

**WOMEN AND MEN OF A *CERTAIN AGE*: THE
GENDER DIMENSION OF AGEISM IN PAID
EMPLOYMENT**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John Moores
University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

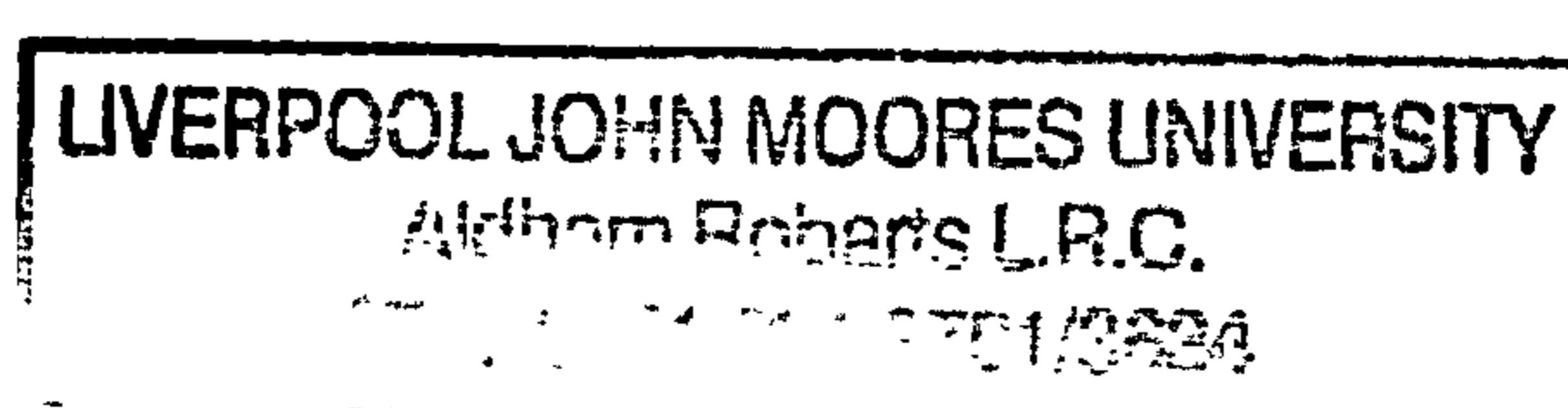
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ABSTRACT

Once a Cinderella subject, the employment of people aged 50 and above (often referred to in the literature as 'older workers') has become an issue of major prominence in recent years. This is no more evident than in the passage of the Age Regulations (October 2006) and with it, New Labour's pledge to encourage age diversity in the workplace. Older people are thus being encouraged to re-enter the labour market through schemes such as the New Deal 50 plus and Pathways to Work or to take up volunteering under the rubric of 'active citizenship'. There is now a variety of ways in which people approaching later life would, on the face of it, be able to access work, education and training opportunities. However, past research and current data suggest that there are number of barriers to the take up of such opportunities. For instance, research has shown that older workers receive lower performance ratings than their younger counterparts (Saks and Waldman, 1998). The suggestion here is that negative stereotypes regarding an individual's chronological age may over ride employers' appraisal of their older workers.

Ageism has been cited as the main barrier to employability and occupational progression for the majority of older workers. Past research in this field has highlighted the discriminatory power of economic myths and stereotypes concerning the work ability of older age groups (for example Taylor and Walker, 1998). The picture to emerge is that older workers are perceived by employers to be less productive, harder to train, and more expensive and difficult to manage than younger workers. It is therefore hoped that policy intervention will have the long term effect of supporting older age groups who have consistently been undervalued and often discarded by employers for simply being 'too old'. Laudable aims, but are employers ready to listen? Moreover are older people (and society at large) ready to refuse to conform to or accept negative images of their age group?

This research considers the nature and salience of ageism in the UK labour market. It also asks whether ageism alone is enough to explain the extent of the discrimination experienced by older women and men. It looks at these issues through the eyes of older people themselves and the organisations that impact upon their lives in an effort to understand the barriers they face in the realm of work and employment. Qualitative and quantitative evidence is presented from older individuals and employers across the UK. Analysis of the data supports the existence of ageism in the workplace. It also reveals a gender dimension to the ageism experienced, which works to the detriment of older women and, in a qualitatively different way, older men as well. Yet self-reported examples of ageism were often more implicit than explicit, based around wider cultural stereotypes about people of a **certain age**. These findings are, of course, in accordance with much related past theory and research. Yet in contrast to previous work, consideration is also given to the part played by individual difference and to broader societal and psychological influences (i.e. life satisfaction). Such an approach indicates that older peoples' experiences of employment are more complex than previously assumed. For example, individuals' experiences of gender and age discrimination are not static, nor isolated from wider personal, historical and social contexts in which they had grown up and grown older. It is therefore argued that the study of ageism should be broadened out and linked to a variety of factors that concern how we as individuals and a society view old age.



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Glossary of Terms

| | |
|-------------|---|
| DTI |Department of Trade and Industry |
| DRC |Disability Rights Commission |
| DWP |Department of Work and Pensions |
| DVLA |Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency |
| EO |Equal Opportunities |
| EPA |Equal Pay Act, 1975 |
| ESF |European Social Fund |
| ESRC |European Social Research Council |
| EHRC |Equalities and Human Rights Commission |
| FEU |Further Education Unit |
| GDP |Gross National Product |
| GHS |General Household Survey |
| GSE |General Self Efficacy |
| LFS |Labour Force Survey |
| LIFO |Last-In-First-Out |
| LS |Life Satisfaction |
| PIU |Performance and Innovation Unit |
| SDA |Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 |
| SPA |State Pension Age |
| SWLS |Satisfaction with Life Scale |
| TAEN |The Age Employment Network (formally, Third Age Employment Network) |

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Appendix D Example of an interview transcript (Strand B)

Appendix E Paper published in Social Policy and Society January 2007

Research Context

This thesis is based on research from a report that was commissioned and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and published by Liverpool John Moores University. The report, of which I was co-author, was concerned with the issues facing older people in the UK workplace. It addressed such themes as the labour market participation of older people; the effects of unemployment on worker's self-esteem and life satisfaction; and age-related barriers to career progression. The original intention of the thesis was to consider in more detail the gender aspect of the ESF report, the aim being to investigate the experiences and perceptions of older women and the organisations which impact upon their lives in an effort to understand the barriers they face in work and employment. This was considered to be an important area of research, not least because women constitute an increasing majority of the ageing population. There is also evidence that women face a 'double jeopardy' of age and gender discrimination in employment (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995). However, as the study progressed, issues concerning men and the factors which impact on them as they age also became apparent.

The various theories of ageing including those related to retirement and pensions, the sex-segregation of work and the concept of agelessness also provide valuable insight into how men age in employment. Furthermore, the recently identified 'crisis of masculinity' (McDowell, 2001) and the rise of the service-sector economy, which is said to have benefited women at the expense of men, have also left their mark. Linda McDowell (2001) for example, has debated the impact of the 'feminisation of work' on male culture and masculine identity. Therefore, it seemed pertinent to the research to determine the effects (if any) of these changes on men who had spent the majority of their life in work that is construed as masculine and is now subject to de-industrialisation. It was hoped that this line of enquiry may point to the existence of possible ageist and sexist barriers for men especially those who had found themselves unemployed later in life. Another topic of concern was the increased sense of insecurity that has occurred across the white collar sector of the economy and its possible impact on men who have carved out professional careers and been very successful at them.

There has been very little systematic investigation of the consequences of ageing in work and employment for men. As a result, the emerging intention of the thesis was to determine and compare the employment experiences of both women and men in the hope of contributing towards, and encouraging the need for, “*[knowledge] and theorising of ageing [in employment] to be applied to both women and men, and subjected to critique on the grounds of gender*” (Hearn, 1995 p. 98).

However, before the research is presented, it is necessary to clarify certain issues and omissions. First, the conditions laid down for funding for the ESF report prevented the collection of data from state-sponsored initiatives and/or organisations concerned with increasing the labour market participation of older workers (i.e. New Deal 50 plus). Whilst it is acknowledged that the involvement of such organisations may have provided an additional and useful dimension to the research, issues and comments relating to such state-sponsored initiatives were nevertheless raised by, and then discussed with, the sample population of older people. Second, an important issue to consider is the timing of the data collection itself, which took place in the run up to the introduction of the Age Regulations (pre October, 2006). The research therefore assesses employers' policies and practices at a crucial point in time and provides opportunity for future research since experiences may be expected to shift as the legislative context is changed.

On a personal note, I would like to acknowledge my own identity and current position on the life course. Featherstone and Wernick note, in their work on the cultural representation of later life, “*It is a distinctive feature of the human sciences, especially where the focus is on understanding some aspect of present-day society, that the subject of knowledge is never wholly outside the object it seeks to understand*” (1995 p. 13). As a researcher in her 20s with a professional interest in culture and society, it may seem unusual to some, that I should turn my attention to the study of later life. This actually takes us to the heart of the concerns of this study. It will be argued throughout that ageing, and the issue of ageism, only become significant to people as they themselves become older. Very rarely do younger women and men consider what their later years will be like. It is for this reason that the research has a personal significance for me. It has highlighted to me the importance of a life course approach to ageing; one that allows us to consider age in relation to the entire life course as opposed to one that upholds the ‘old’/‘young’ dichotomy. It has also enabled me to arrive at a more

respectful vision of, and a deeper connection towards, the older people in my own life: my mother, my aunt and uncle, my neighbours and my work colleagues.

From a methodological perspective the trend has been that those who study older people tend to be older themselves and are thus able to empathise with their study population, integrating their subjective experiences within their research (Bernard, 2001). Some would argue that I am far too young to understand the effects of ageism on the lives of older people. Therefore, conscious of my own age, I have been careful to ensure that older people's voices have been heard and to learn from them. The absence of younger academics in the field perhaps indicates they do not find older people very interesting or suggests a more deep-rooted fear of ageing itself. Yet it is only through us thinking about age and seeing it as a shared experience which affects us all, can we understand our own potential to be ageist through our ignorance and disregard for the lives of older people (Bytheway, 1995). This has been, for me, an insightful journey into a period trodden by all during our lifetime.

Introduction to the Research Topic

Our lives are defined by ageing: the ages at which we can learn to drive, vote, have sex, buy a house, or retire, get a pension, travel by bus for free. More subtle are the implicit boundaries that curtail our lives: the safe age to have children, the experience needed to fill the boss's role, the physical strength needed for some jobs. Society is continually making judgements about when you are too old for something – and when you are too old.
How Ageist is Britain (2004)

One of the authors recently saw an advert for life insurance aimed at people aged 50 and above. It read, "*If you're aged 50 to 80 and you can afford 20p a day, YOU'RE IN!*" (Sun Life Insurance, 2007). It was clearly aimed at those who, in the eyes of the advertiser, qualified as members of the older population. What struck the author was that the category of 'older', at least in this particular case, encompassed a very broad period of middle to later life, a span of 30 years to be precise. As Tinker observed in the early 1980s, "*few people would attribute the same characteristics to a 30 year-old as they would to a 60-year old. Why then should the 60s and 90s be classed together as one group?*" (1981 p. 6). Nevertheless, society has continued compress thirty years of a life span.

This led the author to consider the two most important older people in her own life: her Mother, Elaine and her Grandmother, Renee. Both of whom are similar in nature, yet different as well due at least, in part, to the fact that they are separated by some 20 years. Yet it is not time itself that ‘separates’ them but, rather, cohort difference. Renee is 80 years old. She married at 21 and has only ever lived in the nuclear family. In terms of employment, she left paid employment when her first child was born, then worked part-time when her second child started school. Elaine is 58 years old. She too married at 21 and left paid employment when she had her first child. She had her second child three years later and divorced at 36. Elaine returned to full-time employment and worked full-time ever since. That is not to say, however, that these women were not influenced by choice and circumstance; of course they were. Nevertheless in comparing these women’s lives we are comparing the lives of women from distinct age cohorts. They have been exposed to different life experiences and events by virtue of their cohort location in time, which has served to ‘separate’ one from the other. Arber et al (2003, p.2) explain:

The lives of women have changed enormously over the past century with the growth of women’s employment, the availability of contraception and the liberalization of abortion. These profound changes have had less effect on the oldest generation of older women, but a greater effect on those in their 60s and midlife women.

Aims and Objectives

As one will see from a review of the literature (to follow), research has previously been undertaken into issues concerning gender and employment. For example: the sex-segregation of work (Abdela, 1991), the sexual division of labour (Tyler and Abbott, 1994), the notion of equal pay for equal work (Halford and Leonard, 2001) and the incremental nature of female employment (Warren et al, 2001). Research has also been undertaken into issues concerning age and employment. For example: the transition into retirement (Vickerstaff et al, 2004) employers' attitudes and practices towards older workers (Taylor and Walker, 1998) and the trend towards 'early exit' (Casey and Laczko, 1989; Chan and Stevens, 2001).

Notwithstanding the importance of such work, it is fair to say that research in both areas has focused more on the social and economic implications of these issues and less on the effects upon those at the heart of the matter: older people themselves. What is more, whilst connections between gender, age and employment have started to emerge leading to the production of some very interesting work, there is still relatively little research on the nature and patterns of such connections or if and how they may alter in the future. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine possible connections between all three influences, paying particular attention to their effects upon the individual. To accomplish this the following objectives were set.

- To identify if and how attitudes held by employers towards older workers impact upon the availability of opportunity and choice for people aged 50 and above in the UK workplace.
- To examine the experiences and perceptions of a sample of women and men aged 50 and above concerning matters relating to age in work and employment.
- To determine, in respect to the cohort above, whether past and present experiences of discrimination affect one's current role and position within the workplace.
- To identify, in respect to the cohort above, whether labour market detachment (enforced, voluntary or intermittent) affects individuals' readiness to access work.
- To investigate the current and future perceptions of the cohort above on issues such as self efficacy, life satisfaction and their perceived employability.

Chapter I. Background

To me old age is always fifteen years older than I am

Bernard M Baruch (cited in Age Concern, 2006)

The category of 'older' is marked by enormous diversity and difference, not only between individuals, but also between age cohorts. The idea of cohort difference is summed up by Riely (1987, p. 7) who says:

In studying age we recognise that both people and society undergo process and change. The aim is to understand each of the two dynamisms: (1) the ageing of people in successive cohorts who grow up, grow old, die, and are replaced by other people; and (2) the changes in society as people of different ages pass through the social institutions that are organised by age. The key to this understanding lies in the interdependence of ageing and social change, as each transforms the other.

This study is about older people with respect to the UK workplace. However, in view of the above, it is perhaps first necessary to ask, when does a person become 'older'? Is 'old age' a fixed position on the life course or a state of mind? At a time when life expectancy for British women is over 80 years old and 50 is held the new 30, today's older population are a diverse and complex group who raise important questions about the contemporary nature of what it means to be 'older'.

Research by Ray et al (2006) questioned when youth and old age begin and end respectively. Of the 1843 people surveyed, one in three believed that old age started at 70 years or later. However, the average age stated was 65. Being young, on average, was believed to end at 49 although, one in four subscribed to the popular notion of 'agelessness' believing that youth "never ends". According to the authors of the study, our conception of 'old age' is formed by our gender, our experiences and of course how old we are at the time (the view here is that a 25 year-old will have a very different opinion to that of a 55 year-old). Furthermore, the influence of social policy, culture and cohort difference is not to be overlooked.

For most of post-war Britain, old age (insofar as it is socially constructed) has been based around, and informed by, social policy and is often defined by an age of 65 and above, the age of eligibility for the state pension (Walker and Maltby, 1997). From the 1950s to the early 1970s, the prevailing view was that people left work at the state pension age (SPA) (65 for men and 60 for women) and ‘sat out’ their retirement in relative comfort, cushioned by a pension provided by the state. At a conceptual level, retirement was viewed as a process or transition from adulthood to old age. The social construction of old age was accordingly marked by a change in status, from work to non-work (Guillemard & Rein, 2003).

By the 1970s and 1980s however mass unemployment caused insecurity for many people, especially those who were displaced from the labour market but had not yet reached the relative safety of SPA (Phillipson, 1998). By the 1990s, the expansion in numbers of the over-50s led to the popular portrayal of older people as a social and economic burden. Rather than applaud the increase in older people as evidence of medical advancement and hope for a more purposeful future for us all, the focus was placed on the costs arising from a larger older population. Walker (1990) however, is sceptical of the extent to which older people as a group are, or have ever been, burdensome. He argues “...*political concern about the cost of ageing has been amplified artificially in order to legitimate policies aimed at diminishing the state’s role in financial and social support for older people*” (1990 p. 378). So Walker (1990) sees the ‘demographic time-bomb’ (decline in birth rates, increase in life expectancy) as a distraction from the real issue; the state’s neglect of its older people (Bytheway, 1995).

The social dependency model described above formed a sustained attack on older people. It also formed the powerbase from which bio-medical discourses of ageing have emerged. Bio-medical accounts view the ageing process as a spiral of decline, deterioration and ultimately of death. Accordingly, being old means having to deal with increasing dependency and the loss of a youthful self. As Powell (2006 p. 31) puts it, bio-medical accounts of ageing “*reduce the social experience of ageing to its biological dimension*” ignoring diversity among older people in terms of their employment, their health, their lifestyles and how old they actually feel. Older people are thus marginalised and differentiated from other social groups. So we see older people not as an extension or continuation of their own self but, rather, as totally apart from themselves and from us

(Andrews, 1999). For Biggs (1993), a central component of the bio-medical model is the ability it has to sustain and reinforce ageism in our society. It contains what Powell (2006) calls 'decline-and-decay' assumptions about the ways in which older people are likely to think and behave.

Historically, retirement and social policy have determined, to a large extent, the onset of old age. Both have contributed to the formation of identity in later life (Phillipson, 1998) and helped to ensure the privileged position of the bio-medical model in discussions and debate about older people. In recent years, however, the decline in the age of exit from gainful employment and the more detached role of the state have thrown into question the social construction of old age as it once stood. One can also add the impact of wider social and economic change, and the size of the baby boom cohort, those born between the 1940s and 1960s.

The trend now is to talk about 'active ageing' not 'vulnerable ageing' (Cook and Powell, 2005). If old age with respect to the dependency model was a time of withdrawal, decline and death, then active ageing or its more popular term, 'successful ageing' is the other side of the coin. Successful ageing is essentially a postmodern construction. It is from the same school of thought as other antidote-type theories of ageing (consumer ageing, agelessness, the mask of ageing, continuity theory), each developed to counteract the negative connotation of old age. Successful ageing is based on the concept of adaptability; that is, the extent to which the individual can adapt and conform to the norms and expectations of society (Andrews, 1999). In a youth-orientated society, as it is today, the individual is therefore judged on the extent to which he or she (usually she) can ward off or hold back the ageing process. If you defy the dependency stereotype, you are considered young insofar as you are active, fit and healthy, have a youthful outlook on life and look good, not old. As Minichiello et al (2000) found in their study of the meanings and experiences of ageism for older Australians, active ageing is viewed as a positive way of presenting and interpreting oneself from the 'old' group. Conversely of course those who are inactive are automatically labelled 'old', legitimising the social dependency model as an accurate representation of later life. Viewed this way, successful ageing means transcending old age (Andrews, 1999). One may argue that notions of successful ageing help to sustain society's negative appraisal of older people.

In 'I Don't Feel Old: The Experience of Later Life', Thompson et al (1990) considered the meaning and purpose of old age from the perspective of those who, in the conventional sense of the word, were themselves old. From a theoretical standpoint, the most interesting aspect of the study was the tendency among the sample to disassociate themselves from the category of older. When asked what it meant to be 'old', responses converged around the notion that, "*old age is a combination of incapacity, inability and ill health*" (1990 p. 128), yet very few of those questioned were able to identify with, or indeed place themselves inside this social category. On the one hand, this may reflect the 'stranger in the mirror' phenomenon; the cognitive split between what people feel on the inside and what they see in the mirror. On the other hand, however, it may be read as a reflection of our ageist culture. According to Andrews (1990 p. 306) "*the resistance to being called 'old' is perceived, not as a form of self-hatred, but as an indicator of a positive self-identity in the context of an ageist environment in which they [older people] live*". Unsurprisingly then, many older people are themselves unwittingly 'ageist', critical of others' attempts to defy or reverse the ageing process.

For Cook and Powell (2005), however, ageing successfully means something quite different. It means providing opportunities for older people to contribute to society (in terms of employment, family life, social policy etc.) in meaningful ways, "*they should be valued and involved in wider society on terms that they themselves desire*" (2005 p. 85). It means appreciating the older population as people first as opposed to a category. Cook and Powell (2005) share the view of Todd Peterson, Chief Executive of Help the Aged International, who called for an alternative vision of the older community, arguing that they should be regarded as "*...resources rather than as unwitting victims of poverty, disease and social exclusion*" (cited in Cook and Powell, 2005 p. 85). This impassioned plea may be said to have found expression in Government's attempts to encourage older people to return to, or remain in, employment (i.e. the policy decision to raise SPA in the near future). Of course, the extent to which this turnaround in official opinion is related to wider concerns over the 'burden' of the older population rather than concern for older people per se is fiercely debated. Regardless of the motivation however these attempts have provided some opportunity for disengaged older people to contribute to society in valuable and meaningful ways.

Post-modern Approaches to Old Age

Social change and an increased lifespan have raised important questions about the meaning and purpose of old age in the 21st century. Phillipson (1998) reflects on the ways in which the lives of older people have changed from when his first book was published in the 1970s. He says, “*writing in the 1970s one had a relatively clear sense of who older people were: mainly poor, probably similar in outlook (and indeed appearance) and with limited aspirations for future lifestyles*” (1998, p. 10). Phillipson admits that this may have been an “*unsatisfactory stereotype*” then and feels that it is certainly an inaccurate reflection of older people today. Walker (1981) has also criticised earlier research for treating older people as a distinct social category rather than “*concentrating on the biologically based differences in ageing and individual adjustments to the ageing process*” (1981, p. 179). Walker’s (1981) argument is even more compelling today in a postmodern society where traditional definitions and assumptions about ageing are decreasingly appropriate and experiences fluid and less predictable. Seidman (1994) also emphasises the importance of a postmodern approach in attempts to understand the changing meaning and purpose of growing older.

From an epistemological point of view, postmodernism represents a distinct departure from modernity (Powell, 2006), demonstrative in the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial society and the development of welfare reform. Both of which have at their core the issue of identity, specifically: how do we construct an authentic identity under such uncertain conditions? Before postmodernism, social order prevailed and older people were rooted to society by the predictability of retirement and the security of the welfare state. More recently however, there has been a shift in the formation of social order characterised by the demarcation of power from the state to ‘individuals, families and communities’ (Blair, 2002). Older people are thus encouraged to take personal responsibility for their health and welfare. Against this backdrop is the rise and profligacy of the consumer culture and the creation of powerful images of youth and aspiration. New patterns of consumption have thus emerged, notably the promotion of positive lifestyles as exemplified by the ‘Snowbird’ and ‘Sun City’ (retirement homes in the sun) phenomena in the US (Kastenbaum, 1993) which have redefined later life, certainly for those who can afford it, as a period of ‘perpetual middle age’ (Phillipson, 1998).

