shredded, electronic data will be permanently deleted from the researcher's computer, and audiotapes will be erased.

In terms of risks, discomfort, or inconveniences, the researcher anticipates that you may experience minor inconvenience due to the amount of time spent with her. However, should you wish to refuse to answer a question or discontinue the interview, you may do so without penalty or further contact by the researcher. The researcher will make every effort to stay within the allotted time frame that was established prior to the interview.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by email at xxxxx@xxxx.ca can also contact my supervisor, Professor Rocci Luppicini at xxx-xxx-xxxx or email xxxxx@xxxx.ca.

If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5387
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your participation.

Yours Sincerely,

Jessica Backen

Appendix F – Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

- 1) In terms of profession, what do you do?
Purpose: to understand participants' current context
- 2) How did you become involved in this field?
 - a. Probe – how did you arrive at your current position?
Purpose: to gather participants' complete career histories across their life courses
- 3) What is a typical day of work like?
Purpose: to understand what characteristics participants' consider to be typically associated with their worker identities and the behaviours associated with this identity that they enact
- 4) To what extent do you think continuing to work benefits you?
Purpose: to understand the importance of work and positive meanings associated with work to participants
 - a. Probe – How do you think your experiences compare with those of others?
Purpose: to understand participants' thoughts as to the importance of work to others
- 5) What, if any, are the challenges in continuing to work?
Purpose: to understand the negative meanings associated with work to participants
- 6) When do you think you will stop working?
 - a. Probe – Why?
Purpose: To assess the extent to which continuing to work is related to a need for continuity
- 7) What meaning does your age have for your profession?
Purpose: to understand how expectations associated with an aging identity may affect participants' behaviours at work
- 8) Generally speaking what does your age mean to you?
Purpose: to understand where age lies as a salient characteristic or where "old" lies as a salient identity in participants' salience hierarchies
- 9) What does work mean to you?
Purpose: to understand where "worker" lies as a salient identity in participants' salience hierarchies