In terms of popular culture, bio-medical images of the ageing body as a site of decline and decay have been replaced by consumer culture images of the body as a mask or machine that can be worked upon, monitored, serviced and repaired (Featherstone & Wernick, 1995). How older people dress and choose to present themselves are less closely tied to chronological age (or rather, norms and expectations about what is appropriate for a particular age group) than they once were (Arber & Ginn, 1995). Accordingly, normative expectations about age-appropriate lifestyles have weakened which along with improved health have helped many people 'bide their time' in the Third Age (the domain of the 'young-old') (Arber & Ginn, 1995). The Third Age (Laslett, 1989) was first used to classify the period between active retirement and the onset of dependency. However, it is more commonly used today to refer to "*an extended plateau of active middle age*" (Featherstone & Wernick, 1995 p.46) and is often described as a desirable in-between period in the life course yet one that is no less temporary or less important as other periods or transitions. Rather, the Third Age is stretched and enhanced to create the illusion that we can transcend, escape or live outside of time (Katz, 1996). It is however a "*bourgeois option*" (Arber & Ginn, 1995 p. 8) available only to those who can afford it (and who are typically the subject of praise) and is in many ways a false or simulated construction, unavailable to the socially excluded or those who do not have the income to purchase a consumer-orientated lifestyle.

For Powell (2006) the result is that society has become decentred. No longer is there a common unifying culture but a complex set of lifestyles from which one must try and make sense of the world. The issue of a search for an identity is expanded upon by Beck (1992) and his concept of risk. In his book *Risk Society*, Beck (1992) presents a dysfunctional view of society where individuals are separated from a collective and exposed to various risk. Of special relevance to older people is the risk posed by the shift from welfarism to neo-liberalism (Powell, 2006).

One may recall the question posed earlier, 'When does a person become older?' This question is almost impossible to answer in the context of a postmodern society, where traditional definitions and assumptions about ageing have been replaced by new approaches that provide a new gloss. Indeed, alternative social constructions of ageing have emerged but rather than being framed around a consensus regarding retirement and the welfare state, they are varied and highly individualised, cloaked in postmodern

language (i.e. consumerism) which has had the effect of “*leaving ageing people rootless and prone to increasing uncertainty and ‘risk’*” (Powell, 2006 p. 136). The worry for Phillipson is that “*later life is being reconstructed as a period of potential choice but also one of risk and danger*” (1998).

It is not the intention of this chapter to paint a pessimistic picture of these emerging constructions. On the contrary, new social constructions would be useful and may even deconstruct the biomedical model forming positive images of old age in its place (yet arguably only for those who can afford to maintain such images). For affluent older people, a popular image is currently provided in the form of body maintenance and the promotion of midlife lifestyles – if people can not be young again, they at least want to appear ageless in the way they look and how they behave (Arnold, 1996). Yet for some older people, the worry is that marginality and social inequality may increase as retirement and the welfare state, fail to support their experiences of later life (Phillipson, 1998). This may affect women more so than men since women predominate (numerically) in this period.

Linking Ageing and Gender

The question of what it means to be ‘older’ has so far been approached from a gender-neutral perspective. In view of the fact that a main aim of this study is to determine whether men and women experience ageism in different ways and to different degrees, it is now necessary to address the linkage of age and gender relations.

Although gender and ageing are recognised as prime areas of discrimination, connections between them are often alluded to, but never fully integrated into mainstream academic discourse. Some gender dualisms are well understood (i.e. gender and class, gender and ethnicity), but there has been less of a sustained focus upon gender and ageing. However, over the past couple of years, a number of books have been published on the subject (notably, Arber et al, 2003; Ginn and Arber, 1996; and Browne, 1998). Only now are we beginning to recognise that there is something distinctive about being an older woman, just as there is about being an older man.

Ginn and Arber (1996) assert that gender and age are inextricably linked; each is implicated in the construction of the other. Gender and gender roles are not static, but can and do change over time due to social and cultural influences, in much the same way as age-based norms are shaped by such influences and shifting patterns of relations between men and women. It may be argued therefore, that gender and ageing alone or the primacy of one over the other will provide little insight into the experiences of older men and older women. This point is reiterated by Julie McMullin (1996 p. 37) who writes “*Older people are not just old, they are either men or women*”. Whilst on the face of it, McMullin’s (ibid.) comment could be considered too obvious to warrant attention, she is quick to remind us that such simplistic thought is rarely translated into theory. Older people are still regarded in mainstream, academic literature as a unified social category defined only by their shared position on the life course.

There would therefore seem a case to be made for further research on gender and ageing that moves beyond a description of what form a connection between them might take. Yet the separation between gender and ageing is a theme that has ran through the literature of both fields of study: feminism and gerontology. On the one hand, social gerontologists have tended to treat gender as an addendum or ‘add on’ to improve our understanding of the ageing process (Ginn and Arber, 1996). Yet as Ginn and Arber (1996) argue, such tinkering at existing margins is unlikely to offer any real insight into the complexities of interactions between gender and ageing and will fail to challenge traditional assumptions about male and female ageing in wider social life. The same can be said of a feminist approach to ageing which has, until very recently, tended to view age as an afterthought or as another human component constructed upon the oppression of women by men. Indeed, from a feminist standpoint, it is impossible to talk about an act of ageism against older women that is not in fact an act of sexism (McDonald and Rich, 1994).

A lot of the work in the field has been produced by older women themselves: “*All my life in a man’s world, I was a problem because I was a woman; now I am a problem in a woman’s world because I am a sixty-five year old woman*” (Macdonald, 1984 p. 30). Macdonald (1984) makes the point that once women reach a **certain age** they dissipate into the population; they become invisible. Second Wave feminism, she believes, has

contributed to the invisibility of older woman in society because “*it rose out of a time of a patriarchally supported white middle class youth culture*” (Macdonald, 1984 p. 37).

Feminist writers in the 1970s and 1980s are blamed for neglecting the liberation struggles of older women by articulating a vision of the world based upon their own experiences and concerns (Ann Oakley’s research on housework and motherhood). Notwithstanding the importance of such work, the unfortunate consequence is that older women’s efforts to make visible the realities of their ageing become eclipsed by the power and dominance of youth, “*there is always a feeling of disillusion among older members as younger ones discover and take command of the wheel*” (Bytheway, 1995 p. 36). The feminist message of one generation is thus replaced and recast in the spirit and culture of the next. It is this uprising of youth that has always, and may continue to, place older women at the margins of thought (Maguire, 1995). Arber and Ginn (1991 p. 28) sum it up well when they say:

There are historical reasons for the feminist focus on younger women’s concerns. The American Women’s Liberation Movement of the late 1960s was a movement of younger women, often disillusioned with the sexism with radical movements for Civil Rights and peace, and its demands were related to their experiences. The British Liberation Movement also reflected this orientation to younger women’s concerns.

The ‘Feminisation’ of the Term *Older*

Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years.

Oscar Wilde. The Importance of Being Earnest.

Age may take the form of both chronological age and social age. Chronological (or calendar) age refers to age in number of years. It starts from birth and continues throughout one’s life – a process of maturation. Social age is less easily defined; it is essentially a concept of ageing and refers to age norms and expectations and the age roles we assume. These age-based norms are embedded into the fabric of everyday culture and are reinforced by popular imagery of ageing such as: the body and self image; advertising

and media representations of old age; consumer culture images; youth-orientated lifestyles; age-appropriate dress; images of older people in public health and education campaigns and; popular images of life and death (Featherstone & Wernick, 1995). For instance, the notion that older people do not learn as quickly as their younger counterparts is deeply entrenched in popular culture yet there is very limited evidence to support the belief (Arber & Ginn, 1995). Such prejudice nevertheless serves to create and reinforce negative stereotypes about the learning capacity of older people.

Much of this has special relevance for women “*social ageing is related to transitions in the life course, but since the timing and sequencing of such transitions differs for women and men (and according to class and ethnicity) social ageing is gendered*” (Arber & Ginn, 1995 p. 7). Take for example, employment: the *typical* male pattern of employment is fluid, uninterrupted and clearly defined whilst the *typical* female pattern of employment is broken and reduced on account of women’s childcare and domestic role (Warren et al, 2001). Because of a female chronology of employment, women are often considered to be ‘behind’ in relation to the dominant (male) model of career progression and under-represented in senior managerial roles (Itzin and Phillipson, 1996).

The ageing process itself is said to be more difficult for women than for men (Granleese & Sayer, 2006). Susan Sontag (1978 p. 73) in her double standard thesis argued “*Getting older is profoundly less wounding for men*”. The view here is that women are vulnerable to the loss of a youthful self in a way that men are not. Women are ‘over the hill’ or ‘past their sell by date’ earlier than men are. As a result, older women are rendered invisible and are undervalued in comparison to their younger counterparts (Granleese & Sayer, 2006). As Copper (1995) notes, over the hill is “*metaphorically out of sight*” (cited in Gee & Kimball, 1987 p. 100). Additionally, older women are regarded as being less physically attractive as men of the same age: the cultural stereotype of the older man is one of continued virility and potency whilst the cultural stereotype of the older woman is one of loss of beauty and youth. This points to the fact that it is more acceptable for a man to age than it is for a woman,

Men are 'allowed' to age, without penalty, in several ways that women are not...Being physically attractive counts much more in a woman's life than in a man's, but beauty, identified, as it is for women, with youthfulness does not stand up well to age (Sontag, 1978 p. 73).

According to the 'double standard' older women have to adjust to the fact that they are seen as less attractive than they were when they were younger which can lead to pain and anxiety over their appearance. This is may be reflected in women's views of themselves. Research to date has shown that women internalise society's negative appraisal and try to compensate for it by conforming to the 'ideal woman' stereotype (Gee & Kimball, 1987). Indeed, the entire beauty industry is founded upon the notion that youth is a commodity that can be produced, packaged and sold. The current trend is for older women to model or promote the latest cream, cosmetic and diet pill. Women like Jane Fonda, Joanna Lumley and Sharon Osborne are praised for their beauty insofar as they look good (or young) for their age (Gee and Kimball, 1987). Yet according to Gee & Kimball, such praise is *"more representative of a societal denial of ageing than an acceptance of the realities of female bodily change with the passage of years"* (1987 p. 106).

According to feminist academics (for example, Macdonald & Rich, 1983) the double standard of ageing is symptomatic of patriarchy; a product of women's oppression in society. From a feminist perspective the ideal woman is not a cultural or material construction but a patriarchal one used to suppress female ambition. Simone de Beauvoir (1970) wrote on this matter, *"as men see it, a woman's purpose in life is to be an erotic object, when she grows old and ugly she loses the place allotted to her in society: she becomes a monstrum that excites revolution and even dread"* (cited in Woodward, 1995 pp. 87-88). The sum of it is that women are valued by male standards that place importance upon women's youth and sexuality. Furthermore, 'Malestream' definitions of femininity and (hetero) sexuality presume the absence of sexuality in older women. Inevitably then women are rendered 'old' before men of a comparable (chronological) age.

The notion of female sexuality is also linked to biology or, more specifically, to women's control (or rather lack of control) over their body: a post-menopausal woman is old because her biology has intercepted her sexuality to prevent reproduction. Gee & Kimball argue "*de-sexualised by the 'sexuality = reproduction' equation, older women become invisible*" (1987 p. 100). Arising from this are common Western stereotypes that presume the absence of sexuality in older women: the asexual Grandmother who has fulfilled her reproductive role and no longer desires sex, nor do others desire her; and the depressed older woman (or 'old maid') who is unfulfilled and regretful of a life half lived. Of course such stereotyping is based upon myths which treat sexuality and fertility as interrelated and interconnected concepts: if a woman is no longer fertile, she is no longer sexual.

Based on the literature, the ideology of beauty as it is equated with youth and sexuality, has become absorbed into the female consciousness to such an extent that women are concerned (some would argue overtly) with their appearance. The question here has to be why? Are women under undue pressure or are their attempts positive; an expression of their resistance to the bio-medical image of old age? Is it about ageing well and looking good for one's age, rather than trying to look like a different (younger) age? The irony is of course that one of the main reasons why the baby boom cohort has become so successful is the ability they have to look younger (Warren, 2005). Susan Quilliam says "*In part we are celebrating the 40 and 50 year olds because they now look like 30 and 40 year olds. The truth is that we value the older generation more if they don't actually look like the older generation*" (cited in Warren, 2005 pp. 20-21).

A report from the Research on Age Discrimination (RoAD) Project (2007) asked respondents to consider the example of the 'pensioner's hairdo' as a potential form of discrimination. Results revealed disagreement amongst the sample as to whether the 'hairdo' itself is discriminatory. However, most responses converged around the view that the 'pensioner's hairdo' is "*a sign of ageist attitudes to older women's bodies and appearance*" (2007, p. 33). In response, RoAD asked: "*Should older people colour their hair to try to look younger or should they be happy, or even proud to look their age?*" (2007, p.31). After analysis of the data, the RoAD Project concluded with the need for older people to feel comfortable in their own skin whilst, at the same, feel able to use

make-up etc., to tackle ageist images and crucially “*help them feel good...They want to strike a balance, respecting their own age without succumbing to it*” (2007, p.37).

Of course, the culture of youth affects everyone in society. Older men may feel insecure and unfulfilled or regretful because they have not achieved what they wanted to achieve by a *certain age*. They may be stuck in a rut insofar as their jobs are concerned or fearful of being cast aside or replaced by a younger model. However, the experiences of older women are different from those of older men by virtue of the society in which we live (McMullin, 1995). For instance, the higher life expectancy of women increases the possibility of their dependency in old age.

Women as a group also have lower pension entitlement compared to men as a group due to women’s care of children and the persistent gender pay gap. They are vulnerable to poverty in old age and if they live alone they may also be prone to isolation. Taken together, “*women create the image of old age in our society...this seems to justify the expression of ‘feminisation’ [of old age]*” (Arnold, 1996 p. 117). There can be little doubt that women suffer a double jeopardy of ageism and sexism. There are very clear examples of the ways in which this occurs. Consider, for example, how older women are portrayed in popular culture “*the wicked old women of fairy stories*” (Marshall, 1990 p. 32). Stereotyping is also expressed in the form of popular discourse, ‘regretful spinster’, ‘mother hen’, ‘mutton dressed as lamb’ and so forth. So although men undoubtedly suffer from the negative effects of old age, women, it would appear, are more likely to be doubly affected because of the sexualising of women’s value in youth (Maguire, 1995).

The stereotypes described above are clearly ageist; perpetuating ideas about how older people should think, dress and behave. Yet to come up with a definitive definition of ‘ageism’ is more difficult than one would assume. Some examples of ageism are clear-cut, others are ambiguous and more implicit in nature.

Towards a Definition of Ageism

Ageism is a slippery concept to capture and one that is made no clearer by its entry into economic discourse. As MacMullin and Marshall (2001, p. 111) note “*very little is known about the role that age plays in disadvantaging certain groups of people relative to*

others within labour markets". Since employers, academics and society are at odds as to what it is, whether it exists at all, ageism is difficult to explore.

Ageism is not a new phenomenon; however, its entry into popular discourse is relatively new compared to racism, which entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 1936. Ageism first appeared in print in the Washington Post in 1969 and was attributed to the work of Dr Robert Butler (1969) who subsequently defined it as, "*a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this for skin colour and gender*" (Butler, 1987 p. 22). It is now more loosely defined to refer to "*any prejudice or discrimination against or in favour of an age group*" (Palmore, 1990 p. 15). It may refer to discrimination on account of any age and involve beliefs (young people are lazy) and attitudes (employer preferences for younger workers) that create and sustain prejudice (Macnicol, 2005).

Warr (1994 p. 488), placing ageism in an employment context, defined it as negative practice occurring when, "*individuals are refused employment, dismissed from jobs, paid less, or denied promotions, training or other benefits because of their age*". According to Warr (1994) then, ageism consists of two inter-connected components (i) ideology, which is essentially conceptual in nature consisting of stereotypes, beliefs and attitudes concerning an individual's real or perceived age and; (ii) discrimination, which is essentially more practical in nature consisting of action and behaviour that excludes an individual on account of his or her age, placing them at a relative disadvantage to others (McMullin and Marshall, 2001). Ageism is, therefore, a dynamic prejudice affecting people in different ways and to varying degrees. It may be explicit or implicit in nature and may even seem benevolent of the victim, old women are commonly stereotyped as warm but incompetent (Abrams, 2006).

The term ageism first entered social policy discourse in the 1990s amid concern over the trend towards male early exit or retirement from the labour market (Loretto et al, 2000). Laczko and Phillipson observed at that time that ageism was still "*an alien word*" (1991 p. 33) and the most understudied form of prejudice. More recently however, the focus on ageism in employment has been extended to cover the entire employment life cycle, from entry to exit. It has also secured a prominent place on the socio-political agenda – no more evident than in the passage of the Age Regulations (October, 2006). Despite these

developments, the academic research shows that age discrimination in employment is still widespread, particularly in respect to employers' attitudes and practices towards older workers (see, for example, Loretto and White, 2006).

The Development of Ageism

It is widely believed that ageism is developed through a process of socialisation (McMullin and Marshall, 2001) whereby representations, beliefs and assumptions concerning age and the process of ageing are passed from one generation to the next (Scrutton, 1990 p. 13). Racism and sexism have developed through the same or similar process of socialisation, yet whilst parallels can be drawn between them and other 'isms' ageism differs for two reasons. First, we are all of an age and we will all get older. Age, does not define a separate or discrete group. Rather, it is a feature of everyone's identity. As Glover and Branine (2002) observe, anyone, at any age, can find themselves in a position when they are excluded or disadvantaged because they are not the 'appropriate' or 'right' chronological age. Ageism, should therefore strike a cord with most of us. Moreover the distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed or 'us and them' that has underscored much of racism and sexism is not present in the same way. Scrutton (1990, p. 14) puts it well when he says, "*the white racist will never be black; the male sexist will never be female; but the young ageist will grow old*". Second, there is a certain amount of confusion as to whether the discrimination born out of ageism is a biological inevitability or a social construction, or creation. The same cannot be said of racism or sexism. Such confusion may account for why so many people seem to accept age prejudice as part and parcel of life. Ageism has at its heart the ageing process as a process of physiological decline, yet many things that appear natural or biological are in fact socially created. Whilst the implacable physical deterioration of advanced old age is undeniable; it is the process of socialisation that provokes our fear of ageing causing us to treat older people as "*a race apart, different from ourselves or what we can bear to think we might become*" (Gearing, 1995 p. xi).

The treatment of ageism as a distinct form of oppression has aroused speculation from those on both sides of the debate. On the one hand, because ageism can affect us all regardless of our age, sex, race etc., there is a case to be made to set it apart from other 'ism's'. Bytheway (1995) for example is concerned that the concept of ageism will be

undermined or weakened if it is treated as a sub-component of more traditional forms of oppression. In respect to his book, *Agesim*, he (1995:2) writes:

This is a book about ageism and anti-ageist action, not about how age is involved in other forms of prejudice and discrimination. This may sound a little like splitting hairs, but it is all too easy for the examination of ageism to become dominated and constrained by a concern with other more visible issues that are placed higher on the politico-cultural agenda.

Bytheway (1980) also feels the need to protect the concept from the view that ageism is 'just a joke'. As McDonald and Rich note "*there are people who are fully versed in the acceptable vocabulary of anti-racist feminism who will tell 'jokes' about 'wrinklies' who will then deny that they are offensive*" (1984 p. 19). It is fair to say that ageism is much less discussed and not taken as seriously as prejudice based on one's race or sex. The example Bytheway (1995) uses to illustrate the acceptance of ageism in our society is the everyday practice of sending birthday cards containing ageist messages. On the other hand, however, it is naive to question the existence of multiple disadvantage - that is, the possibility that an individual can belong to one or more oppressed groups. It may also be argued that since ageing is an inevitable process which affects us all, the practice of sending birthday cards is not one that is based upon inequality per se, we are all likely to receive one at some point. That is not to imply of course that ageism should be accepted or even tolerated. Yet as Glover and Branine note "*it is important to appreciate the huge complexity and significance of the moral, economic and political issues raised by serious thinking about age-related attitudes and behaviour*" (1997 p. 275). It is debatable whether birthday cards qualify here.

Many believe, however, that ageism should not be set apart and isolated in this way. Bytheway, himself, recognises that women may be subject to ageism in a way that men are not, "*there can be little doubting the double jeopardy thesis that older women suffer doubly (at least) as a result of both forms of oppression*" (1995 p. 36).

The relationship between ageism and sexism, certainly from an employment standpoint, has been poorly explored and explained. However notable exceptions are to be found and they include Itzin and Phillipson's (1993) case study of 'age barriers at work' which included a chapter on women at various points in the employment life cycle. More recently, Granleese and Sayer (2006) have produced some interesting work on this issue of 'Lookism' in employment. Notwithstanding the obvious importance of such work, interactions between ageism and sexism remain significantly under-theorised and somewhat narrow in focus based on evidence from people in one employment sector or firm. On this issue, Duncan and Loretto ask "*Is the dual effect of age and gender discrimination [in employment] simply additive or in some ways mutually reinforcing?*" (2004 p. 98). If connections between them prove to be mutually reinforcing then a gender-neutral conception of ageism is deeply problematic especially in an era of legislative change. To consider this matter further, it is first necessary to provide a comprehensive background to the issues facing today's older workers.

The Position of Older Workers in the UK Economy

Once a Cinderella subject, the employment of older workers (50+) has become an important topic in recent years. There are about 8 million older people in the UK (between 50 years and SPA) and they account for just over 24 percent of the working age population (DWP, 2005). However, an important trend in the UK labour market has been the decline over the last 20-30 years in the employment of older workers, described as, "*one of the most remarkable labour market transformations in modern times*" (Duncan, 2003 p. 101). While there is some evidence that this trend may have halted recently and even reversed (Hotopp, 2005), economic activity rates among older people are still below that of the workforce as a whole (Loretto et al, 2005). Between 1995 and 2004, employment rates of older men increased from around 65 percent to 72 percent and, an increase for women from around 60 percent to 67 percent over the same period (DWP, 2005), yet these figures mask the subsequent decline in the employment of men and women in their late 50s and early 60s (see Table 1 overleaf).

| Table 1: Economic Activity Status of Older People | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-----|----------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| Age | In Employment (%) | | Unemployed (%) | | Inactive (%) | |
| | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men |
| 50-54 | 75 | 84 | 2 | 3 | 24 | 14 |
| 55-59 | 61 | 75 | 2 | 3 | 38 | 22 |
| 60-64 | 30 | 54 | * | 2 | 70 | 44 |
| 65-70 | 10 | 18 | * | 1 | 90 | 82 |
| 70+ | 2 | 4 | * | * | 98 | 96 |
| Total (50+) | 31 | 45 | 1 | 2 | 68 | 54 |

(* Less then 0.5%)

Source: Loretto et al, 2005

The early exit of older workers from the UK labour market is the result of number of factors including, redundancy; recession; public policy; personal motivation; additional income; care commitments; and early and ill health retirement (see Vickerstaff, 2007). According to Vickerstaff (2007), these factors can be sub-categorised as structural factors, personal factors and cultural factors. They can also include elements of choice and necessity. However, research to date has shown that the majority of older people do not choose to stop work early. In fact a recent study by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) found that of those who had taken early retirement, only half had wanted to retire while 39 percent felt that retirement was forced upon them (Salvage et al, 2005). Furthermore, research for SAGA Magazine (in Bull, 2005) found that 28 percent of older workers surveyed wanted to work beyond normal retirement ages and those that did had higher than average levels of job satisfaction. This should be music to the ears of employers adjusting to a world with fewer school leavers. Yet until recently, little attention was paid to the problems facing displaced older workers. In the recessions of the 1970s and 1980s public policy was explicitly aimed at creating jobs for the young unemployed, through measures that encouraged the withdrawal or early exit of older workers from paid employment (i.e. Redundancy Payment Act, 1965; Job Release Scheme, 1977).

From the 1990s however public policy was adapted in response to the ageing of the population. Government introduced campaigns aimed at ‘active ageing’ and encouraging older people to return to the labour market (Mann, 2006). The consumer market was also quick to respond to the potential influence of a larger population of older people,

attempting to adapt to the interests of the ‘grey’ market. The same can be said of certain social and welfare groups that have moved away from traditional and polarised views of older people to build upon the diversity of a larger older population (Bernard and Phillips, 2000). However, research to date (for example McVittie et al, 2003) has identified reluctance on the part of *some* employers to do the same for their older employees and job searchers. Research by Redman and Snape (2005) concluded “*age discrimination is still insidious, widespread and permeates many aspects of working life*” (2005 p. 3).

Government policy is nevertheless firmly directed at retraining and returning to work those aged 50 and above who have become disengaged from the workforce. For some, such measures may present a welcome opportunity to take up flexible work or return to education as a way of improving their employment prospects or developing their career. For others however discrimination in the job search process may prevent many older people from reaching their full potential.

Displaced Older Workers

Branine and Glover (1997) note how beliefs concerning age have become part of the everyday culture of work and society. Thinking of the young and old respectively as ascending and descending a hill or staircase, Branine and Glover (1997) paint a clear picture of how society has come to regard those at oppositional ends of the age scale. They also provide some indication of how societal views about the roles of older people (for example, the duty of the old to make sacrifices for the young) are instilled in popular culture. Taking this analogy one step further, and placing it in an employment context, one may assume that it is the responsibility of older workers to make way for their younger counterparts. Implicit in this assumption is the view that older people are nearing the end of their working life and that younger people are the new employees, the employees of the future (Pilcher, 1996). It may therefore be argued then that, often subconsciously, age-based ideologies may engender in the old, a lower confidence in their right to work.

Data taken from the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) (2000) show that one in three people aged between 50 and 64 are absent from paid employment. This finding raises important questions about why older people find it difficult to secure employment. Patrickson and Ranzijn (2003 p. 53) conjecture:

Is it because they [older people] have fewer relevant skills [than younger people], do they pursue inappropriate search strategies, are they the victims of discrimination or are they simply unlucky? To what extent is perceived age-related discrimination confounded with out-of-date currency in the job market? What proportion of unsuccessful job seekers are employable but unemployed?

Failure to find work is most often explained as an outcome of employer prejudice based on culturally prevalent images of older people in society. Consequently, work until SPA is no longer the cultural norm (Bytheway, 1995). Some have viewed the under-representation of older workers in a positive light drawing upon the cultural construction of retirement as a privileged and envied position and the freedom to seek fulfilment outside the realm of paid employment (i.e. engaging in community and voluntary work). Yet for many older people the 'retirement as liberation' argument is in stark contrast to the reality of their everyday experience. Curran and Blackburn (2001) for instance, found that older people are among the poorest in society and are much more likely to suffer from ill health than younger people.

Unemployed older people also tend to report feelings of loss (of wage and activity), depression and shame (finding it degrading and frustrating at times). They may become less active in seeking work and less hopeful of finding work (Further Education Unit, 1989). Age is a significant factor here with many unemployed over 50s regarding their age as a major cause of discrimination (FEA, 1989). As Taylor puts it, "*their prospects of finding work are so poor and that, even where jobs are available, these are often only part-time or low paid*" (2006 p. 273). Those whose exit from the labour market is enforced (for example, through redundancy) are at risk of poverty and social exclusion because of the unexpected nature of their departure from work and consequently their decreased ability to plan for the future (see, for example, research by Burchell, 1994). Displaced older workers are also more likely to report feelings of rejection especially if they have limited family support networks or are isolated from wider social life. In

addition, research by the Further Education Unit on older unemployed people has highlighted the importance of work for people in “*a society which provides power, status and identity through paid work*” (1989 p. 27). For those with continuous employment chronologies, loss of the worker role can result in a loss of confidence and self esteem creating internal barriers to re-employment. Thus perceptions about age, held by both employers and individuals serve to limit the employment prospects of older people.

Government is keen to entice displaced older workers back to work and a number of policy initiatives have emerged as a result (see, for example, New Deal 50 Plus and Pathways to Work). Notwithstanding the importance of such initiatives it is important to consider the reason why so many over 50s become unemployed in the first place. One may argue here that an important policy aim should be to help older people to keep their jobs in the first place and to improve their conditions of employment (Loretto and White, 2004).

Employer Attitudes and Practices Towards Older Workers

Taylor and Unwin (2001) found that older workers were less likely to be offered, or to take up offers of training in comparison with their younger counterparts supposedly in order to maximise the ‘pay back’ period in investment. Data from the Labour Force Survey (2004) also bear this out. When employees were asked whether they had undergone training in the last four weeks, on average around 40 percent of women aged 35-49 said they had, compared to approximately only 16 percent of those aged 50 and above. Similar rates were found for men, indicating that inequality in this area is not specifically a gender issue but one that is firmly rooted in ageist perceptions concerning older employees, either by those offering training or those refusing the opportunity to train. Research by Taylor and Walker (1997) found that when employers were asked what might discourage them from recruiting older people, lack of appropriate skills came top despite evidence of employers restricting access to training to workers over the age of 50. This and subsequent research found that age was an important factor in employers’ decisions regarding the employability of older workers and was often in contradiction to an organisation’s written policy concerning their equal opportunities practices (Walker, 1997).

Yet mindful of the forthcoming (at the time of writing) Age Regulations (October, 2006), one would assume employers to be taking more proactive approaches in this area. The research, however, suggests otherwise. Most employers know very little about their older workers and even less about the issue of workforce ageing (Loretto and White, 2006). Similarly, research by Metcalf and Meadows (2006) examining the extent to which, prior to the implementation of the draft Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, employers were adhering to the principle of equal opportunity (EO) with respect to age, found that 72 percent of employers surveyed had an EO policy in place, yet only 56 percent had one which addressed the issue of age. Just over half of employers said they were aware of the forthcoming legislation but only 26 percent thought they knew when it would be implemented. Of these, only 7 percent correctly stated October 2006.

Apart from a lack of awareness on the part of employers, there is considerable evidence to support the claim that employers continue to hold stereotypical attitudes towards older workers including both positive and negative elements (IRS, 2003; Loretto and White, 2006; Metcalf and Meadows, 2006). Positive elements include the view that older workers are reliable; loyal to the firm; have superior interpersonal skills and; are safe and responsible. Negative elements include the view that older workers are past their peak; unable to accept new technology; that they are inflexible and hidebound; reluctant to take orders from younger managers; and are expensive to employ (Walker, 1997; Chiu et al, 2001). Whilst these stereotypes may be said to have some root in reality, they are more often exposed as mistaken and irrational (Loretto et al, 2004). For example, the view that older workers do not learn as quickly as their younger counterparts is not substantiated by research evidence, yet many of these economic myths continue to pervade workplace culture, contributing to the loss to the economy of an untapped and valuable resource.

Additionally, there is still evidence of a preference among employers for recruiting younger rather than older workers (Loretto and White, 2006). According to Taylor (1996) there are two possible explanations for this, (i) either the firm's employment policy is inherently biased and not the employer, or (ii) 'positive' attributes concerning older workers are not weighted as heavily by the employer as 'negative' ones (which tend to include a cost element i.e., investment in the pay-back period on recruitment). Extending this point further, Loretto and White's (2006) study concerning the relationship between employers' attitudes and practices towards older workers found that when attitudes were

based upon employers' experiences with older workers (in other words, their existing older staff) the resulting practice was more positive than when attitudes were based upon stereotypes, which tended to be associated with less positive treatment.

Of course employers' perceptions can also affect younger workers, though the origin of the term 'ageism' has meant that it has traditionally been regarded as a phenomenon affecting older as opposed to younger people. Jane Pilcher, for example, argues that both older and younger workers are at a relative disadvantage to 'prime age' (adult) employees who are regarded by employers as being the most productive "*able to perform at an optimum level, at least in the medium, if not the long term*" (1996 p. 161). So in addition to the old ('mature reflection')/young ('youthful energy') dichotomy is the 'prime-age' position; the notion that those aged between 25 and 40 years are the most employable and cost effective employees – they are fit and healthy; responsive to direction; usually already trained and; are loyal to the firm because they have mortgages to pay for and children to provide for.

Another question yet to be answered relates to possible perceived differences between the sexes, specifically, do male and female employees experience age discrimination in different ways and to different degrees according to their gender? As mentioned earlier, the typical male pattern of employment is full, continuous and easily defined. The typical female pattern of employment is interrupted and reduced on account of women's caring for others and the gendered order of society, and tells the story of the role of work in women's lives.

The Role of Work in Women's Lives

Until recently the assumption had been that women's paid employment was secondary only to their unpaid work in the home (Gee & Kimball, 1987). This was because women did not tend to work outside the home as continuously as men and were therefore not as committed to their jobs. The role of work in women's lives is a contentious issue mainly because it arouses debate in the most sensitive of areas – the family. Until the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s the private sphere was an area unfettered by public policy and the absence of state intervention ensured the dominant role of the nuclear family in society. However, the modern shift towards separation, divorce and single

parenthood has thrown into question traditional assumptions about the role of the male breadwinner and female homemaker.

It is now the expectation that both the man and the woman must work to support the family unit (in whatever its shape or form). The idea that motherhood per se should not prevent women from working has become enshrined in public policy through for example such 'welfare to work' measures as the New Deal for Lone Parents. Women who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s have witnessed and often initiated (for example, Second Wave Feminism) changes to both spheres: the family and the labour market. Demographic trends indicate the rising numbers of women in their 50s experiencing divorce, separation, childlessness and single parenthood (Airey, 2004). According to the General Household Survey (GHS) 7 percent of women in their 50s are divorced, a three fold increase compared with 20 years ago (ESRC, 2000). In addition to changes in the norms prevailing during the life course, these women have been at the forefront of major social and economic change, including, the decline of heavy industry, women's integration into the labour market and the introduction of equal opportunity (EO) legislation.

That is not to say of course that women's integration into the UK labour market is a new phenomenon. During the Second World War women's participation in work in non traditional employment areas sparked off major changes in the ways they viewed their contribution to society, with many seeming to reject the life of previous domesticity (Maguire, 1995). However, it was not until the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s that women began to work alongside men in non traditional female areas which consequently raised their aspirations and expectations regarding what they could achieve in paid employment. Nevertheless women at that time faced years of discrimination in terms of access to employment and parity of pay and conditions.

Women in the early 1950s had very low rates of economic activity (35 percent) reflecting the nature of their role in society at that time as homemaker supporting the male breadwinner and caring for offspring in the family home. This position was challenged in the 1970s due at least, in part, to the raising of the female consciousness – because of Second Wave Feminism and campaigns for the rights of women to receive fair and equitable treatment at work, women felt that equality would soon be their's. Legislation aimed at trying to create a level 'playing field' for women and men culminated in two

major acts: the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act, both coming into effect in 1975. Economic forces also played a part here. The inflationary period in the 1970s and subsequent demise of heavy industry was a time when women entered the labour market at unprecedented rates as they watched full time male employment rates spiral downwards and the availability of part time work increase. This was quickly followed by the rise of service sector employment, the expansion of feminised labour markets and the popularity of short term contracts and part time work for women.

At this uncertain time, employers could hire women on part time contract work with limited employment protection at a fraction of the cost for men. Many women at that time realised that work not only provided them with an income and a social network but also raised their confidence and self-esteem (Klungness and Donovan, 1987). Equally, however, it is important to remember that the widening of opportunities for women was and, to a large extent, still is determined upon the economic requirements of the labour market. Maguire (1995 p. 561) explains *“the desire/need to participate in paid labour outside the home as well as capital’s ‘requirement’ for cheap part-time labour have shaped the employment patterns of women”*. In this way women have been used as a kind of reserve army of labour ushered into and expelled from the labour market when required. Whilst participation rates for women have either continued to rise or at least remained stable, the work they do is still poorly paid and ancillary in nature to the work of men.

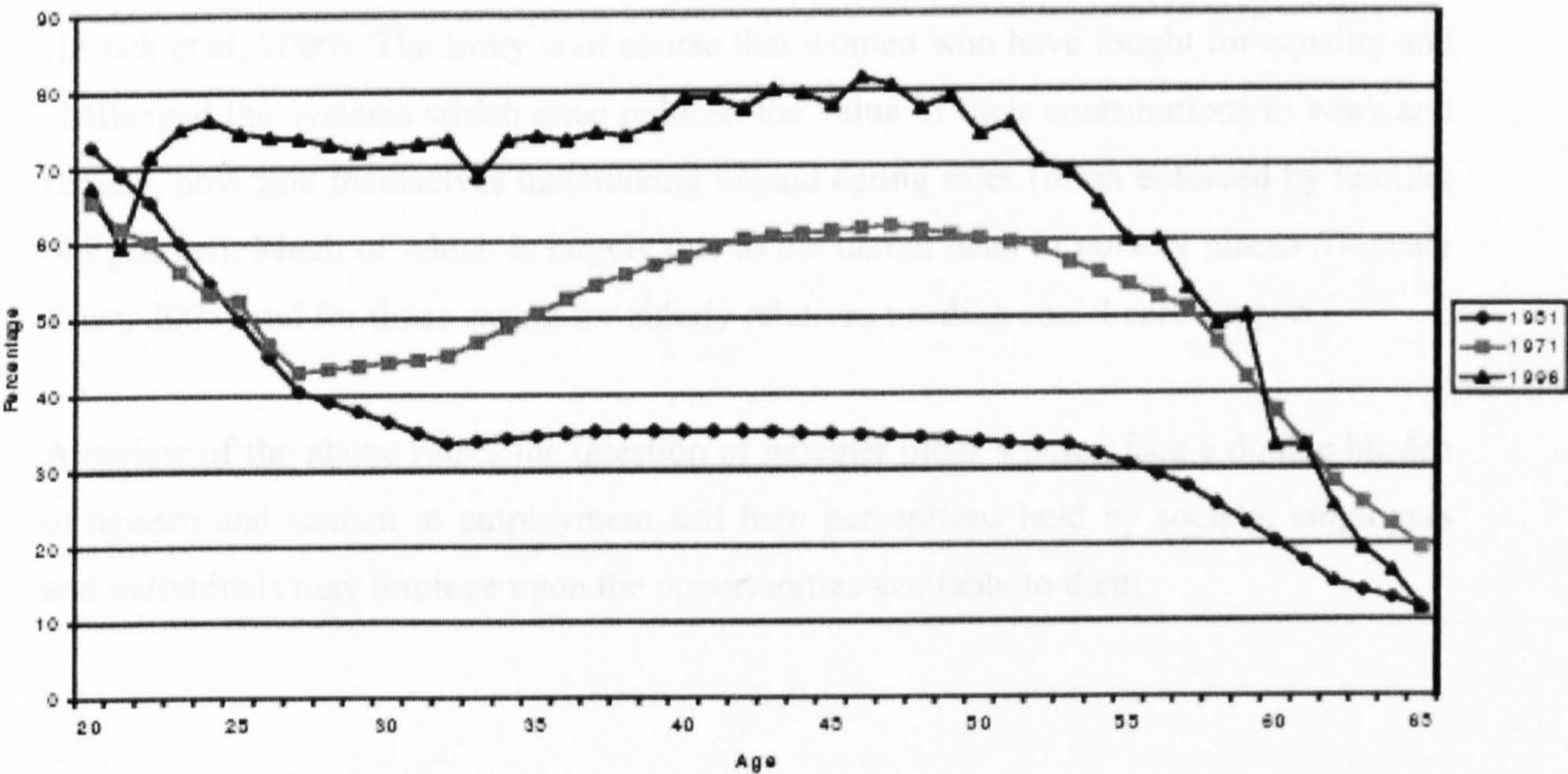
Despite the fact that more women are working and progress is being made to combat discrimination, women are still underrepresented at the upper levels of the career ladder and overrepresented at the lower levels (Halford and Leonard, 2001). With over 70 percent of women now participating in the workforce, research by the Women’s Unit declared that women were still *“paying a heavy economic price for just being female”* despite the long history of legislation on equal pay. Persistent patterns of inequality remain, particularly in respect to women’s secondary status in the workforce.

“Women overwhelmingly work in the service sector and make up the bulk of the part time workforce; they are concentrated in low-wage occupations; and although there has been a narrowing of the unemployment rate for women and men, the unemployment rate for women is still higher in some cases” (Bakker, 1988 quoted in Maguire, 1995 p. 561).

The effects of these factors have been well-researched and well-documented (see, for example, Cockburn, 1998). However as noted by Maguire, “*there is an additional need to focus on ageism and age in relation to unequal relations for women and between women in paid employment*” (1995 p. 562). Despite the gradual and persistent increase in female employment, women as a group remain at a disadvantage to men as a group in respect to equal treatment at work. This is partly the result of differences in economic activity (see p.15). The pattern of difference is much starker for older women and older men.

The downward trend of economic activity for women in their 50s is clearly observable if one was to look at women’s economic activity rates from the 1950s to 1990s. The economic activity rate of those in their 40s was much higher in 1971 than in 1951, indicating the inroads women had made in accessing employment and by 1996 around 70 percent of women aged between 25 and 50 were in paid employment; the economic activity rate for women aged between 40 and 50 was particularly high at 80 percent (see Figure 1 below). However after the age of 50, the economic activity rate declined more sharply and at an earlier age than had been witnessed in the 1950s and 1970s (Collis et al, 2000). This decline coincided with the trend towards early exit whereby voluntary redundancy packages were used to downsize companies and reduce wage bills by offering enticements for people to leave employment before official retirement ages.

Figure 1. Female Economic Activity rates 1951, 1971, 1996



Source: Collis et al, 2000

The Picture for Older Women

As Maguire (1995) observed, where women once left work upon marriage, the present situation is one where women tend to leave work upon the birth of a child and return to work after basic maternity leave. Hence there are some elderly women who left work as soon as they got married or had children and there are some women, typically in their 50s, who left work upon the birth of a child, returned to work and worked (mostly part-time) between the births of their subsequent children. There will of course be differences here based upon race, class and family status yet the point remains the same, namely, *“the younger the woman, the more paid work she is likely to have done and the better qualified in formal terms she is likely to be”* (Groves, 1993 p. 48). As a result, older women are more likely to be working part time than older men. They are also more likely than men to be engaged in poorly paid, low status and sex-segregated work (Bernard et al, 1995).

Women’s caring for others has also been cited as part of the issue. According to Mooney et al (2002), one in five people between the ages of 50 and 59 regularly provide informal and unpaid care for their family. Currently there are approximately 6 million carers in the UK, 60 percent of whom are women aged between 45 and 50 (Social Trends, 2004). Approximately 34 percent of children under 15 years old whose mothers are in paid employment are looked after by their grandparents either regularly or occasionally (Dench et al, 2000). The irony is of course that women who have fought for equality and challenged the systems which once reduced the value of their contributions to work and society, now find themselves undertaking unpaid caring roles (often enforced by familial obligations). Much of which is largely due to the unmet need in nursery places (Daycare Trust, 2005) and for those caring for elderly relatives needing social care support.

A review of the above raises the question of whether older women face a double burden of ageism and sexism in employment and how perceptions held by society, employers and individuals may impinge upon the opportunities available to them.

Double Jeopardy for Women?

It is possible that women and men experience age discrimination in different ways and to different degrees according to their gender. This point is echoed by Itzin and Phillipson (1995) who conceptualised the term ‘gendered ageism’ to describe the combination of, or interaction and intersection between, ageism and sexism so that: “*it would appear that age and ageism is in fact significantly gendered and that sexism operates always with a dimension of ageism*” (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995: 88). In their case study research, women were said by their employers to ‘hit their peak’ at younger ages than their male counterparts. It was also found that employers’ perceptions of women often contained a sexual element linked to the sex stereotyping of women at particular points in the life course. As one manager in the study put it “*she is a flighty young piece*”, or “*hearing wedding bells*”, or “*raising a family and not really committed to her work*”, or “*it’s that age - the change*” (Itzin and Phillipson, 1996 p. 87). These often-quoted examples are used to describe the unique and complex nature of the discrimination experienced by women in the workplace.

That women are ‘never the right age’ has also secured support from a study of that name by Duncan and Loretto (2004) who found self-reported evidence by women of gendered ageism, specifically by the older and younger cohorts. Yet despite the evidence that gendered ageism can impact on women at whatever age, the accumulation of negative treatment and/or missed opportunity over the years may result in greater inequality with increased age (Barnum, et al, 1995; Browne, 1998) – in short, discrimination follows you. Additionally, the notion that women are valued in accordance to the conditions ascribed to their youth (sexual appeal, reproductive capacity) has meant that older women have tended to be those more harshly affected.

A more recent study by Granleese and Sayer (2006) explored the issue of ‘Lookism’ in employees’ experiences of work in academia. The authors found issues of physical attractiveness and appearance to be relevant to women’s experiences, and these were played out in a number of ways. Women academics were perceived as career driven if they did not pay attention to their physical appearance or if they were viewed as unattractive. Consequently, younger women played down their looks (i.e. attractiveness)

as they felt this to be of detriment to the development of an academic career. Men did not report the same experiences. Itzin and Phillipsoin's (1995) case study identified similar female adaptation strategies whereby women had to work harder than their male counterparts to reach the same occupational levels, or adapt to the masculine culture of the workplace. Yet in doing so they were perceived as pushy or seen as deviant. The point to be made here is that women are, in many ways, damned if they do and damned if they don't. One woman described how she was treated as one of the boys, she said, "*I still don't know if I feel insulted or committed*" Itzin and Phillipsoin's (1995). There were other examples of women being described in sexual terms by employers, or stereotyped, for example, 'dolly bird', 'spinster' (Itzin and Phillipson, 1996).

Notwithstanding the importance of such work, researchers have yet to consider the differences as well as the shared aspects of older women's experiences of ageism or how these might relate to broader social, structural and economic factors (i.e. job type or seniority of post). There is still a lot of work to be done.

Men, Masculinity and Old Age

A critical examination of the construct of 'feminisation of old age' raises the question of whether the whole negative and individual connotation of old age has been labelled a 'woman's problem' in order to allow men to escape from a milieu which suffers from the negative stereotype of old age. Arnold, 1996.

Arber et al (2003, p.1) write, "*over recent years there have been substantial advances in our understanding of the lives of older women, but older men have been largely neglected*". It is not the intention of this study to neglect the experiences of older men. On the contrary, referring back to Hearn's quote (p.2), this study is not about women, but an attempt to contribute towards the need for "*[knowledge] and theorising of ageing [in employment] to be applied to both women and men and subjected to critique on the grounds of gender*" (Hearn, 1995 p.98).

Hearn (1995) is one of the few academics to explore the relationship of age and the social construction of older men and masculinity. He argues that the ageing of men cannot be separated from wider political, social and economic change, and must be considered

within societal, domestic and personal as well as cultural and media contexts (Hearn, 1995). One of the ways in which men's age originally related to their masculinity was through the construction of power "*'maleness' and 'age(dness)' were usually mutually reinforcing and reaffirming as means to power*" (Hearn, 1995 p. 100). This was observable across the various stages of the human life course. According to Hearn (1995) youth signified power for men in terms of their physical strength, body shape and sexual virility; adulthood signified power in terms of men's promotion and power status in work and patriarchal power in the home; and the period of later life signified power for older men in terms of the seniority of patriarchal and economic power, and older men's freedom of retirement (Hearn, 1995).

There are however several ways in which the relationship between men's age and their power has been threatened or undermined recently. For instance, the consumer culture has impacted on men via the promotion of successful older men in the media or in positions of power on the television, or the spread of youth fashion into older men's markets: the notion that, "*men can now die with their Reeboks on*" (Hearn, 1995 p. 102). In the mass media older men are portrayed in a number of contradictory ways: the sadness/status loss of the respectable older man; the old, angry man; the older man who has reaffirmed his connection with youth (i.e. the rock star); the older man who has managed to 'move on' (as sports star to sports manager/presenter) and; the wise old man or fatherly figure (Hearn, 1995). Such positive and negative portrayals can take power away from men by creating powerful stereotypes to be lived up to or avoided at all cost.

Another way in which the lives of older men have developed recently is in terms of their discontinuity or loss of control over the future. This is no more evident than in the world of work where the move from an industrial to a post-industrial economy has meant redundancy and unemployment for many groups of older men. The loss of work may be expected to affect men in different ways according to their personal characteristics, family circumstances, future expectations and of course the importance of work to them.

According to Edwards (2006 p. 8) "*work has often stood as the fundamental foundation of masculinity...the most fundamental element in the formation of successful masculine identity*" The point to be made here is that work for many people, men especially, is more than simple 'nine-to-five' involvement. Work not only is important *to* men, but is also

part of them, in the sense that it is a primary source of power and identity, and for some a central life interest (Edwards, 2006). Consequently, successful masculinity is equated with success at work, whether in respect to the profession or career of the 'white-collar' male or the manual labour associated with the 'blue collar' male. However, the decline in industry and the feminization of work have led to talk of a 'crisis of masculinity' whereby men are said to feel increasingly redundant because of a lack of available work (McDowell, 2001).

Areas of the country that were previously dominated by one main employer have fallen victim to the post industrial economy, leaving unemployment and social inequality in its wake. Hardest hit are those later in life, "*studies of unemployment tend to show a marked stigma concerning men who feel emasculated without work and, more particularly, the loss of 'men's work' or manual labour in later life*" (Edwards, 2006 p. 8) No longer is the notion of a 'job for life' applicable to the majority of people in the UK. For poorly qualified older men, redundancy is often followed by discrimination in the job search process. Accordingly, some feel that they are, in fact, 'too old' to work and assume the status of early retired.

The reduction in traditional male work or manual labour may constitute a *material* crisis for these men and those around them but whether this is accompanied by, or related to, a deeper emotional 'crisis of masculinity' is uncertain (Hearn, 1999). Certainly it is true that displaced older workers have a high probability of part time, insecure and temporary work (Chan and Stevens, 2001). For some men, this may mean having to adjust both socially and emotionally to the fact that they are no longer the main provider. Yet relatively little is known about the effects of job loss on a worker's self esteem and life satisfaction, or whether men and women react to redundancy in different ways.

According to Bruegel (1979) women's orientations to work are largely determined by their primary socialisation which has traditionally ensured that a woman's place is in the home. It is reasonable to assume therefore that older women treat themselves as more readily disposable in a redundancy situation than do men or possibly that they have a lower emotional or financial attachment to work (Bruegel, 1979 in Wood, 1981). Additionally, women's typically broken pattern of employment (on account of their childbearing role) may mean that redundancy is more readily accepted or treated as 'just'

another discontinuity in the life course. Because women are used to the job search process (for example, between the births of children) the prospect of redundancy could perhaps be less traumatic for them, than for men. It may also be that due to the rise of service sector employment, women have more work available to them.

Ashcraft and Flores (2000) have identified two types of work performed by men: (i) manual labour and (ii) mental labour. The first, manual labour, is more primitive in nature consisting of essentially physical work performed by rough and tough men. The second, mental labour, is more civilized in nature consisting of essentially intellectual work performed by competitive businessmen in a dog-eat-dog world. As already mentioned, many of the men performing work of a manual nature have found their role undermined by the collapse of modern industry. However, the spread of occupational insecurity across the UK has also seeped into the professional, masculine workplace (Edwards, 2006). Yet relatively little is known about the vulnerability of the professional masculine identity and even less about its impact upon older 'company men' who have carved out professional careers and been very successful at them.

Social Policy Approaches to Age Discrimination

If one were to take a historical look at the economic activity of older people, the pattern to emerge would be that of a flexible workforce unworthy of any real investment but with some value in a reserve manpower role (Walker, 2001). It is only in the face of demographic change that the early exit of workers from employment has become an issue of concern to policy makers at both national and European levels. The UK Government is thus faced with a conflict of interest regarding the cultural construction of old age, namely, should older people be workers or dependents? The recently enacted Age Regulations (October, 2006) is an important indication of the direction they have decided to take.

Chris Phillipson (2004) believes that traditional retirement trends may be difficult to reverse particularly among the baby boom cohort, many of whom have worked since they first left school at 16 years of age (or younger). Policy is nevertheless now in place for extending the retirement age (to 68 for both sexes by 2044). Yet the prospect of working beyond 65 years of age is likely to be met with some resistance from the public (see

Vickerstaff, 2007). In the UK the notion of retiring at age 60 for women and 65 for men or younger is a part of societal consciousness (Macnicol, 2005). However, placed in the context of a world in which people are living longer and healthier lives, prolonging working life to support oneself in one's old age seems reasonable enough, if not necessary. One must also question the desirability of retirement as for some it can be a disempowering and lonely experience. Retirement is therefore a complex issue, and one which is conflated with contradictory argument. For instance, Scales and Scase (2001) found in their report for the ESRC, evidence of a polarisation between those who are well off and who can afford to take early retirement and displaced older workers at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder (cited in Phillipson, 2001).

Older Workers and Social Policy

In the economic boom of the 1950s Government attached importance to the work ethic and encouraged older people to work towards a 'happier old age' (Taylor and Walker, 1994 p. 570). In the recessions of the 1970s and 1980s Government reversed its policy objective and expected older people to take early retirement from work. In this period, older workers were reminded of their moral obligation to make way for younger ones. The aim was to achieve a smaller and more productive workforce comprised of mostly younger people. 'Disposability' has therefore become the popular watchword in historical accounts following the recruitment and retention of older workers.

In the early 1990s however there was a shift in policy focus in favour of the recruitment of older workers alongside wider recognition that the older workforce has consistently been undervalued and often discarded by employers for being 'too old'. At the same time, concern over the so-called demographic 'time-bomb' arising from the ageing of the population and shortage of younger workers emphasised the importance of older people to both society and the economy. The Government's position on the 'waste of talent of older people' at that time was articulated in the House of Commons Employment Committee Report:

When we began to plan the inquiry, interest still centred on the development of schemes to ease older workers into early retirement. By the time we had finished taking our evidence there had been a dramatic shift of emphasis and there was growing discussion of ways in which older people could be persuaded to stay in work in order to offset the impending shortage of young workers. The pendulum has rarely swung so swiftly (1989 para.1, cited in Loretto et al, 2000).

Policy measures to accompany such an abrupt turnaround in official opinion included: the abolition of the earnings rule in 1989 which penalised people for working over the SPA if they earned beyond £75 per week; the raising of the age limit for the Government's Access to Training for Work (TfW) from 59 years of age to 63 years of age; and the 1993 'Getting On' campaign which extolled the virtues of the older workforce in the hope that employers would be persuaded to abandon discriminatory practice (Taylor, 2001). Through these measures ageism was able to secure (some) prominence as an issue of concern. Yet the *need* for an unfettered labour market prevented this concern from culminating into legislative action.

For years, successive British Governments argued forcefully against legislation to combat age discrimination in the workplace. Eventually, however, a U-turn took place "*Legislative interference is now being rehabilitated, in both government publications and extra-governmental research reports*" (Macnicol, 2005 p. 295).

One must question the reason for such debate and confusion over what approach (legislation or persuasion) to take? There are essentially two schools of thought here. On the one hand, there is a powerful social justice case based on the view that ageism should be placed on an equal footing with discrimination on such grounds as race and sex. This case is powerfully articulated by pressure groups such as Age Concern who have campaigned tirelessly for legislative action prohibiting age discrimination in employment, arguing that merit should replace age as the criteria for recruitment (Macnicol, 2005). On the other hand, there is an equally powerful economic case based on the view that an unfettered labour market is what is needed in order to maximise labour supply and increase profits in the private sector (Macnicol, 2005). With respect to the latter, Duncan (2000) suggests that older employees may be laid off, not because they are old (chronological criteria) but because they are more costly (for example, where

seniority-base payment systems are in place) and possibly less flexible than younger workers (cited in Loretto et al, 2000). Duncan's (2000) point is that there is certain rationality to the economic approach, based upon functionalist as opposed to ageist criterion.

Concern over the future employment of older people is reflected in the current orthodoxy of the New Labour Government. The view taken is that ageism is unjustified and, above all, bad for business (Duncan, 2003). When in Opposition, New Labour promised to make age discrimination in employment illegal but when it came to power in 1997, a legislative approach was ruled out and the previous Conservative option of voluntary persuasion was adopted instead (Taylor, 2001). After a consultative period, Government issued a non-statutory Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment in 1999 with the intention that if the code of practice did not work, subsequent legislation would not be ruled out (DfEE, 1999). The aim of the code was to rely upon exhortation and persuasion to tackle age discrimination: 'Building a Better Britain for Older People' (1998), the 'Code of Practice: Age Diversity in Employment' (1999) and 'Winning the Generation Game' (2000) (Macnicol, 2005) – each united in the vision that 'ability is ageless' and 'the older worker is an asset; they are to be welcomed'. Despite such worthy sentiment there was little evidence of a (notable) decline of ageism in employment as a result of the code.

Research by Taylor and Walker (1994) on the effects of the Conservative Government's voluntary approach to age discrimination concluded that for any voluntary approach to work, a very high level of penetration in the culture of the workplace must be achieved. Yet an evaluation of the New Labour's voluntary Code of Practice, carried out three months after its launch found that among 430 small and medium enterprises surveyed, three out of ten were unaware of the existence of the code; less than one in ten intended to make any changes to their recruitment as a result of the code; and 60 percent stated that the code would make no difference to the way they ran their business (Employer's Forum on Age, 1999). A second evaluation of the code, carried out six months after its launch, drew the same conclusion. The code received a lukewarm reception at best. Thus following the re-election of the New Labour Government in 2001, a consultation process on the introduction of age discrimination legislation was launched.

The Current Context

In October 2000, Government pledged its commitment to the EC General Framework for Equal Treatment and Occupational Directive (Council Directive 2000/78/EC) and was required to outlaw workplace discrimination based on religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation by December 2006. The Bill to establish the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to ensure and uphold the rights of persons who have been subject to discrimination on any of the above grounds received Royal Assent in February 2006 providing an integrated approach to tackling discrimination across the board. The Commission will incorporate the work of the existing Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and Disability Rights Commission (DRC) from October 2007 and will be responsible for the new grounds of sexual orientation, age and religion or belief from the same date. The Commission for Racial Equality will join next year (2009).

At the same time, a number of 'active labour market' policies were developed as part of Government's 'welfare to work' initiative. Older people are thus encouraged to re-enter the labour market through schemes such as New Deal 50 plus and Pathways to Work or to take up volunteering through the rubric of 'active citizenship'. As New Labour's election manifesto stated, "*Employment is not just the foundation of affordable welfare, it is the best anti-poverty and pro-family policy yet invented*" (cited in Walker, 2001). The latest workforce statistics bear this out, with employment rates for the over 65s increasing faster than any other age group (ONS, 2007). There is now a variety of ways in which people approaching later life would, on the face of it, be able to access employment. The main obstacle however is the apparent separation between the rhetoric and reality of employers' commitment to equality.

Research by McVittie et al (2003) indicated that employers often use the discourse of 'equality' to obscure unfair practice and even account for the under-representation of the over-50s in employment. The employer's in their survey took a back seat approach; where equal opportunities policies were in place, age imbalances in their workforces were attributed to a lack of older applicants and, as such, were 'out their hands'. Employers' claims to adhere to the principle of equality allowed them to position themselves as non-discriminatory while, at the same time, justified the marginalisation of older workers in their workforces (MacVittie et al, 2003) limiting the options for older workers.

According to McNair (2005) choices in employment are not made in isolation. Some social groups have limited choice due to social, political and economic factors which impact upon the workplace (such as recession). Gender, race and disability compound structural pressures that need to be overcome along with individual pressures such as caring responsibilities, lack of qualifications and ill health (Loretto, et al 2006). Labour market attachment for such groups tends to become a necessitous relationship, often confined to employment in part-time and poorly paid work without recourse to promotion or career development. One's decision to remain in, or move out, of such employment is therefore easier said than done. It is also more perilous for older workers armed with the knowledge that re-employment later in life is considerably more difficult. The concept of choice is therefore more readily available to the "*choosers*" who are "*likely to have higher qualifications are in professional and managerial careers and have significant savings or pension entitlement*" (McNair, 2005 p.3). The question here has to be what can legislation offer in way of changing the fortunes of vulnerable social groups, such as older workers?

Following the DfEE consultation document (DfEE, 1998) legislation outlawing age discrimination in employment was finally introduced in October 2006. The legislation is too new at the time to assess other than to say that it is informed by both social justice and business case approaches to ageism, aligning it with all other forms of unjustifiable discrimination. It also incorporates the broader definition of ageism covering all ages which seems sounder on equality grounds. However, Duncan (2003) argues that the distinctive nature of age prejudice may make it difficult to incorporate into EO frameworks in ways that will benefit vulnerable older workers. Moreover, there is little evidence, at the present time, that the legislation will be elaborate enough to challenge the more covert and indirect forms of discrimination, or recognise and incorporate the concept of multiple-disadvantage (for example, that ageism can be compounded by sexism).

In looking at examples of jurisdictions from other countries it is difficult to come up with an assessment regarding the effectiveness of a legislative approach. In the Republic of Ireland in 2004, 22 percent of discrimination cases involved claims of age discrimination (Attwell, 2005) sending a strong message to employers in the UK to tackle age discrimination now or risk stiff penalties later on. However, research on the US Age

Discrimination in Employment Act, in place since 1969, found that whilst there had been a small drop in age discrimination, the Act was largely ineffective until the 1980s when a prohibitive element was introduced with respect to mandatory retirement, suggesting that it was the consequential reduction in retirement that led to the increase the employment of older workers in that period, not, necessarily, the power of the legislative stick (PIU, 2000 cited in Duncan, 2003).

Most policy approaches to tackling prejudice in the workplace are based upon the logic of equality, that is, that ‘likes should be treated alike’ (Fredman, 2003). The principle of treating all individuals equally regardless of group membership is easily applied to all forms of discrimination (i.e. racism, sexism). Yet equality of this kind raises all sorts of questions about assimilation, on the one hand, and difference, on the other. For instance, if equality is based upon the notion that ‘likes’ are accorded equal treatment, are we then to assume that women and men are alike in the qualifying sense (Fredman, 2003). In other words that they begin at the same starting point and share the same social and personal realities. The Feminist school of thought is that equality in the shape of uniformity is a poor substitute for liberation (Smith, 1987). Herein lays the problem: equality has no conception of difference - women and men can not exist as morphed images of one another, in much the same way, as two people from separate age groups will experience different life events that mark their distinction and difference.

Tackling age discrimination on purely equitable grounds has the potential to create an ‘ageless’ society in which individuals will be judged on individual and personal characteristics that would not include their chronological age. Such a society may, on the face of it, seem an attractive even inspiring option. Macnicol (2005 p. 301) however is sceptical, *“the controversial idea of an ‘ageless’ society has as its obverse implication that the protective walls that have hitherto shielded older people, notably via state pension systems, should be demolished. If that happens, the achievement of an ‘ageless’ society may not be in the best interests of older people”*.

The notion of this ‘dissolving of difference’ (Duncan, 2003) highlights the contradictory nature of equality – that equality in the shape of uniformity may actually perpetuate disadvantage. For example, there are clear cases where equality may benefit the majority at the expense of the minority (see Macnicol’s, 2005 example above). For Fredman

(2003) a more *equitable* form of equality would require that people be treated according to their difference and consequence exclusion (i.e. increase the representation of women in areas where they are currently underrepresented).

The distinctive character of age prejudice can also pose problems in terms of policy formation. Unlike the more traditional forms of discrimination (i.e. racism, sexism), ageism is without clear definition. There is no discrete group that can claim ownership - we are all vulnerable whatever our actual age. The concept of ageism is, therefore, sufficiently hazy enough to be exploited by Government to promote ideas that may empower or exclude certain groups of workers (different interpretations to suit different agendas). Until recently social policy has maintained older workers' position as a reserve army of labour. For the Age Regulations (October, 2006) to work, it must include safeguards to ensure this does not happen and, at the same time, make sure that it is flexible enough to respond to the complexities of age prejudice and the diverse patterns of age discrimination that exist.

The following piece of research was undertaken in the run up to the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (pre October, 2006). It is an attempt to paint a broad picture of older people's experiences of age discrimination and employer's policies and practices at a crucial point in time. It should be viewed as a prelude to future research, which will test the effectiveness of the regulations.

Chapter II. Methodology and Method

This chapter will outline the rationale for choosing the methodological approach taken in this study. In view of the fact that the methodology will affect the research methods adopted, the specific techniques used to collect data for the study will also be explained. The chapter will begin by considering some of the philosophical standpoints that underline the various methodological approaches that could be taken to research this particular field and explain why a pragmatic route was chosen as the best methodological approach. It will then move on to explain the process of data collection and analysis used in this study.

Philosophical Background

Any methodological stance is underpinned by a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions which the researcher must consider when deciding upon the methodological approach to be taken and the subsequent methods used. Ontological assumptions question the nature of reality or what we know about the fundamental character of social life. Epistemological assumptions concern the relationship between the “*knower and the known*” (Maykut and Morehouse, 2001 p. 2). Epistemology, is therefore interested in the construction of knowledge and what should pass as an acceptable picture of the world. Thus in response to ontological assumptions about what is real, epistemology asks: How do we know it is real?

In attempting to answer these questions, a variety of methodological approaches have been developed. These approaches have grown from the roots of two polar opposite paradigms of thought, each adopting a unique ontological and epistemological position. The first is the positivist position of inquiry which is orientated towards the testing and verifying of hypotheses or what has already been discovered by other methods (Maykut and Morehouse, 2001). The second is the humanistic or interpretivist position, which unlike positivism, places emphasis upon the meaning that people attach to a particular situation or event. More recently, a third paradigm has developed, incorporating the methodologies of both positivist and humanistic or interpretivist approaches. This mixed methodology has become an increasingly popular approach to social research, despite accusations that it is ‘impure’ because it claims that distinct ontological and

epistemological approaches can be mixed (Hennessy, 2007). However, before choosing an appropriate methodological approach for this study, it was felt important to consider all three approaches.

Positivism

The positivist philosophy is traditionally regarded as the prevailing paradigm of social research (Gephart, 1999). Rooted within the domain of the natural sciences, positivism takes its lead from the discovery of positive or observable facts. Positivist ontological assumptions presume an objective world independent of the mind, while positivist epistemological assumptions presume a fixed reality made knowable only through our sensory experiences of distinctly natural phenomenon. This fixed reality therefore stands as the reference point for the verification of hypotheses. To put it simply, positivists believe that the natural world moulds the internal dimension of human behaviour to such an extent that humankind is both the product and reflection of a fusion of natural forces. The analogy most frequently expounded to explain this viewpoint is that of molecules responding to heat (May, 2001 p. 9).

Natural sciences establish theories, rules and laws which are tested through experimentation and objective measurement. Positivists assume that like the natural sciences the social world can be explained in much the same way. To this end, all social phenomena are regarded as powerful illusions or misinterpretations of reality. In other words, they cease to exist. It may therefore be argued that positivist philosophy is perhaps more concerned with placing boundaries around knowledge than it is extending knowledge or seeking discovery. Yet positivists maintain that qualitative methods which presume the existence of multiple realities stand outside the remit of *acceptable* social research. As Hume (1975) vehemently argues,

Does [qualitative data] contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of facts and existence? No. Commit it then into the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion (cited in, Hughes and Sharrock, 1997 p. 28).

Positivists claim that if reality is one, it can be pulled apart and separated into pieces which exist 'out there'. It, therefore, follows that the knower can suspend his sense of belonging and stand apart from each piece (Maykut and Morehouse, 2002). Here, true objectivity is believed to be possible. The researcher remains detached from his/her subject by collecting information that is quantitative in nature such as that of questionnaires and statistical experiments, which provide an objective viewpoint. The result, according to the positivist stance, is the collection of data which should be true, repeatable and generalizable to a wider population. However, many commentators (e.g. Gephart, 1999; Guba and Lincoln, 1994) are sceptical of the extent to which this fixed, external reality actually upholds the positivist claim to neutrality. Indeed, by exploring the social realm through a universal prism (one which ignores the possibility of multiple realities) positivism fails to capture bona fide knowledge of the world - the world as perceived by its subjects. In this way, positivist methods of inquiry are said to distort and sanitise the lived experiences of each individual, transmitting these experiences via a positivist focus of concern. As Gephart (1999) points out, such encroachment of individual freedom of expression stands in contradiction to the true nature of neutrality. More specifically, Gephart (1999) questions the value of a research method which seeks to explore the social realm, but which fails to engage the consciousness of its subjects.

Post-Positivism

The positivist commitment to knowledge concerning matter of fact and empirical confirmation is, it has been argued (see above), unlikely to offer any real insight into distinctly human phenomenon. As Hughes and Sharrock put it "*science can study and describe human values, but cannot assess their ultimate truth*" (1997 p. 27). For one thing human phenomenon is far more complex than fixed and measurable matter. Post-positivism therefore conforms to the positivist assertion of an objective reality, but assumes certain aspects of this reality to be excluded from natural scientific study. Here, it draws a distinction between 'human' (mental constructions) and 'material' phenomenon. The view is that human emotions can be measured with a degree of validity, but they are very different phenomena to material objects and constructions.

Moreover, post-positivists are sceptical of the extent to which knowledge conceived in terms of correspondence to the external world can be acknowledged as the bearer of ultimate truth. For Popper, positivist epistemology was simply a “*system of guesses or anticipations which in principle cannot be justified, but which can only be claimed to be valid in this sense: up until this time they have witnessed the toughest tests that scientists have been able to set them*” (1959, cited in Hughes and Sharrock, 1997 p. 78). Viewed this way, all scientific explanations are probable, but not explicit. As Dixon et al (2002) point out positivism fails to produce explanation beyond those inferred to in a ‘cause and effect’ mechanism. This philosophical flaw is reflected in attempts by post-positivists to falsify, rather than verify hypotheses “*truth must be tested by the elimination of falsehood*” (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997 p. 79). Thus, the post-positivist assumption of non-observable phenomenon (inner mental states) coupled with its focus on falsification has paved the way for more *sophisticated* explanation, whilst still upholding the spirit of scientific inquiry.

Interpretivism: Objectivity versus Subjectivity

Interpretivist researchers believe that it is difficult, if not impossible, to study social experience in the same manner as quantifiable scientific phenomenon. The term ‘interpretivist’ refers to the branch of social research that includes a number of diverse approaches such as hermeneutics, phenomenology and constructivism. Whilst each approach is different, there is a unifying similarity between them. Central to each approach is the presumption of multiple realities which are socially constructed and interdependent of people, “*In the truest sense, the person is viewed as having no existence apart from the world, and the world as having no existence apart from the person*” (Valle and King, 1978 cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Thus there is no ontological assumption as such. Rather, the social world exists because we experience it. However, since proponents of interpretative research claim that the knower and the known are inexorably linked; that each implicated in the construction of the other, the knower is unable to stand apart from what is known. This raises fundamental questions about how to capture and explore the social world as perceived by the individual.

Hermeneutics is regarded as the dominant paradigm of interpretive research (Gephart, 1999). Proponents of the hermeneutic stance argue that although people view the social world through separate realities, they do not operate inside social vacuums. Rather each individual is linked to the next through a shared sense of belonging and it is this sense of belonging to a society that becomes the bridge from which the researcher may cross from one prism or viewpoint to the next. Here, the researcher must penetrate the inner world of his/her subjects whilst, at the same time, remain conscious of what Maykut and Morehouse (1994) call the 'objective-subjective' split: to step inside the world of others yet to be aware of his/her own values and preoccupations "*to be apart of and apart from*" (Patton, 1980 p. 121). There is however an acknowledgment that the researcher is part of the research process and as such can affect how the data is collected. An interpretivist researcher is more likely to favour qualitative approaches which focus on people's words, actions and experiences, and which include in-depth interviews, case studies, conversational analysis and participant observation.

Studying Ageing and Later Life, Strategies and Methodologies Used

In studying issues relating to ageing and later life, a number of methodological approaches have been adopted by researchers. The positivist paradigm has been favoured when trying to count the proportion of 'older people' in society or when providing statistical information about the numbers of older workers in the UK (see, for example, Hotopp, 2005). Post positivist approaches have similarly been adopted when trying to measure individuals' experiences and perceptions of age discrimination (Duncan and Loretto, 2004) and employers' attitudes and practices towards 'older workers' (Taylor and Walker, 1998). Such analysis is deductive in nature with a certain amount of theory testing of prior assumptions and hypotheses formed from the available literature (what is already known). However, there are certain limitations to these approaches.

For instance, Taylor and Walker's (1998) postal survey of more than 300 large employers (those with 500 or more employees) asked respondents' attitudes towards older workers to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements reflecting common stereotypes associated with older workers. Notwithstanding such work, Taylor and Walkers' (1998) study focused on a fairly narrow range of measures meaning that the quantitative nature of the data prevented a deeper analysis of employers' attitudes and

practices and the relationship between the two. For example, they were not able to identify the extent to which employers' attitudes were shaped by actual experiences (of a 'known' older employee) as opposed to societal prejudice and cultural stereotypes of older people in general (Loretto and White, 2006). Recognising the impetus for further research here, Loretto and White (2006) conducted a more detailed, qualitative examination of the relationship between employers' attitudes and practices. The aim of their qualitative approach being "*to capture in detail that which is beyond the capacity of quantitative methods*" (Loretto and White, 2006 p. 315).

Another problem with positivist based approaches relates to the difficulties of defining some of the terms and concepts concerning issues of ageing in work and employment. As mentioned earlier (see p.6), the term 'older' is a relatively elusive concept to capture. Unlike tangible objects, it defies clear cut definition: what is yet to be explained is what exactly does it mean to be 'older' and how might this effect the study itself? In creating the concept of the 'Third Age', Peter Laslett (1989) attempted to reconcile some of the tensions surrounding how to define the period of later life/older age. He used the concept of the Third Age to denote the period between retirement and the 'Fourth Age' of decline, dependency and ultimately of death.

Yet the modern trend towards the early exit of workers from employment has meant that retirement is no longer a stable or predictable reference point in the life course. In fact, policy makers and the research community often use the term 'older' to refer to workers aged 50 and above, despite evidence that people in their 50s and 60s do not *feel* old and certainly not *older* than they did when they were forty-nine. The variation in the ways in which older is defined, understood and internalised has led interpretivists to reject the view that ageing is simply a natural, objective process. Defining someone as older is already a result of subjective interpretation. More recently then there has been a trend towards interpretivist methodologies relying upon qualitative methods for data collection (see for example Cook et al, 2004). Nevertheless, this has not put an end to the debate amongst researchers studying ageing, regarding the most appropriate methodological approach to be taken.

The difficulties identified above highlight the dilemma posed when trying to decide upon an appropriate methodological approach. However, by comparing the philosophical

assumptions of each paradigm or worldview it is possible to see that a research topic concerned with examining the perceptions of individuals' experiences of discrimination must lend itself to more interpretative methods of inquiry. As one important aspect of this research was to understand the study cohort within their social context, a methodology which would be able to analyse the meaning of social processes and social interaction seemed most appropriate. This research topic is premised on the idea that knowledge of the social world is rooted within the constructs of our cultural perspectives and meanings of everyday life. In other words, reality is subject to interpretation. Hence, positivist and post-positivist approaches are rejected at this point. Not to say that they are without value. As Table 2 overleaf illustrates, *"In brief, there are not choices between good and bad, but choices among alternatives. All of which have merit"* (Patton, 1980 p. 78).

Table 2: Methodological Paradigms in Social Research

| | Positivism (dominant paradigm) | Post-positivism (alternative paradigm) | Interpretivism (alternative paradigm) |
|---------------------|---|---|--|
| Assumption | An objective world independent of the mind. A fixed reality. | An objective world. Distinction between ‘human’ and ‘material’ phenomenon. | A subjective world. Multiple realities. |
| Aim | Search for truth. | Search for truth and discovery. | Search for meaning. |
| Key Idea | Science can measure reality. | Human phenomenon can be measured with a degree of validity | Focus on understanding and interpretation. |
| Criteria | Confirmation of hypotheses. | Falsification of hypotheses. | Descriptions of meaning. Patterns of meaning. Qualitative methods. |
| Contribution | Highly probable explanations. | More sophisticated explanations. | Deeper levels of explanation. |
| Problem | Excludes discovery from beyond scientific explanation. | Fails to consider subjective meaning. | Culturally-specific. Prevents broad generalization. |

The Focus of the Study and its Fit with Interpretivism

Lincoln and Guba (1985 pp. 229-230) produced a set of criteria for determining the appropriateness of the interpretivist paradigm in terms of its ‘fit’ with the focus of a particular study. They concurred that interpretivism is an appropriate methodology for studies in which:

- a) the phenomenon under investigation is represented by a multiplicity of complex constructions
- b) there is significant investigator-phenomenon interaction to the extent that the interaction may influence the investigation
- c) the phenomenon under investigation is context dependent
- d) participant and observer values are likely to be crucial to the outcome of the investigation

Meadows (2003) used Lincoln and Guba's criteria to help him decide upon the interpretivist paradigm for his study concerning the effects of intervention strategies on the experiences of lone parents. In respect to the present study, it was considered that, in various ways, and to various degrees, the study did meet each of the criteria listed. One of the deciding factors for Meadows (2003) was the acknowledgment that lone parents experience their lone parenthood in different ways. Thus, the experience of lone parenthood is reliant upon the reciprocal relationship between the individual and his/her environment. For Meadows (2003) the practical application of this was that there has to be an acceptance that experiences are socially constructed and, albeit to some degree, have shared meaning. The same could, of course, be said of older people's experiences of the social world.

The focus on the meanings of social interaction is an important tenant of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism contends that "*human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings the things have for them*" (Blumer, 1969 p. 2). It rests on the premise that the source of the meaning of things is derived from one's social interaction with other people, an interpretive process through which one is able to revise, modify and make sense of the world. Society itself is a product of social interaction between people in the course of their everyday life and is made knowable through the use of symbols that have meaning for the people involved. Society therefore consists of people interacting with one another on a symbolic level. An object can be anything which can be pointed or referred to - a cloud, a book, a chair, a school boy, a teacher, a concept, a belief. Such objects can be classified as: (a) a physical object; (b) a social object; and (c) an abstract object. However, the nature of each of these objects only comes to life when one is able to interpret their meaning – it is the meaning that is fundamental to the way in which one sees the object, the way in which one is able to speak about the object, and the way in

which one is prepared to act towards it. It follows that the ways in which we experience the social world are determined by the understanding we have for it (Blaikie, 1999).

Of course an object may mean different things to different people. The example used by Blumer (1969) is that the President of the United States may be a very different *object* to a devoted member of his political party than to a member the opposition. Out of our interaction with those around us and those who operate within our social environment, objects emerge which have a shared meaning for the people involved and are seen and experienced in much the same way. Yet we also come to learn from the indications of others that a chair is a chair, a cloud is a cloud and the President of the United States is the head of State. Such interpretations are based on a common stock of knowledge (Scott, 1995). Any subsequent behaviour becomes symbolic when people ascribe a sense of meaning to it. That is not to say however that objects are fixed or stable in terms of our interpretation of them. Social interaction is an ongoing process in which the meanings we have for the objects in our social world are formed, sustained and transformed. As Blumer (1969 p. 12) explains “*A star in the sky is a very different object to a modern astrophysicist than it was to a shepherd of Biblical times...The life and action of people necessarily change in line with the changes taking place in their world of objects*”. In relation to the study of older people it follows that what is meant by the term older may differ according to historical periods, cultures and cohorts.

Social interactionism also has important implications for the self, with human beings being able to develop a sense of self through their interactions with others. Blumer (1969 p. 12) contends “*Like other objects, the self-object emerges from the process of social interaction in which other people are defining a person to himself*”. In respect to the present study, this would be useful to consider how those aged 50 and above viewed themselves, in relation to those of a similar age and how their interactions with others affected their position and role within the workplace. The suggestion here is that if a man recognises himself as an old man, he will then act towards himself and other people on the basis of that recognition. Yet the fact that old age is a much contested concept means that such recognition may not be easily formed or accepted, or experienced in the same way or at the same time (or age). This may understandably lead to confusion with some people. On this issue, Bytheway (1995 p. 125) asks “*what then is the reality of age?*” He makes the point that the body of an 80 year old is unmistakably not that of a 20 year old, and that there is clearly visible and measurable evidence that tell us that. However, it is

not a momentary change that causes the difference: rather our identification with the category of older is likely to be a gradual social process which emerges through a change in interpretation in terms of how we interact with the world and consequently a different sense of self. An interpretivist methodology is especially appropriate here because it considers the dynamics of social interaction and the meanings that individuals ascribe to their lives and themselves.

There were however some aspects of the study that required more objective information, which did not need the depth of understanding of individuals' interpretations of meaning, for example, describing the characteristics of the study population. It was also felt necessary to compare and contrast the experiences of 'younger' (i.e. those in their 50s) and 'older' (i.e. those aged 60 and above) individuals to discover if age as a variable had an affect. Comparisons between women and men were also necessary in order to support or disprove the theory of a double jeopardy for women. Here there were a number of prior assumptions that needed to be examined through deductive as opposed to inductive reasoning. There was also a need to discover if there were any particular variables which affected individuals' experiences of work and employment, which were common to all individuals in the cohort. Moreover, if an outcome of the research was to develop a model of best practice and/or have implications for policy and further research, then there needed to be some results which were generalisable to a wider population. This could only be obtained by adopting some type of variable analysis through a positivist research framework.

The complexity of issues and questions raised by the research called for a more pragmatic approach as opposed to being aligned to a single methodological framework. Thus the philosophy of pragmatism which favours a mixed methodology seemed most appropriate. But could quantitative and qualitative methods really be mixed in view of their antithetical ontological and epistemological assumptions? These comprise essentially: (a) objectivity versus subjectivity; (b) a world independent of the mind versus a world that is socially constructed; (c) a fixed, stable reality versus a multiple, fluid reality; (d) proof versus discovery; and (e) an outsider versus an insider perspective (Meadows, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Towards a Mixed Methodology

There has always been a division between the two main methodological approaches: positivism and interpretivism with research purists on both sides of the divide, united on only one view – that the two stances are incompatible with each another. Under such a perspective, it would seem to be impossible to combine the use of a positivist methodology for one part of the research with an interpretivist methodology for the other part. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985 p. 93), the idea of such a compromise is akin to “...*a compromise between the view that the world is flat and the view that the world is round*”. This has resulted in what some have described as ‘paradigm wars’ (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) with the literature containing arguments that advocate one method above another, often to the other’s exclusion. Yet there is never a victor. Rather, the conclusion is always the same, namely that the methods associated with each methodology should not be mixed.

Outside research purists’ school of thought, it is clear that a number of researchers feel that the divide between the two main methodological approaches is overstated and overdrawn, and that common ground can be found. Erzberger and Kelle (2003) list a number of well known studies within the field of social research (such as the Hawthorne experiment) that have used a mixed methodology for the collection and validation of their data. Meadows (2003) extends this further by trying to determine where this common ground can be found. He argues that since positivism has been largely usurped by post-positivism and the acceptance that human phenomenon is excluded from pure scientific study, there is opportunity for quantitative and qualitative methods to be mixed. Drawing upon the work of Cook and Reichardt (1979) he suggests the ontological and epistemological assumptions of post-positivism and interpretivism should be viewed at “*separate ends of a continuum, rather than simply as a dichotomy*” (Meadows, 2003 p. 61) and that the practical application of both methods is possible. However, a cautionary note is added warning that the use of both methods of data collection may mean a trade off between generalisability (quantitative) and specificity (qualitative).

Yet purists maintain that one philosophy or belief system must not be saturated or sanitised by the power of another. Rather, one worldview should determine the methods used. However, as Hennessy (2003) points out, this does not mean that those who have chosen the pragmatist approach are unable to adopt a philosophical stance. On the contrary, the stance they adopt is the pragmatist philosophy which is based on the premise that the researcher must make use of all the tools and methods at his/her disposal in order to answer a particular research question; an interplay of methods as opposed to a compromise. Furthermore, as Denzin (1990) points out, the combination of both methods can add reliability and depth to the data. Qualitative methods are unable to tell us how variables interact or which has a stronger relationship to the phenomenon under investigation. While quantitative methods are unable to tell us about the complexity of a phenomenon within a particular situation and environment. We can learn from one what we cannot learn from the other. Thus, the question is not whether we should use both methods but rather how they may work together (Strauss and Corbin, 1996).

Ethical Considerations

Two important issues must be addressed before we can proceed. They are the ethical practice of social research and the role of a *younger* researcher involved in research with older people. To deal with the ethical issue first. Adherence to ethical practice is needed in order to ensure that the consent of the research participants is informed, voluntary and valid, and that the researcher behaves in an ethical manner. On considering these principles with respect to research with older people, Gilhooly (2002) argues that most older people should be treated in the same way as any other adult invited to take part in a piece of research. The suggestion being that to treat older people otherwise is to negate the principle of justice whereby treating people fairly means treating everyone equally. As with any study then, it is essential that those involved do not experience emotional discomfort from their participation; that the research is of positive value to society; that it respects people's rights of self-determination (to take part or to not take part) and; that it treats people fairly. These principles were upheld by the present study. For example, it was recognised that age discrimination can be a sensitive and emotive issue. Participants may revisit painful or uncomfortable experiences from their past and/or present. It was with this in mind that all questionnaires and interview schedules were constructed with the utmost care and sensitivity. Moreover, it was decided that any person who was, in any

way, adversely affected by the issues raised would be directed to local counselling and support services (listed on the participant information sheet). However, it was hoped that the emancipatory element of the research (to combat discrimination) would, in fact, encourage participants to feel empowered by their involvement in the research.

It was also acknowledged that whilst the vast majority of older people should be treated in the same way as any other adult asked to take part in a piece of research, there are some who Walker (1998) describes as having “*quiet voices*” (cited in Cook et al, 2004 p. 149) and require an approach that is sensitive as well as participative. Therefore, a pilot study (see Appendix E) was carried out in which a number of topics concerning age and employment were discussed. Issues raised from the pilot study enabled the researcher to construct a questionnaire and interview schedule (see next section for details of these) which allowed for sensitivity of questions and words used. The pilot study also raised issues of access, specifically, how to involve those with quiet voices. As Bhopal (2000) suggests it is possible that social research by virtue of its very nature attracts certain *types* of people who like to talk about their life. A major problem therefore was how to contact those who were vulnerable or hard to reach. It was decided that all those who completed a questionnaire would be asked if they would be willing to distribute one or more questionnaires to people relevant to the research, and this proved an effective way to contact those who may have been hard to reach.

It was also fully acknowledged that those who may not wish to take part in the research may feel undue pressure to do so if they were directly contacted by the researcher. In view of this, initial contact was made by employer and community groups who agreed to pass on information to the sample population about the study, informing them of the various ways to take part, if they wanted to do so. Finally, all completed questionnaires, transcripts and tape recordings were kept in a secure location at the university and pseudonyms were assigned to all interviewees to assure anonymity.

In addition to the above precautions to uphold the ethical integrity of the research, a deeper ethical issue still needed to be addressed. That is, can a younger researcher usefully interview older people? Traditionally, research with older people, especially from a feminist standpoint, has been undertaken by *older* people themselves who have reflected upon their own experiences in an attempt to move closer to their subject and

develop close, personal relationships with their study cohort. Talking about this self-reflective approach, Oakley (1981 p. 57) draws attention to how as a woman interviewing other women she was '*inside*' the processes being observed. The suggestion here is that her gender was enough to create a shared sense of identity that would enable her to understand the different aspects and experiences of women's lives. In a similar vein, Barnard (2001) calls for more research that integrates the researcher's substantive experiences with his/her research work in order for one to illuminate the other.

Whilst such integration would undoubtedly allow for greater understanding and thus a closer reflection of actual experience it is nevertheless considered possible for a younger researcher to usefully interview older people. In her book, *Women Feminism and Ageing* Collette Brown (1998) questions her authority as a relatively young academic to research and write about issues concerning the lives of older women. Similarly, Bill Bytheway (1995) debates whether he is too young to understand how ageism might affect people in their seventies and eighties and whether instead, the battle against age prejudice should be led by someone of pensionable age (as with, Laslett, 1989). Yet arguably the reason why younger academics are notably absent from the field is not because it is too problematic to research '*where one does not live*' (Brown, 1998) but rather because most young people are indifferent to the issue of ageism, until they themselves are old. Indeed, before Cynthia Rich met Barbara Macdonald (21 years her senior) her indifference to ageism was clearly evident. She wrote at the time, "*ageism is hardly a word I use in my vocabulary. It has something to do with job discrimination in middle age*" (Macdonald and Rich, 1983 p. 10). It was only after Macdonald started to write about ageism, that Rich's perspective changed:

I began to see that I myself am ageing, was always ageing, and that only powerful forces could have kept me from – from self-interest alone – from working to change the social and economic realities of older women. That ageism is part of the air both Barbara and I have breathed since we were born, and it is unthinkable that women should continue to be indifferent to the meaning of the whole of our lives, until we are old ourselves (Macdonald and Rich, pp. 11-12).

Until Cynthia Rich *discovered* ageism, she knew only of the cultural division between 'us and them', and it is this insider/outsider dichotomy which has proven to be problematic

for researchers on the 'outside' to enter the world of their subjects. However, the recognition that we are all of an age and will all become older should in many ways bridge or at least narrow the divide. Both Brown (1998) and Bytheway (1995) take the approach that, age is part of life's continuum, as opposed to a crude 'younger versus older' dichotomy. In his book, *Ageism*, Bytheway (1995 p. 126) explains the practical application of such an approach, "*in the writing of this book, I have endeavoured to ensure that I did not foster the continued conceptualization of older people as 'them'. I have learnt to think in terms of younger and older people in ways which do not require reference to us and them*".

Such an approach proved an effective way for this researcher to tackle the research process. The power relation between the researcher and the participant was also accounted for by the researcher recognising that her location in society affected the research relationship. Whilst an *older* researcher may have felt close and familiar with the subject matter and been able to establish a reciprocal relationship based upon a shared identity, it may also have been the case that participants may have withheld information that they saw as too obvious in view of their 'shared reality' (see Bhopal, 2000; McCracken, 1998). By adopting a participatory research strategy that was non-manipulative and non-authoritarian, and which aimed to capture participants' lived experiences in their own words and on their own behalf, those involved with the study had the opportunity to talk to an interested listener who wanted to know more about their story. Indeed, most participants commented that those who were not of a **certain age** did not usually want to listen to what they had to say. Consequently they felt the need to explain their situation and views on the subject matter in depth and detail, and to help the researcher allow their voices to be heard.

Research Design

The study would combine the use of a quantitative method (questionnaire) with a qualitative method (semi structured interview) in order to achieve a more accurate picture of this particular field of research. The ontological and epistemological stance of the study would be rooted within a pragmatic methodology as it was clear that no one research method would independently provide adequate data about the study population. Moreover, the interview process would be influenced by the symbolic interactionist

approach to social research whereby emphasis is placed upon the meanings that individuals attach to their everyday life.

In order to meet the objectives of the study (see p.5) the research was broken down into two strands:

Strand A consisted of a sample of women and men aged 50 and above who were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their experiences of work and employment and take part in a semi-structured interview to further discuss some of the issues raised.

Strand B consisted of a sample of public and private sector employers who were asked to complete a questionnaire about their attitudes and practices towards 'older workers' and take part in a semi-structured interview to further discuss some of the issues raised.

The research population therefore included two distinct groups: (1) women and men aged 50 and above, and (2) employers from across the UK. The aim here was to build a detailed picture of the experiences and perceptions of people aged 50 and above, and the organisations which impact upon their lives in an effort to understand the barriers they face in the realm of work and employment. It was hoped that the inclusion of both strands of the research would help to provide practical information that would better inform policy responses towards issues of ageism in the workplace. The intention was to collect 500 questionnaires from people aged 50 and above across the UK, and 100 questionnaires from employers. Overall 731 questionnaires were collected – 650 from people aged 50 plus (51% women, 49% men) and 81 from local and national employers. Forty two interviews were carried out, 30 with women and men aged 50 and above and 12 with employers from across the UK.

A primary consideration for any research study is that the sample should be representative of the study population. To this end the national sample of women and men were broadly representative of the general population of people aged 50 and above who were economically active (67%) and those who were economically inactive (33%) at the time of the data collection (LFS, 2004). However, in order to understand the potential barriers to work facing people in this age group, those who had experience of job loss at age 50 or above were targeted by the researcher and accounted for 46% (300 people) of the sample. The aim here was to investigate

the experiences of people leaving work in their 50s in order to determine if they had intended to return to work and, if so, how successful had they been in accessing employment, and whether there had been any differences in outcome between women and men.

The sample of women and men were recruited through various avenues, including newsletters, advertisements placed in public libraries and assistance from voluntary and community groups and information and advice centres. Trade Unions, community-based interventions such as Kirkby Unemployment Centre, and a number of employers from across the UK were also contacted and used to recruit people who had experienced redundancy or other job displacement at age 50 and above. These organisations were carefully and specifically chosen as they were considered to be an effective way to represent the full spectrum of circumstances that people aged 50 and above find themselves in and, therefore, lead to the collection of more disparate data. It was agreed that these organisations would contact relevant individuals on behalf of the researcher, informing them of the study and providing a copy of the questionnaire. Those who chose to complete the questionnaire were then invited to provide their contact details if they were happy to be interviewed at a later date. They were able to return (or not return) the questionnaire to the researcher in a pre-paid envelope. Those who took part in an interview were also asked to distribute one or more copies of the questionnaire to other members of the sample population.

It therefore follows that a mixture of purposive ('fit-for-purpose') sampling and snowball sampling procedures were used (May, 2001) whereby certain participants were chosen so that the researcher could learn from those who best represented what was studied, while others were led to the research by members of the same study population. In respect to the latter, there is always the possibility that the sample will be skewed in favour of a particular type of respondent. The researcher did, however, try to overcome this by using a variety of 'starting points' (see above) from which to contact respondents. Whilst concern over the representative nature of these methods is accepted it, nevertheless, proved to be an effective way of recruiting respondents that may otherwise have been hidden from the research process. It also enabled those who were not involved with a particular service/organisation to have the opportunity to take part.

The employers (Strand B) were contacted mainly through a nationally representative database of public and private sector organisations held within the University as well as internet searchers, telephone book research and advertisements placed in local newspapers. The employers were initially contacted by telephone to inform them of the research and those who agreed to take part were sent a questionnaire and covering letter. The response rate was aided by the initial telephone (and in some cases person-to-person) contact, the targeting of named individuals, telephone follow-ups and the offer of access to research findings including examples of best practice and recommendations.

It was felt to be important to provide all those involved with the study with an opportunity to access in an accessible format the main findings and recommendations if they so wished. Too often research is conducted on what Reinharz (1983 p. 95) has likened to a 'rape model' whereby *"the researchers take, hit and run. They intrude into their subject's privacy...and provide little or nothing in return. When the needs of the researchers are satisfied, they break off contact with the subject"*. The idea here was to repay respondents in some way for their time and to allow them to see the value of their contribution to the research. Yet according to Barnard (2001) the researcher should go further suggesting that there should be scope in the future for participants to interact in the research process by assuming a range of roles which may relate to methodology, data collection and interpretation of results. Such a participative approach can be observed in the work of Cook et al (2004) where nine members of the study population were recruited to act as co-researchers on their exploratory study on the quality of life of older women. In the present study, participant interaction took the form of various members from the study population helping the researcher to devise the questionnaire and interview schedule.

Use of a Questionnaire for Strand A

The questionnaire had to be able to be completed by a variety of women and men aged 50 and above. There are of course practical implications to this concerning the design and layout of the questionnaire itself. More fundamentally, however, was the need to reconcile the problem of how an 'outsider' may be able to identify the issues that needed to be addressed. This was not only in relation to ageism, but also in relation to what it means to be older or perceived as such in the area of work and employment. In an attempt to overcome this concern, a pilot study was undertaken with 12 members of the study population (see Appendix E). It involved an in-depth

interview with each individual to explore their views concerning age and employment. As Meadows (2003 p. 81) points out, whilst such information may already be obtained from the literature, it is nevertheless useful to start with what he calls a 'blank slate' so as to ensure that the research captures the social world as perceived by its study population. Important points raised by the pilot study concerned the importance of what it means to be *older* in the workplace; issues relating to self esteem and the affect this may have on people's commitment to work; social support networks; age as a factor in the job search process; control over one's health; and opportunities for career advancement. Other important areas included the role of past experiences (i.e. inconsistent work patterns); the cumulative experience of discrimination and; the influence of wider historical, cultural and social contexts. With these areas in mind, a questionnaire was constructed and piloted with the interviewees (from the pilot study) to ensure that the order of the questions, the types of questions themselves and the operationalization of concepts (de Vaus, 1996) were adequate. Following this, the layout of the questionnaire was revised and the type enlarged to take account of a possible age-related decline in health (i.e. poor eyesight) which was identified in the pilot.

The questionnaire was all in all well received by the pilot sample. The majority of respondents felt that the questions were clear and unambiguous, and that the questionnaire itself was relatively easy to navigate. However, when initially handed the questionnaire, a number of respondents commented that it was too long, not realising that they only had to complete certain sections depending upon their current circumstance. This point was therefore made explicit on the first page of the questionnaire in an effort not to dissuade people from filling it in.

From a methodological standpoint, the format of the questionnaire was also quite important. Given that the pilot study had identified the role of cumulative experiences in shaping individuals' current role and position within the workplace – the idea, as Brown (1998) puts it, that people's inequalities and opportunities follow them as they age, it was felt important to provide opportunity for this to emerge (or not emerge) from the data. The layout of the questionnaire was therefore loosely based upon a life history approach to the study of older people (see, for example, Bornat, 2002) but one that was concerned with capturing different snapshots of individuals' lives as opposed to reporting their experiences across the entire life course. A similar approach was adopted by Still and Timms (1998) who took a snapshot of older career women's relationship with work as they approached retirement. The questionnaire in the present study however was intended to represent more of a holistic portrayal of respondents'

experiences of work (and of not working) at various stages in the life course. The aim was to bring together respondent's past and present experiences in order to determine any changes that may have occurred, and to what extent these may be related to the ageing of individuals in the workplace and/or wider changes in culture and society, and the structures (i.e. the organisations we work for) that preside over our lives in work.

Use of a Questionnaire for Strand B

The questionnaire for employers was less complex in terms of its construction. It took as its inspiration Taylor and Walker's (1998) well known survey of employers' attitudes and practices towards older workers. It contained original questions developed for the research as well as pre-tested items and attitudinal statements used in previous work (i.e. Taylor and Walker, 1998; Redman and Snape, 2002). As with Taylor and Walker's (1998) survey, issues addressed included: the social construction of age in employment; the age structure of the workforce; employer awareness of demographic change; the organisation's stance on recruiting older people; age as an equal opportunities issue; typical characteristics of an older worker; any evidence of age discrimination; merits of an older worker; suitability of work for older people; the organisation's retirement policy; and the views held by employers on the state pension age and attitudes towards age discrimination legislation. Unlike Taylor and Walker's (1998) survey, however, which used a gender neutral conception of the term 'older worker' there was a special focus in the present study on gender. The aim here was to determine whether there was a difference in employers' attitudes and practices towards older male and female workers, and address the need for a greater understanding of the interaction between ageism and sexism in the workplace.

Data from both strands of the research were entered into SPSS and analysed separately using the methods suggested by Kinnear and Gray (1999). Statistical testing was then undertaken to draw out conclusions from the data collected, including chi-square tests of significance used to measure the strength of associations between variables, independent and paired sample t-tests to measure correlations, and where data was unevenly distributed, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to measure the difference between variables from different groups (i.e. 'large' and 'small' sized organisations).

The Interview Process

The final phase of the data collection involved semi-structured interviews with both participant groups (Stand A and Strand B). The first comprised of women and men aged 50 and above, the second comprised of employers from across the UK. Each group was interviewed using an appropriate interview schedule. The focus throughout was on trying to understand matters relating to the ageing of individuals in the workplace. The semi structured format allowed the researcher to cover the relevant issues whilst, at the same time, provided flexibility to explore new areas of interest. The participants were recruited using the methods described above and were randomly selected from a list of people who had agreed to be interviewed. However, in the case of women and men aged 50 and above, the interview cohort were specially chosen to represent variation in demographic profile (i.e. employment status).

In respect of the interview process itself, an important consideration was where exactly the interview should take place. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) have commented on the context bound nature of distinctly social phenomenon whereby in order to understand more about a particular aspect of human behaviour, it is important to research it inside the context to which it is bound. For example, to learn more about students' experiences of academic life one must enter the classroom, the library, the student union, etc., to interview students in the places they inhabit. The point made here is that "*meaning is tied to context*" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994 p. 45). It was therefore decided that employers would, if agreeable, be interviewed inside their places of work. This proved to be convenient for the interviewees and helped them to assume the role of employer representative. Yet for women and men aged 50 and above, the sensitive nature of aspects of the research (i.e. if they had encountered discrimination) meant it was important that they felt comfortable in the interview situation. They were therefore asked to choose where they would like the interview to take place. Importantly, in line with some of the ethical issues previously raised, this approach was used to minimise the level of emotional discomfort that participants involved any piece of social research may feel. For some, the location chosen was the comfort of their own homes whilst others preferred a more neutral location such as a coffee shop or public library. Most interviewees were extremely friendly and afforded the researcher considerable hospitality, especially when interviewed in their own home.

It should also be noted that the researcher did not encounter any difficulty in terms of the ‘insider-outsider’ dichotomy mentioned earlier (see p.73). May (2001) makes the point that where possible the characteristics (i.e. sex, race, age) of the interviewer should match those of the interviewee. He refers to a study conducted in Tennessee in which black participants were asked about the extent to which they were satisfied with their social, political and economic life. When interviewed by white researchers, participants expressed a relatively ‘high’ level of satisfaction. However, when interviewed by black researchers the level of satisfaction lessened and a more radical opinion was expressed (see May, 2001 p. 128). It was not possible for the researcher in the present study to ‘blend in’ with those approximately 30 years older than herself. Yet this did not appear to matter. On the contrary, participants were pleased to have someone take an interest in their life who was keen to listen to them and learn from their experiences. They felt it important to inform a *younger* person of the issues and problems affecting older people in the workplace in an effort to break the cycle of age and old age as being entirely negative or as something ‘we’ll worry about when we get there’. In fact, many of the interviewees assumed, on a subconscious level, a sort of educator role in the sense that they were very detailed in the information they provided and were open and honest in an attempt to help the researcher understand all the dynamics at work. This undoubtedly aided the data collection, for as Mishler (1989 p. 118) notes, where interviewees feel that they are *collaborators* in the research process as opposed to subjects they will find it easier to “*construct coherent and reasonable worlds of meaning and make sense of their experiences*”.

In terms of how the interviews were conducted, the chosen method for this study was the use of open ended questions that provided the opportunity for participants to interpret their experiences within the topic under investigation (Meadows, 2003). To start with a broad-brush question was asked, but which captured the essence of the research topic: ‘What does the term *older* mean to you?’ This meant that participants had the opportunity to describe this term in their own words and to identify with it, distance themselves from or remain indifferent. Here participant perspectives were illuminated through the everyday language and culture of the individual as opposed to those of the researcher. The question also stood as a platform from which to probe further beyond the answer provided and partake in meaningful dialogue. Further questions were then used and asked in a chronological order (similar to the method adopted in the questionnaire) whereby participants were invited to consider the role that their age played in influencing their position in employment throughout their lives. Adopting a similar approach to that used by Hennessy (2003) the questions aimed to be probing yet sensitive to the experiences

of participants. The style of the interview remained as informal as possible with the aim for the interview to feel like a natural conversation, or as Robson (1993 p. 228) describes a “*conversation with purpose*”.

Such a flexible approach can lead to problems insofar as the focus of the interview can, at times, be lost. Under such circumstances, the researcher must ‘think on her feet’ (Mason, 1996 p. 43) and try to redirect the study back to its intended course. Nevertheless a flexible approach was felt to be important to ensure that the researcher was able to leave aside her personal opinions and see the world through the eyes of her participants (Bryman, 2001). So that rather than have prompt cards that may lead participants to the ‘answer of best fit’ i.e., what they think they should say as opposed to how they may really feel, a semi structured approach was used to reveal what was important to participants and therefore make it more likely that the researcher would come to understand, on a deeper level, the phenomenon under study (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

The interviews with employers (Strand B) were conducted in much the same way as described above. The overall intention was to understand more about employers’ attitudes and practices towards ‘older workers’ in employers’ own words and on their own behalf. However, the employers interviewed had various different job titles which could have made it difficult to understand what exactly their job entailed and how much say they had as ‘employers’ in the employment of older workers – it was felt important to be able to make the distinction between what may count as employers’ own attitudes and beliefs, and what may be described as company policy and practice. In order to discuss their job role further, the first question with employers was ‘Can you tell me what your job role entails’. This was a useful way to start the interview and provided opportunity to capture the different phases of the employment life cycle (from entry to exit) and their relevance to older workers.

Each interview (for both Strands) was taped and transcribed in full as soon as possible (usually within two days). The use of the tape recorder did not appear to intrude upon the interview process and its presence quickly faded into the background. After transcription, notes were made in the margins of each transcript and then coded and compared with other themes that either confirmed or refuted what the researcher had found. As the collection of the data continued it was constantly compared between the concepts the researcher had developed, data already

collected and new data to the study. The intention here was to use a combination of inductive and comparative methods to analyse the data, as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The process of qualitative data analysis can take many forms yet a fundamental similarity between them is that the aim of each approach is to examine the meanings of people's worlds (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). For Strauss and Corbin (1990 p. 23) this means allowing theory to emerge from the data so as to ensure that it is "*inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents*". This fluid and dynamic process is based on the premise that social agents are not simply empty vessels into which knowledge of the social world is magically poured but rather active participants in the construction of their own reality. Therefore to truly understand the phenomenon in question, the researcher must "*stay close to research participants' feelings, thoughts and actions as they relate to the focus of inquiry*" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994 p. 126).

This type of research analysis accepts the uniqueness of individual interpretations of reality; that is, that experiences and interpretations are specific to the individual (no two people will experience the same phenomenon in exactly the same way). But that being the case, how is it possible to reduce the data and accept the existence of a common link? As was argued earlier, although people view the world through a separate reality, they do not operate inside a social vacuum. In other words, each individual is connected to the next through a shared sense of belonging from which the researcher may cross from one reality the next, searching for differences and similarities; common characteristics; and related meanings (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Moreover, if we are to accept that the phenomenon under study, is both a product and reflection of symbolic interaction (see p. 57) then it is logical to search for shared meanings through commonalities that emerge from the data. Here, the researcher is concerned with intersubjectivity rather than strict individual interpretation. With this in mind, the process of open coding was used. This was undertaken without the aid of a computer software package (i.e. Nvivo), mainly because the researcher did not want to forsake the opportunity to become so deeply immersed in the data.

The first step in the process of open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was to search for meaning in conversational and verbal narratives. All interpretations that were conceptually similar on a given dimension were grouped together and placed into more abstract concepts or themes to compare patterns and natural variations in meaning. The relationships among these themes were then discussed in terms of correspondence to official or theory laden explanations

of the phenomenon under study. However as Cole (1994) points out, linking findings back to official explanations precludes discovery from beyond the domain of, what is already known. The researcher must build theory from the data and keep a handle on all different themes that may emerge. In light of this Cole (1994) proposes that we should turn to the ‘Chenail Matrix’ to provide a framework for our data analysis. The matrix consists of two concentric circles – the inner circle describes the central tendencies or emergent themes while the outer circle presents the range of differences (see Figure 2 overleaf). The range is organised in terms of expected (preconceived assumptions or theory laden ideas) and unexpected (expectations to the rule, unforeseen happenings) findings. In relation to the latter, such curiosity for the unexpected allowed the researcher to move closer to the reality of her participants (i.e. the lived experiences of older people) whilst at the same time preserve the connection between what she found and the literature review (i.e. what she already knows).

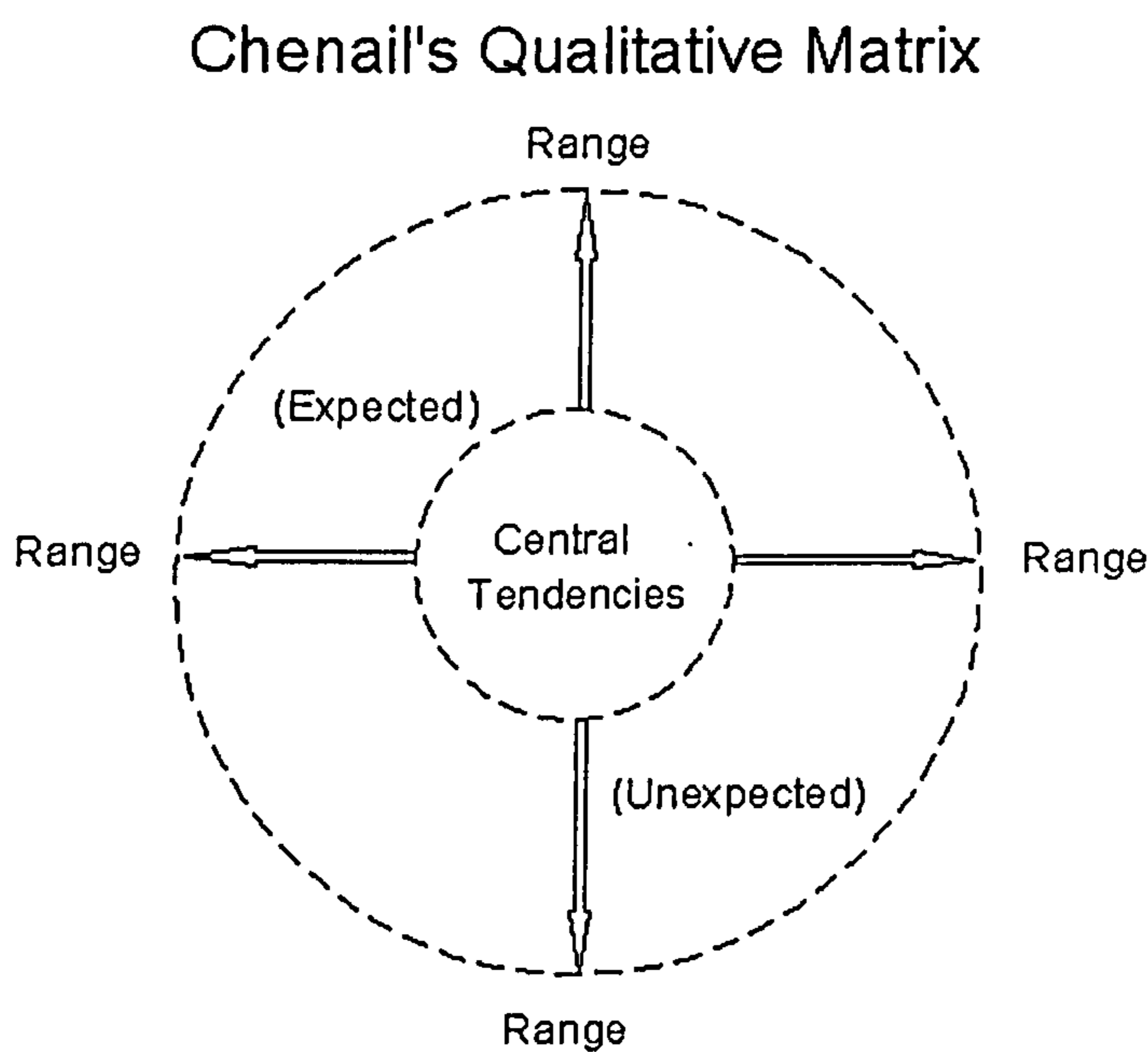


Figure 2: Qualitative Research Matrix
Source: Cole, 1994

To complete the qualitative data analysis, a comparison was carried out between the qualitative data and the results of the quantitative data (within each strand). The method of comparing results in this way is called triangulation (see Creswell et al, 2003). The approach taken to the triangulation of data was to interplay the data, rather than simply provide an opportunity for one to complement the other. As well as examining data which were comparable, this method allowed for contradictory evidence to emerge, be examined and explained.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the possible methodologies that could have been used to explore issues surrounding the ageing of individuals in work and employment. In view of the complexities of the issues involved, the pragmatist method was chosen and allowed for the collection of data that was both rich and reliable. The next chapter (Chapter III) reports the findings from Strand A, and continues into Chapter IV, which outlines the results of life satisfaction and self efficacy scales. Chapter V reports the findings from Strand B.

Chapter III. Results: Women and Men Aged 50 and Above

This chapter will outline the quantitative and qualitative results from Strand A of the research. It will include the results recorded from returned questionnaires as well as the various themes to emerge from interviews with participants thus adhering to the philosophy of pragmatism previously discussed. It will start with a description of the respondents who completed the questionnaire and the participants who were interviewed, and will proceed to present their experiences of work and employment at various points in the life course.

Profile of Study Respondents

Overall 650 people responded to the questionnaire. The study population were previously involved in, or were currently working within, the public or private sectors of the UK economy. Approximately 30% were aged 50-54, 33% were 55-59 and 20% were 60-64. A further 20% were aged 65 and above. It was felt important to collapse the data down into an index of 50-59 and 60 and above in order to identify any differences in experiences between these age groups.

The gender composition of the sample was relatively evenly spread between women and men (51% and 49% respectively) which is relatively unusual for surveys of this kind as previous research had identified reluctance on the part of women to participate in research on older workers' issues (Loretto & White, 2004). Although the impact of ethnicity on equality and diversity is recognised, the number of non-white European respondents (26 people) was too small to include ethnic background as a separate variable. As can be seen from Table 3, most of the sample were married or living with a partner. The vast majority (80%) also had one or more children (infant or adult).

| Table 3: Frequency table showing the partnership status of the sample | | |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|
| Status | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Married/living with partner | 431 | 67 |
| Single | 74 | 11 |
| Divorced/separated | 95 | 14 |
| Widowed | 47 | 7 |

(n=647)

The geographical spread of the study population was unevenly distributed with more respondents from the north of England (54%) compared to 17% from the Midlands, 20% from the South of England and 10% categorised as ‘UK other’ (not England).

The educational and employment background of respondents was very diverse. Table 4 provides a description of the types of schools attended.

| Table 4: Frequency table showing the types of schools attended | | |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|
| School | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Grammar | 161 | 25 |
| Secondary Modern | 293 | 45 |
| Comprehensive | 136 | 21 |
| Private | 20 | 3 |
| Other | 33 | 5 |

(n=643)

Forty three percent of the sample had started work by 16 years of age. When asked about their previous employment, 32% had professional and managerial experience, 33% had been involved in non-manual work (such as office work), 16% in manual work (such as trade and technical work) and 19% in semi-skilled or unskilled work (such as shop work).

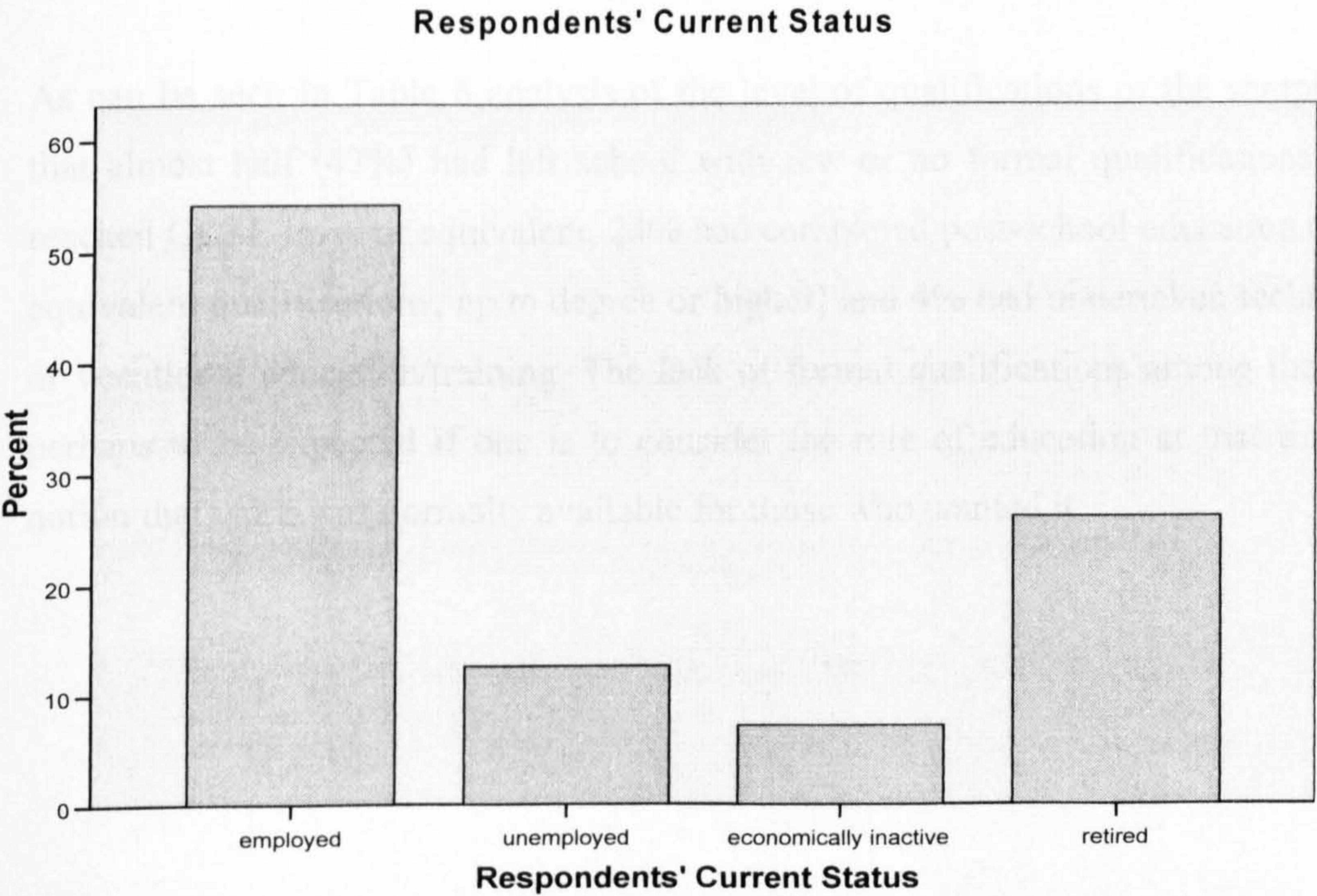
Statistical testing was carried out to measure association between respondents’ previous main work area since school and gender as a variable. Gender differences were evident in the respondents’ work experience. Table 5 illustrates where these differences occurred. As can be seen, women and men were segregated into different types of work possibly reflecting the gendered expectations prevalent at that time. However, professional and managerial experience was more evenly distributed between the sexes (amongst 31% of men and 33% of women surveyed) suggesting that such segregation was more horizontal than vertical in nature.

| Table 5: Cross tabulation of main work area since school by gender | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Gender | Main work area (%) | | | | |
| | Professional/ managerial | Non-manual skilled | Manual skilled | Semi skilled | Unskilled and below |
| Male | 30 | 15 | 27 | 21 | 6 |
| Female | 33 | 49 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| | | | | | |

(n=626 p=<0.01)

In respect to their current status, 54% of the total sample were employed either full time (68%) or part time (32%). Twenty six percent were retired, 12% were unemployed and the remaining 7% were economically inactive, which included volunteers (10 people), full time carers (15 people) or permanently sick or disabled (27 people) (see Figure 3). A cross tabulation revealed that approximately 45% of those who were ‘economically inactive’ (unemployed, but not actively seeking work) at the time expressed a desire to return to work, but reported a number of barriers (both internal and external) to participation. These will be discussed throughout the following chapter.

Figure 3: Respondents’ Current Employment Status



Profile of Interview Participants

Thirty five ‘face to face’ interviews took place between June 2004 and December 2005. Twelve interviewees were aged 50-54, 13 were 55-59 and 8 were 60-64. A further 2 were aged 65 and above. Thirteen women and 12 men took part. Eighteen interviewees were still working, eight were unemployed, five were retired and three stated that they were caring for others/looking after the family or home. Twenty were married or living with a partner while 15 were either single (5), divorced or separated (9) or widowed (1). The vast majority (30) had one or more children (infant or adult).

Education

It would seem pertinent at this point to provide some indication about the educational profile of the study population since past research has shown that educational attainment is a key determinant of entry to, and progression within, an increasingly competitive labour market; the employment rate for any age group is higher for people with longer periods in education (Collis et al, 1998).

Educational Background

As can be seen in Table 6 analysis of the level of qualifications of the sample, showed that almost half (47%) had left school with few or no formal qualifications, 25% had reached GCSE level or equivalent, 24% had completed post-school education (A-level or equivalent qualifications, up to degree or higher) and 4% had undertaken technical, trade or vocational education/training. The lack of formal qualifications among the sample is perhaps to be expected if one is to consider the role of education at that time and the notion that work was normally available for those who wanted it.

| Table 6: Frequency table showing level of qualification of the study cohort | | |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| Qualification | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| None/few | 297 | 47 |
| GCSE or equivalent | 156 | 25 |
| A'Level | 101 | 16 |
| Degree or higher | 48 | 8 |
| Trade | 21 | 4 |

(n=623 missing=27)

A cross tabulation was performed to determine if respondents’ gender was statistically significant with the type of qualification obtained whilst during or immediately after the initial school period. As can be seen from Table 7 (below), overall, women held higher qualifications than men. Fifty two percent of all men left school with few or no qualifications as compared with 42% of all women surveyed. However, relatively equal numbers of women and men had completed academic qualifications from GCSE level or equivalent and above (44%, n=148 of women, compared with 37%, n=115 of men). As may have be expected, more men than women had technical and trade qualifications or on the job training (19 men, compared with only 2 women), whilst more women than men had secretarial and RSA or equivalent qualifications (37 women, compared with only 5 men) (p<0.01), once more reflecting gendered educational experiences.

| Table 7: A cross tabulation analysis of gender by qualifications first gained | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|------|---------|-----|-------|--------|
| Gender | Qualification (n) | | | | | |
| | None/few | GCSE | A'Level | RSA | Trade | Degree |
| Male | 155 | 56 | 39 | 5 | 19 | 20 |
| Female | 138 | 79 | 41 | 37 | 2 | 28 |
| | | | | | | |

(n=619, missing=31, p=<0.01)

A cross tabulation was performed to determine if the level of qualification first obtained affected whether the respondents had returned to education. As described by Table 8 just over half of the sample (51%) had returned on at least one occasion, including a notable proportion of those with few or no qualifications (37%). However, this figure rose to 59% for those educated to GCSE level or equivalent and 65% of those initially educated to degree level, suggesting the significance of educational attainment in precipitating a

reconnection with education. The majority (72%) of those with professional qualifications had also returned to education, perhaps indicating the importance of continued learning as part of their career development. Those who returned to education were more likely to study at further education level and above, up to higher education level. This both confirms and reflects wider increases in the proportion of people aged 50 and above in the UK with higher level qualifications (see, for example, Hotopp, 2005) and was consistent across genders and ages. It was similarly not affected by the level of education initially obtained. For instance, a cross tabulation revealed that 19% of those who had returned to education completely unqualified had subsequently gained university degrees.

| Table 8: Cross tabulation of returned to education by qualification first gained | | | | | | |
|--|-----|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| | | Qualification (%) | | | | |
| | | None/ few | GCSE /equivalent | A'Level/ professional | Trade | Degree or higher |
| Have you returned to education | No | 62 | 41 | 28 | 66 | 35 |
| | Yes | 37 | 59 | 72 | 33 | 64 |

(n=621, missing=29, p=<0.01)

Those who had returned to education were asked what motivated them to return. This was a closed response question. The possible answers were to ‘acquire qualifications for progression or re-establishment in an existing career area’; to ‘take a new direction or change in career’; or to ‘study in a non-job-related area’. The high proportion (76%) of respondents citing work related motives for continued education indicates the need for improvement in educational attainment in order to improve one’s employability and/or earnings potential.

Gender differences were evident in respect to the type of motivation expressed. As can be seen by Table 9, although the majority of respondents had returned to education for career progression (57% of men, 41% of women) rather more women than men had returned to education for a career change (32% compared to 20% respectively). The latter of which was especially true of women who had typically returned to education in their 30s. One may argue here that possible breaks in employment for childcare may lead to, or

provide imputes for, women to re-evaluate their career or pursue a career ambition once put on hold.

| Table 9: Cross tabulation of gender by motivation for study | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Gender | Motivation for Study (%) | | |
| | Career Progression | Career Change | Non-Job Related |
| Male | 57 | 20 | 22 |
| Female | 41 | 32 | 25 |

(n=326, p<0.05)

In terms of employability, a cross tabulation was performed to determine if educational attainment was statistically associated with the type of occupation undertaken. In terms of respondents’ previous employment, there was a clear trend whereby those with low educational attainment (none-GSCE Level) were more likely to have previously worked at the lower end of the labour market (i.e. in elementary or unskilled jobs) than those with high educational attainment (A’Level and above). The opposite pattern occurred for those with high educational attainment thereby indicating the importance of the initial school period in determining one’s future position in the labour market.

In terms of respondents’ current employment, nearly 75% of those educated to degree level or higher were currently working in professional and managerial occupations, compared with only 25% of those with few or no qualifications. But whereas a notable proportion (17%) of those with few or no qualifications were currently working in low-level occupations (‘unskilled and below’), the figure for those educated to GCSE level or equivalent was significantly less at 7%. Overall then, individuals with low educational attainment were more likely to be concentrated in the lower end of the labour market (see Table 10). This is broadly consistent with what was found in respect to respondents’ educational attainment and previous employment. The only exception to be found was in relation to those with technical or trade qualifications who were relatively evenly spread amongst each of the occupational groups.

| Table 10: Cross tabulation of current work area by qualifications first gained | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------|------------------|
| Current Work Area | Qualification (%) | | | | |
| | None/few | GCSE/GCE /RSA | A'Level/FE professional | Trade | Degree or higher |
| Professional/managerial | 25 | 37 | 53 | 46 | 75 |
| Non-manual skilled | 29 | 38 | 37 | 7 | 18 |
| Manual | 14 | 5 | 0 | 20 | 3 |
| Semi-skilled | 13 | 10 | 6 | 13 | 0 |
| Unskilled and below | 17 | 7 | 3 | 13 | 3 |

(n=321, p=<0.01)

With respect to one’s current status, a cross tabulation test found that the majority (61%) of those who were ‘economically inactive’ at the time of the data collection had left school with no or relatively few qualifications. Unemployed respondents within that category were most likely to be affected in this way, possibly reinforcing the belief that a lack of formal educational qualifications serves to limit one’s employability. As can be seen in Table 11, 24% of those who were unqualified were also unemployed at the time of the data collection as compared with 19% of those educated to GCSE level or equivalent and only 8% of those educated to degree level or higher. Thus the higher qualified an individual is the less likely they are to be unemployed. A possible explanation here is that whereas ostensibly low educational attainment had, in the past, been compensated for by an earlier and more extensive employment experience (i.e. apprenticeships following school) modern ways of working have rendered such experience less valuable in the current jobs market (Taylor and Urwin, 2001).

| Table 11: Cross tabulation of current situation by qualifications first gained | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------|------------------|
| Current Situation | Qualification (%) | | | | |
| | None/few | GCSE/GCE /RSA | A'Level/FE Professional | Trade | Degree or higher |
| Working | 42 | 61 | 70 | 81 | 72 |
| Unemployed | 24 | 19 | 8 | 14 | 8 |
| Retired | 33 | 19 | 22 | 5 | 19 |

(n=614, p=<0.01)

Demand for Higher Education

The move from unemployment to education is a transition that may be important to many older people if they are to successfully secure waged work or develop their career. One in four people (28% of the total sample) said that they would like to study at higher education (HE) level. Whilst this does not necessarily mean they have the intention or inclination to do so, it does, nevertheless, indicate the potential interest and possible demand for HE that may exist.

Current Education

Almost 10% of respondents were undertaking a course of study at some level; although a relatively low proportion overall, when extrapolated to the wider population of over 50s (27 million people) it is of course a significant amount. It would therefore seem pertinent the research to explore this issue in further detail. In respect to the sub-sample of older learners in the study, the vast majority were studying part time. Indeed, available time appeared to be an influencing factor here with study activity most prevalent amongst retired people (30%), followed by the economically inactive (16%) and lastly, those in work (9%).

Cross tabulation of study by the various different characteristics of the sample showed that women were more likely to take up study (20%) than men (13%). Those who were single, divorced or widowed were also more likely to be studying (50%) than those who were married or living with a partner (14%), possibly indicating the importance of new social contacts formed in an educational environment. Study also tended to be more popular amongst older rather than younger age groups¹ (10% of those aged 50-59, compared to 26% of those aged 60 and above).

As expected, those who had returned to education at some point during adulthood were significantly more likely to be older learners (59%) than those with little or no experience of post school education (11%) ($p < 0.05$). There was no significant difference with respect to the educational attainment of those who were studying, however, the pattern to

¹ Unless stated otherwise 'younger' age groups refer to those aged 50-69 while 'older' age groups refer to those aged 60 and above.

emerge was that those already educated to Further Education (FE) and HE levels were those most likely to be enrolled on a course of study.

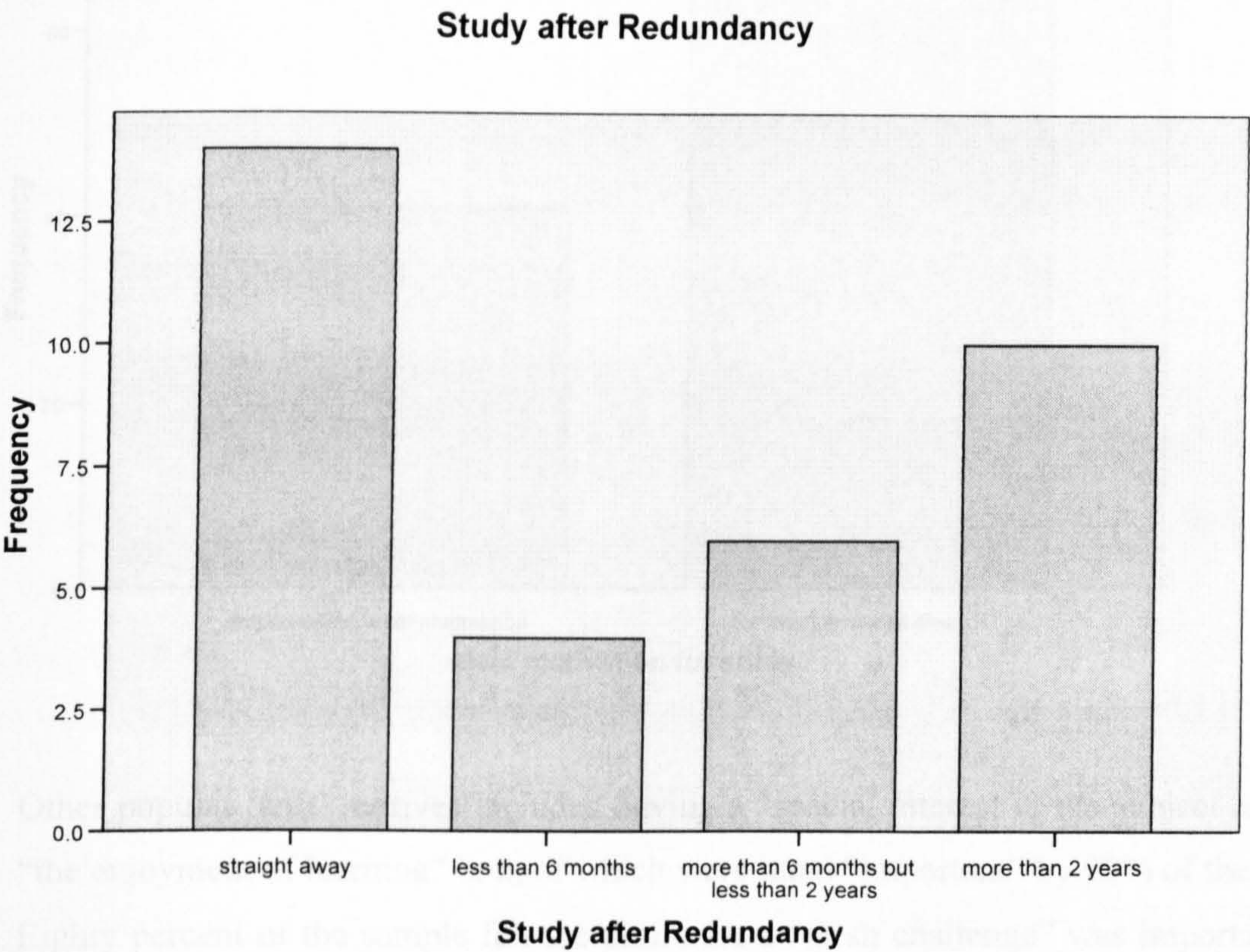
The type of study undertaken included both vocational and non vocational courses spanning a variety of subjects and disciplines. Nearly one quarter of the sample (23%) were undertaking computer related courses, challenging the negative stereotype that older people are unable to adapt to new technology. Seventeen percent were working towards a vocational qualification (for example, NVQs). Modern languages, the arts and social sciences also proved to be popular subjects. In terms of the educational institution attended, the majority of the sample (51%) were studying both accredited and non-accredited courses at community level whilst relatively equal proportions of individuals were studying at FE and HE levels (25% and 23% respectively). It was noted that, there was a trend whereby the older end of the cohort (i.e. those currently in their 60s) were those most likely to be studying at community level (64%) while those at the younger end of the cohort (i.e. those currently in their 50s) were the most likely to be studying at FE level (31%), perhaps indicating the importance of A-Level or equivalent qualifications for those wishing to develop their career in their 50s.

When asked what prompted them to undertake a course of study, 21% said that their family, usually a partner or child had persuaded them. However, it did also appear that a life event had been the original motivator. For example, 41% 'indicated retirement' had been a factor and 18% suggested "ill health" was the initial prompt. Other triggers included "bereavement" (5%), "unemployment" (12%) and "redundancy" (15%), indicating that labour market detachment had provided the impetus for many to return to education.

Of those in the sub-sample who had experienced redundancy at age 50 or above, the majority (41%) had considered study "straight away" while 11% had waited "less than six months" and 18% had considered study "between six months and two years after" (see Figure 4). Only 29% percent had waited "more than two years after". This possibly suggests that, for those who had returned to study relatively soon after redundancy, time on one's hands could be filled by undertaking some form of educational course. Equally, it may indicate a realisation amongst this group that upgrading one's qualifications was something which had to be undertaken fairly swiftly. Those who had returned to study

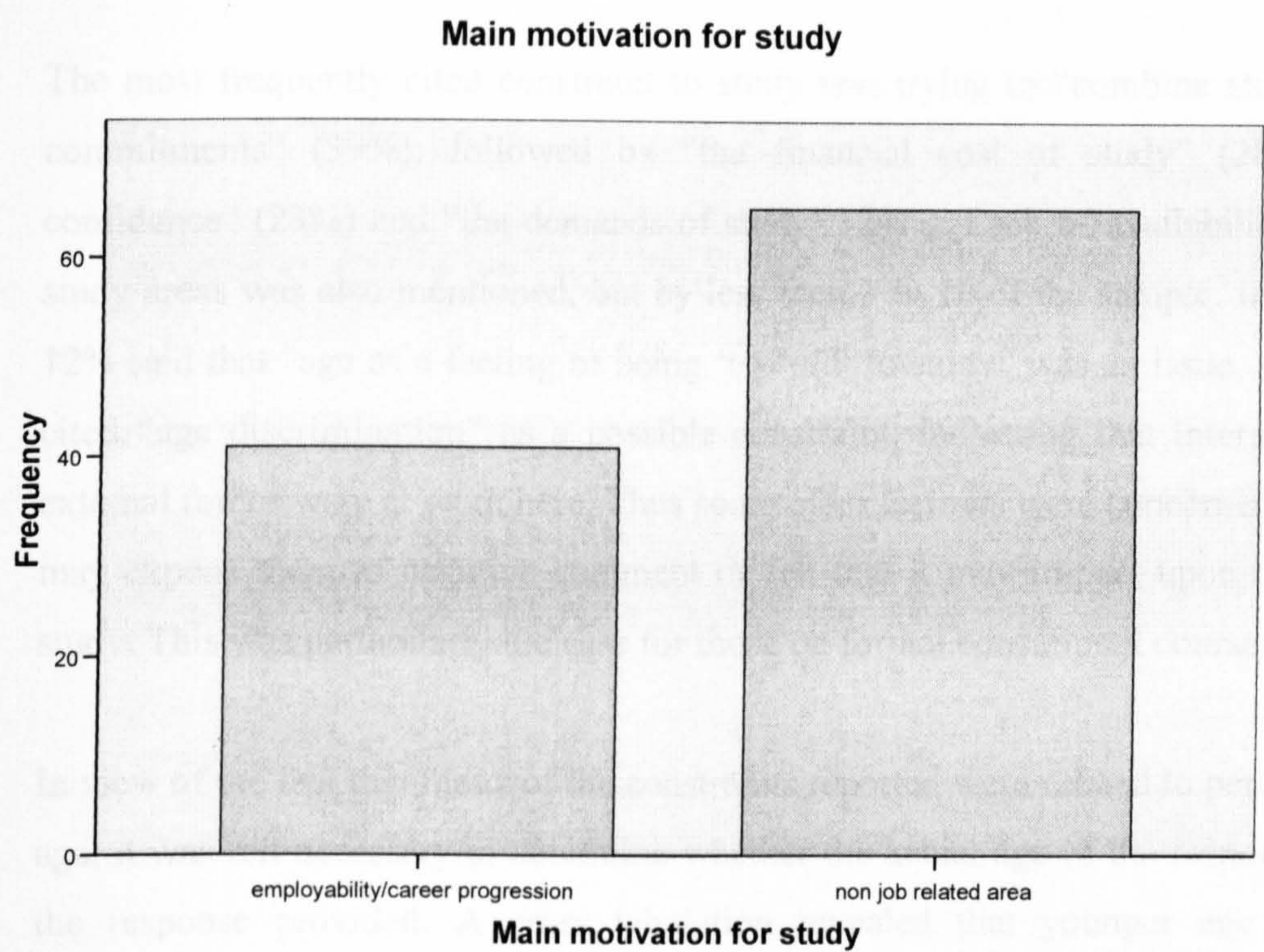
much later after their redundancy were perhaps more fatalistic in their approach, possibly taking time out for themselves and waiting to see what might happen, or that failure to secure work in this period precipitated a return to education as a last throw of the dice.

Figure 4: Length of Time after Redundancy when Respondents' Considered Study



Overall 61% of the study sub-cohort were studying in a non-job related area, 22% wanted to acquire qualifications for progression or re-establishment in an existing career whilst 17% wanted to acquire qualifications for a change of career (see Figure 5). In terms of respondents' age, a cross tabulation analysis revealed that the younger end of the cohort (those in their 50s) were equally as likely to want to acquire qualifications for a change of career (34%) and to study in a non-job related area (34%), whereas those aged 60 and over were much more likely to want to study in a non-job related area (86%) ($p<0.01$).

Figure 5: Respondents’ Main Motivation for Study



Other popular ‘soft’ motives included having a “special interest in the subject area” and “the enjoyment of learning” both of which were rated “important” by 90% of the sample. Eighty percent of the sample felt the desire for a “fresh challenge” was important, 63% were interested in “the social aspect/meeting new people” and, 52% said they wanted “time to do something that was just for them”. The desire to “contribute to society” was rated important by 52% of the sample whilst slightly fewer (42%) rated “the status acquired from qualification” as being important.

No significant association was found between the learners’ current status (i.e. employed, unemployed) and the various motivations. However, the picture for the retired community was one of learning for ‘learning sake’; for interest and recreation, rather than educational for attainment. The following interviewee recalls how social support networks and bonds were formed between fellow students:

We used to study in each other's houses and the phone would ring all the time: 'What are you doing for this?' 'How can we do this?' And I'd phone them [fellow students] up, but everyone was absolutely loving it...and it takes up your whole life (Male 65, retired).

The most frequently cited constraint to study was trying to “combine study with other commitments” (39%), followed by “the financial cost of study” (28%), “lack of confidence” (23%) and “the demands of study” (24%). Lack of availability of choice in study areas was also mentioned, but by less than 1 in 10 of the sample. In terms of age, 12% said that “age as a feeling of being ‘too old’ to study” was an issue, while only 6% cited “age discrimination” as a possible constraint, indicating that internal rather than external forces were at work here. Thus some older learners were concerned that their age may expose them to negative comment or felt that it may impact upon their ability to study. This was particularly the case for those on formal educational courses.

In view of the fact that many of the constraints reported were related to perceptions about age, it was felt necessary to determine whether the actual age of the respondent affected the response provided. A cross tabulation revealed that younger age groups cited financial constraints to study (39%) more so than older age groups (19%) ($p < 0.05$), possibly reflecting the fact that those in their 60s tended to study at community level where courses are often provided free of charge. Lack of confidence coupled with a feeling of needing to ‘catch up’ created a sense of despondency in the case of this interviewee:

I feel that the barriers are obviously my skills aren't up to date, you get a lack of confidence as well because you realise that everybody else is up to speed on computers and when you've been out of the workforce for any length of time, you do lose your confidence and it's hard (Female 50, job seeker/volunteer).

In terms of the rest of the interview data, a trend was identified whereby those in their 50s were less confident about their ability to study than those in their 60s. They also had greater concerns about their ability to cope with the demands of study and were more likely to suggest that they were perhaps “too old” to learn. This may reflect the fact that those in their 50s were more likely to be working towards a formal educational qualification, than those in their 60s (as was evident from the quantitative data). Yet it may

also be the case that possibly there was a sense of vulnerability on the part of the younger end of the cohort as they perhaps came to terms with a new phase of life. For some, such vulnerability may have been precipitated by children leaving home and similar life transitions. It may be the first time they had faced the reality of their ageing and, consequently, felt exposed to negative images and representations of old age. Featherstone and Wernick (1995 p. 8) sum this up well when they say, “*old age becomes a haunting possibility for people in mid life once they reach a certain age*”.

Another constraint identified by the sample was the impact of negative school experiences. These interviewees recalled how ‘failure’ to achieve at school was in a way expected and how this resulted in limiting the choices that were available to them.

When you left [school] no one expected you to [achieve], you never got any qualifications and there were no O' levels on offer. After you failed the Eleven Plus you left school with, well the most you could hope for was a reference and, in my case, it was two sentences (Male 65, retired).

I was in the C stream so my expectations or the school's expectations of me were not [good]...I wouldn't be suitable for further education or anything like that. My only choices were to work in a factory or shop work you know that type of work (Female 55, early retired).

I always felt that I had failed really because when I took the Eleven Plus I had an interview to attend the Grammar school and I didn't pass. You can imagine the first couple of years of my education, I felt quite a sort of a failure really (Female 54, full time worker).

For some, the prospect of returning to education was viewed with trepidation.

I haven't studied since I was fifteen. I mean I will be okay once I do it, but the prospect is quite daunting (Male 55, paid staff, voluntary sector).

As might be expected, those who had returned to study after the initial school period found the adjustment or transition easier to cope with and were also more confident in their ability to learn.

I always knew I wasn't thick, but I just hated maths and that so when I was 36 I did three O' levels on a correspondence course and I just passed one of the three at a very low level. I was a bit like Rodney from 'Only Fools and Horses' you know, one 'O' level [laughing]. But I think if I'd have failed that I may not have continued (Female, 54, early retired).

Respondents were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of study after middle age. This was an open response question in the survey. Positive responses included: keeping the brain active – that study helps you to remain physically and intellectually alert; the pleasure and enjoyment of learning; the need to keep up with new technology; to broaden one's mind; to enrich one's life; for emotional and social development; and to increase one's self-confidence. A number of respondents wanted to prove that they were still capable or prove something to an education system, which in their eyes, let them down. Whilst others felt that being older enabled them to bring a mature approach to study and that it may be easier this time around.

With respect to the perceived disadvantages of study in later life, answers ranged from adjustment to study; ill health; the financial cost incurred; that it perhaps takes longer to assimilate information (“*brain not what it was*”); time constraints/family commitments. In addition, 7% of the sub-sample had accessed education as a way of improving their employment prospects but were now veering towards the idea that it may not be as profitable as they first hoped due age discrimination in the job search process. Clearly, if employment is not seen to be accessible to older people, the motivation to access educational avenues for such purposes will understandably be lacking. Finally, 4% admitted that negative cultural perceptions concerning their age groups' ability to learn were resonant at the back of their mind. This was demonstrated in the words of one interviewee:

Because I was the oldest person doing my final...this diploma...my tutor said to me 'why are you doing it?' because I was already qualified, but I just wanted to renew it all and find out what else was going on. She used to say to me 'you are so brave' and I used to think, is it because I am older? Was she thinking what the bloody hell is she doing this for? (Female 57, volunteer).

Closer examination of the qualitative data highlighted a myriad of influences that impacted upon participants' educational choices and decisions. For example, a key issue here was that education and/or study were just too expensive. This ranged from not being able to afford to access HE to not being able to afford locally based courses, offering for instance basic foreign language skills. It was also the case that many women (particularly those from working class backgrounds) tended to view HE as an alien concept. The marketing of HE was also of some concern with the institution itself thought of as being exclusively aimed at younger people and not valuing the life experience of the prospective older learner. Whilst this, in some ways, suggests institutional failings in terms of widening participation amongst older people, the barriers identified were often more blatant. As one interviewee recognised:

...then a course came up in X [name of college] so I thought I'll try there so I rang up and by then I think I was 49 or 50 and he [the tutor] said, 'can I ask you how old you are?' I said, 'I'm 50' He said, 'won't you feel stupid in a class of 16-19 year olds?' (Female 55, unemployed).

Whilst such discrimination may be contrary to institutional policy, it does, nevertheless, demonstrate how individual prejudice and/or attitude may undermine any good work that may be have been done in terms of making education more accessible. The interviewee above also explained how her confidence had been dented by the experience and this was a constant theme running through the data. It was not necessarily the ability to deal with the intellectual demands of further or higher education or a locally based course that was causing reluctance on the part of the sample, though this was mentioned. Rather it was the ability to deal with other maybe less obvious or immediate pressure. For example, as pointed out by one interviewee, one's work, home life and study can present a hidden dynamic creating tension and pressure for some people especially those who have previously been orientated toward the familial aspect of life.

I think what happens is especially if their family is still at home, and especially if they've got a man, the old fashioned ideas come back in again...I should be there to put the tea on, I should make sure the washing is done and then if I've got any time I will do that and that...she doesn't think about the man off to the pub in the night or the kids off out (Female 54, unemployed).

One must recognise, however, that it does not mean family members are deliberately standing in the way of opportunities but that social influences run deep. Family members, whilst on one hand, lauded as being supportive and encouraging, may also be in some ways, complicit in failing to break down barriers.

Narratives also centered on the initial motivation for study which could be grouped into three themes. First, the need to re-train after redundancy, second, to widen social circles and thirdly, for reasons of personal development. Of course these motivations are not necessarily mutually exclusive and in fact one may facilitate the other. However, what was clear and supported by quantitative data was that accessing education and/or training more often than not, was a reaction to a life event. For some, it was to re-train or re-skill after redundancy, for others it was just to keep some social contact after one had left work, or to maintain companionship after bereavement.

Regardless of the initial motive to access education, what emerged from the data was how an initial introduction to education was able to foster a desire to undertake more and that small, manageable steps within the context of extended support networks can help to mitigate some of the effects that a lack of confidence or a sense of perhaps being 'too old' for study may bring. The comment below is an example of these dynamics at work:

Then, all very slow steps, I did a couple of A' levels and then I did a further education teacher's certificate. Then I applied to the Open University, I suppose I was into my 50s then. Once I got the bit between my teeth about education, I went mad (Male 60, retired).

The picture to emerge thus far from the data is that in many ways the world of education replicates the world of work in that women and men are often guided into educational avenues reflective of gendered presumptions and are, to a large extent, also constrained by these presumptions. Further to this, both internal and external barriers co-exist and

seek to dissuade many people from taking that first important initial step. These initial steps cannot be underestimated and both sets of data clearly highlight how one's confidence, ambition and self efficacy may be enhanced through the achievement of clearly reachable educational goals.

Learner Typology

If we were to categorise those who are older learners, five groups could be said to have emerged from the data (see Table 12 below). First, highly educated and motivated individuals who have become serial learners, dipping in and out of education at various points throughout their lives. They will have mostly positive experiences of school and will tend to be from well-paid occupational backgrounds. They need the opportunity for further academic study (this may be undertaken for pleasure and/or for the achievement/status of qualification). Second, those who have returned to education earlier in the life course as a way to access work or to become job ready after a period of unemployment, or women returnees after children. They require tailored educational provision to meet their individual needs. Third, those who feel disillusioned or let down by the school system and consequently left school unqualified. They require the opportunity to pursue education at their own pace and need sensitive and tailored support. They also require fair access to recruitment of courses (perhaps substituting qualification requirements for enthusiasm and life experience). Fourth, a smaller group who have found themselves out of work at 50 and need to re-train or re-skill in a new area. They will have a limited educational background and are likely to be reluctant or apprehensive about undertaking education/training at this point in their lives. They require career support, vocational guidance and the support of a learning mentor/adviser. Fifth, those who have opted for community based courses for enjoyment and social interaction. They tend to be more women than men and choose to study as part of a more leisurely lifestyle. They require access to the types of courses which encourage reminiscence and provide a link to the past (i.e. a family history course) as well as those which are progressive and look towards the future (i.e. a computer based course).

Table 12: Older Learners - A Typology

| Category | Experience/orientation | Support required |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Serial Learners | History of continuous education. Tend to be highly educated individuals from well paid occupational backgrounds. | Lifelong learning. Opportunity for learning for pleasure and for academic achievement. Fair recruitment into higher education. |
| Education Strategists | Returned to education after unemployment/break in employment. Women returnees after children, who have used education for career development. Planners with clear educational goals. | Access to vocational and non-vocational courses. Tailored education/training. Flexible hours. Recognition of the value of skills acquired from, for example, unpaid work in the home. |
| First Returnees | A sense of being ‘let down’ by the education system, but with an innate enjoyment/love of learning. May have undertaken training/education in work. Want a new challenge. | Information about the range of courses available. Fair access to recruitment. Tailored student support. |
| Reactionaries | Displaced older workers, typically with out-dated skills. Need to continue to work until forced to retire. May be apprehensive entering the ‘classroom’ again. | Fair access to training/education. Career support/vocational guidance. Protection against age discrimination. |
| Community Engagers | Typically retired. Education as a social and recreational outlet, more women than men. | Funding for community facilities. Opportunity to challenge stereotypes – should not be ‘written off’ as incapable of learning new things. Creative range of courses. |

Previous Employment

What was apparent from the interview data was that the point at which the cohort first entered the world of work was especially important because people are influenced by what they have seen and experienced in the past. As labour market entrants those now in their 50s and 60s entered a new period of economic expansion, they adopted the notion that work was secure and available to those who wanted it.

When I left school, it wasn't a matter of whether you'd get a job, it was a matter of what job you'd get. I hadn't a clue. I walked round this trading estate and I saw a factory there for tailoring and I did that for two years and then thought I think I'll go and do something different, went out in my lunch hour and got a job as hand sander. It was that easy (Male 66, retired).

For women, prevailing norms and expectations concerning women's roles, especially with regards to their participation in employment, influenced them in different ways and at different points throughout the life course.

When I was younger you left your job and your children were your life, you brought them up, it was a different attitude, more traditional (Female 60, full-time carer).

I think it's probably the norm for the woman to return back to work [now], whereas when I had my first child it wasn't. It was more normal to do what I did [break in employment] (Female 56, full-time worker).

The period in which the women interviewed first entered work had a powerful affect on their employability. The vast majority felt that they were channelled into female-dominated employment areas, the expectation being that "women could do office work, they could nurse and teach, but definitely not work in Law or in masculine or heavy work" women were also located at the lower end of the sectors in which they worked. As one woman explained:

There was a low expectation of women actually progressing up the career ladder. Women generally had to work twice as hard as men and there was a cultural expectation, that really it was the men who worked and provided and that women would only work for a number of years until they got married and settled down (Female 54, full-time worker).

Many women had to be proactive to enter the types of occupations that were previously closed off to them. One such woman applied for a job in her chosen profession only to be told that it was a *male only position*:

To do the actual job I do now I had to wait for the Equal Opportunities Bill and then reapply because they [employer] didn't take notice of me the first time. I applied for my first trial and I was told that it was a male only job and I applied again and they said 'no' they only employed men so I reapplied when the Equal Opportunities Bill came in, which must have been in the [pause] 1970s. I wrote out a written application and attached a copy of the Bill (Female 54, full-time worker).

A cohort aspect was also believed to be at play here.

When I was a child, women were mothers and housewives and then they were managers and it only takes a few generations for that integration to take place. I think we're in that [transition]...I don't think it's happened yet to its full potential, but I think it's on its way (Male 55, full-time worker).

What was evident throughout was that each member of the cohort has lived through and, often initiated, profound social and economic changes which have, in turn, provided them with a radically different outlook on life to those before them, and moreover, changed forever the culture of the workplace.

Discrimination in the Work History

Reports of Age Discrimination

The respondents were asked if, and in the context of their past employment, they had experienced discrimination on account of their age. The response categories were: discrimination because of an actual or perceived 'younger age' and/or discrimination because of an actual or perceived 'older age'.

A significant proportion (24%) of the total sample indicated that they had experienced age discrimination because of an *older* age previously in their career. While slightly fewer but nevertheless a notable proportion, (10%) said the same in respect to a *younger* age. With regards to the latter, analysis of variance was conducted to determine if and how experiences of discrimination because of a younger age varied across respondents'

current age and gender. The respondents' gender did affect the response recorded with experiences of perceived discrimination being higher amongst men than women (14% of all men, compared to 6% of all women surveyed) ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, there was variation across the ages. A cross tabulation revealed that the younger age group were, in fact, twice as likely to have experienced discrimination related to perceived youth (12% of those aged 50-59 as compared to 6% of those aged 60 and over) ($p < 0.05$).

In terms of discrimination on account of a perceived older age, men were also more likely than women to have perceived such discrimination (28% of all men, compared to 19% of all women surveyed) ($p < 0.05$). When compared to age, a cross tabulation illustrated a distinct trend that younger age groups were more likely to experience discrimination related to perceived older age, though the association here did not reach statistical significance. There was also a notable trend whereby those with periods out of the labour market were more likely to have experienced such discrimination at some point (24%) than those with full and continuous employment chronologies (16%), perhaps indicating that a cumulative affect of unfair treatment and/or missed opportunity on account of, for example, breaks in employment was at play here.

However, in view of the fact that respondents were reporting on events that may have occurred sometime in the past, there may have been some issues concerning their retrospective reinterpretation of that time. It is also possible that those who were dissatisfied with their current job or non work status may have provided a different (and arguably a more negative) response than if they had been satisfied.

The qualitative data did, however, support the existence of age discrimination in respondents' work history. Age discrimination on account of being 'too young' occurred mainly in respect to respondents being stereotyped by their employers as being disloyal to the firm or untrustworthy, or being denied responsibility because they were younger workers. Another area of discrimination was identified as negative treatment, which was reported mainly by those who had entered manual employment areas as young apprentices and who received a 'bit of a hard time' from older workers. This was however accepted by most as part and parcel of work in a male dominated workplace environment, and was looked back upon as a learning process or initiation into adulthood.

A more pertinent area of discrimination concerned pay, with pay based upon one's age, rather than one's experience.

When I worked in X [public sector company] you were 28 before you came on full money. So if you were looking to get married or anything before 28 forget it, you know. It was crazy (Male 60, retired after redundancy).

Interviews also addressed the issue of age discrimination on account of an older age. Yet the age at which a person was classified as 'older' was often at a relatively and often surprisingly early age, confirming what was found by Itzin and Phillipson (1995). Discrimination on the grounds of an older age was levied at some people as young as age 30. A significant proportion of women referred to the prevalence of age bars (typically between 18-30) in job advertisements when they were returning to work after children, clearly an explicit and overt form age discrimination. There were also examples of ageist attitudes and behaviour within the workplace itself. As one interviewee understood it, age-related banter was a common aspect of workplace culture at that time and, as such, was accommodated or accepted without much question or challenge. She did, however, feel that over time awareness of age discrimination has brought the issue into sharper focus and consequently that people are now more age sensitive at work:

I remember when we went for a night out the younger people that we had trained were in the restaurant and I sort of came in slightly later and I remember X [colleague's name] who I had known for some time [say] 'oh, you're over there with the oldies' and then she was like, 'oh I am sorry, I am sorry' and I was [saying] 'yeah, you're right'. I remember being her age and doing it, but there was no age discrimination then, it was just the way it was. There wasn't a label or a word for it, that's the difference (Female 55, Volunteer).

Reports of Gender Discrimination

It was important to establish whether individuals had experienced gender discrimination in their work history. As one might expect, a cross tabulation analysis revealed that reports of gender discrimination were more prevalent amongst women than men, (18% of all women, compared with only 6% of all men surveyed) ($p < 0.01$). As with

discrimination on the grounds of age, there was a distinct trend whereby the tendency to have experienced discrimination on account of one's gender was stronger amongst younger (i.e. those in their 50s) rather than older age (i.e. those aged 60 and above) groups. One may argue here that possibly the impact of equal opportunity legislation in the 1970s had less of an affect upon those women currently in their 60s (and older) and more of an affect upon those in their 50s simply by virtue of the fact that these women were the first to have experienced the full impact of a more equitable work climate. Consequently, they may have a heightened awareness of gendered processes and inequalities, and how they are manifest.

Further examination and a cross tabulation revealed that gender discrimination was more keenly felt among women who had previously taken time out of the labour market to have or raise children (23%, compared to 16% of those who had not taken time out of the labour market for that reason) ($p < 0.05$). This was reiterated by the interview data. Many of the women interviewed had confronted classic gender discourse about motherhood, the care of the family and their role within it. It was felt that employers at that time (1960s, 1970s) thought women were only interested in work until they got married or had children. This is clearly evident in the comment below where attitudes and beliefs concerning the economic value of married women were communicated by an employer to the interviewee:

Just after I was married, I went for a job and it was between me and two men. Both of the men were the same age as me, they were less qualified than me, they had a worse sickness record than me...on paper it looked like me, but at the interview this man [employer] said to me, Gods honest truth, he said to me, 'you've recently been married?' I said 'yes'. 'So you'll be having children in a few years time?' I said 'no, I don't intend to have any children for a long while yet'. He said, 'but you will be having children?' It was an assumption he made. I didn't get the job. I was so angry because I knew why he hadn't given it to me (Female 55, full-time worker).

In a similar vein, this second comment shows how women were discriminated against because of their childbearing role:

They [employers] said, 'no, I must have known [that I was pregnant]' That I was just messing around because it takes you a few weeks to get trained, so they said, 'you must have known you were pregnant' and I said, 'well I didn't' and they said, 'well we're terminating your contract'. They could do that back then (Female 58, carer of family and home).

From the comment above, it was possible to see how the importance of sexism and sex discrimination were underrated by employers and exercised routinely without fear of any come back. Similarly, the comment below shows how sexist banter became a part of one woman's everyday existence in work:

I was whistled at everyday I came to work and there were a lot of sexist comments, nothing specifically insulting but just low level boring crap you know [laughing] and you can't be bothered to respond to it on a daily basis so it just becomes part of your daily life (Female, 50 part time worker)

Other women recalled how they had made use of the new (at the time) Sex Discrimination Legislation (1970s) to become the first wave of career women to enter formerly male dominated employment areas. However, they identified yet another set of hurdles as a result. One such woman recounted the trouble she had encountered in terms of being accepted into what was previously a *male only* occupation. The message conveyed was that she was easily replaceable:

When I went into X [name of company] it was 1976 so it was just after the equal opportunities [legislation] came in and some people had claimed for discrimination. I mean if I'd claimed for some of the things that were said to me when I first came and the way we were treated because we were women, you could have taken them to a tribunal. But at the time you didn't realise, you're only young and you felt that if you stepped out of line that would be it. Because they could do that at any time, just say that you were not suitable (Female 50, job seeker).

Time taken out of the labour market to have and raise children also had a profound impact on the availability of opportunity and choice once women returned to work. Although most of the women interviewed returned to their previous employer they had fewer years compared to men and childless women in which to progress and move up the career ladder. For those women who entered the jobs market at the time, it was not only their gender and family status that conspired to discriminate, but age itself was also a determinant.

I was 36 years old and believe it or not 17 years ago they[employers] typed on a little postcard, they'd put, '18-30' [age limit]. The numbers of job, jobs I could have done quite easily like answering the telephone...that would have got me back into the workplace and I could have coped with that (Female 55, full-time worker).

There was other evidence of the various ways in which ageism and sexism interacted and intersected to the detriment the individual. The two examples of double jeopardy cited below are quite different, in that one is the experience of a man, the other of a woman. Yet both felt that they had been discriminated against because of age and gender-based attitudes and beliefs:

The new area manager [in previous job] decided she didn't want older managers and she certainly didn't want male managers and I was told, 'I don't want you, you're male and you're over 40, you're out'. So they put me through nine months of hell because I wouldn't leave. When I did leave I was about as low as you could get...all because I was too old and the wrong sex (Male 55, job seeker).

I have been referred to even in my later years as 'eye candy' or they've [employers] said 'we've got to have bit of glamour at the meeting X [participant's name] will you come' which is all very nice in one way, but if I wasn't conventionally presented in that way and wasn't as youthful, would it be the office 'crone'? (Female 50, full time worker).

In the quote above, the interviewee is referring to the sex-stereotyping of older women. She identifies two classic, yet oppositional stereotypes: the dim but attractive younger woman and the asexual older woman. Both, it was felt, are unhelpful ways to classify an individual.

The Impact of Discrimination

The emotional impact of discrimination ranged from people feeling upset, anxious and depressed at the time to feeling frustrated and angry because they felt they had a lot to offer an employer. For some, their self esteem and self confidence had also been dented. This took the form of people lowering their expectations for advancement and reducing their commitment to the organisations they worked for, or overcompensating and working harder because they felt they had something to prove. In the case below, the interviewee explained how she emotionally withdrew from the workplace to concentrate on what she felt to be the more important aspects of life:

I suppose at the time because I was younger and it was a career I'd always wanted, it [discrimination] made me stronger. But when my family came along I had someone else to consider so it became a disadvantage. I used to take things to heart and that is why I thought in the end, 'oh, I give up'. I think if I hadn't had any one else to consider, I'd have dug my heels in (Female 50, job seeker).

Discrimination was also found to have a negative affect on one's perception of one's own employability which, in turn, led to a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. Put quite simply, if people are told they are 'too old' for work, they start to believe it. A consequence of perceived discriminatory treatment therefore was the internalisation of ageist and sexist assumptions. Consider the quotes below:

I remember coming home and saying to my mum, 'I'm thirty six and I'm written off already, I can't believe it!' And I didn't feel old, but it made me feel worthless (Female, 55 full-time worker).

I think I got a couple of interviews, but just didn't get anywhere with them but by that time my confidence was really knocked. I wasn't performing very well. I went for an interview in X [name of company] and the person there fed back to me and said that I seemed to be identifying problems rather than solutions so I must have had a negative turn of mind (Female 54, full time student).

Gaps Out of the Labour Market

Because the negative effects of intermittent employment patterns have been so widely reported the respondents to the questionnaire were asked if they had taken time out of employment at some point in their work history. Overall 75% of the study sample indicated that they had been absent from employment either regularly or occasionally at some point. In order to examine if there was a difference between women and men, a cross tabulation analysis was undertaken. As one might expect, women had more disrupted employment patterns than men (87% of women had a break(s) in their employment as compared with 64% of men) ($p < 0.01$). There was also a difference between the sexes in terms of the reasons why people were absent from work, with women more likely to have taken time out of employment for childcare (65%, compared to 7% of all men) and unpaid domestic work (20%, compared to only 5% of all men) ($p < 0.01$). It is fair to say then that for these women their experiences of, and participation within, paid employment has been shaped to a considerable extent by their reproductive functions and role within the family. The employment pattern observed was fragmented as women adjusted their paid work to fit around their childrearing role. Indeed, having children had essentially no affect for men, but it did have an affect amongst women.

Further examination and a cross tabulation revealed that women with children were more likely to have a gap(s) in employment (93%, compared to 69% of women with no children). On the other hand, men were more likely to have been without work because of an unforeseen circumstance or structural process such as redundancy (57%, compared to 30% of women) and unemployment (41%, compared to 16% of women), however the association here did not reach statistical significance.

A cross tabulation of the data revealed that those in the sample who had previously most regularly worked in manual skilled occupations were more likely to have been out of work at some point due to unemployment (40%) as compared with those from non-manual skilled occupations (25%) ($p < 0.05$). The same trend was found in respect to redundancy (61% and 38% respectively) ($p < 0.01$) and is perhaps to be expected if one is to consider the gradual and persistent decline in heavy industry that has occurred across the UK, particularly during the recessions of the 1970s and 1980s.

In terms of the qualitative data, the most important theme to emerge amongst the women, but not the men interviewed was the pivotal role played by children. The majority of the women interviewed had stayed at home after the birth of a child or had returned to work, mostly part time, between the births of subsequent children.

I worked full time when I left school and then I stayed in work until [pause] I think I had my son. I never went back to work after then until my second son was ten (Female 54 part time worker).

It was fair to say that these women tended not only to consider their own circumstance and preferences but also those of their family. Whilst the majority felt that it was important to spend some time at home with their children, they were also acutely aware of the adverse affect that this may have on their career:

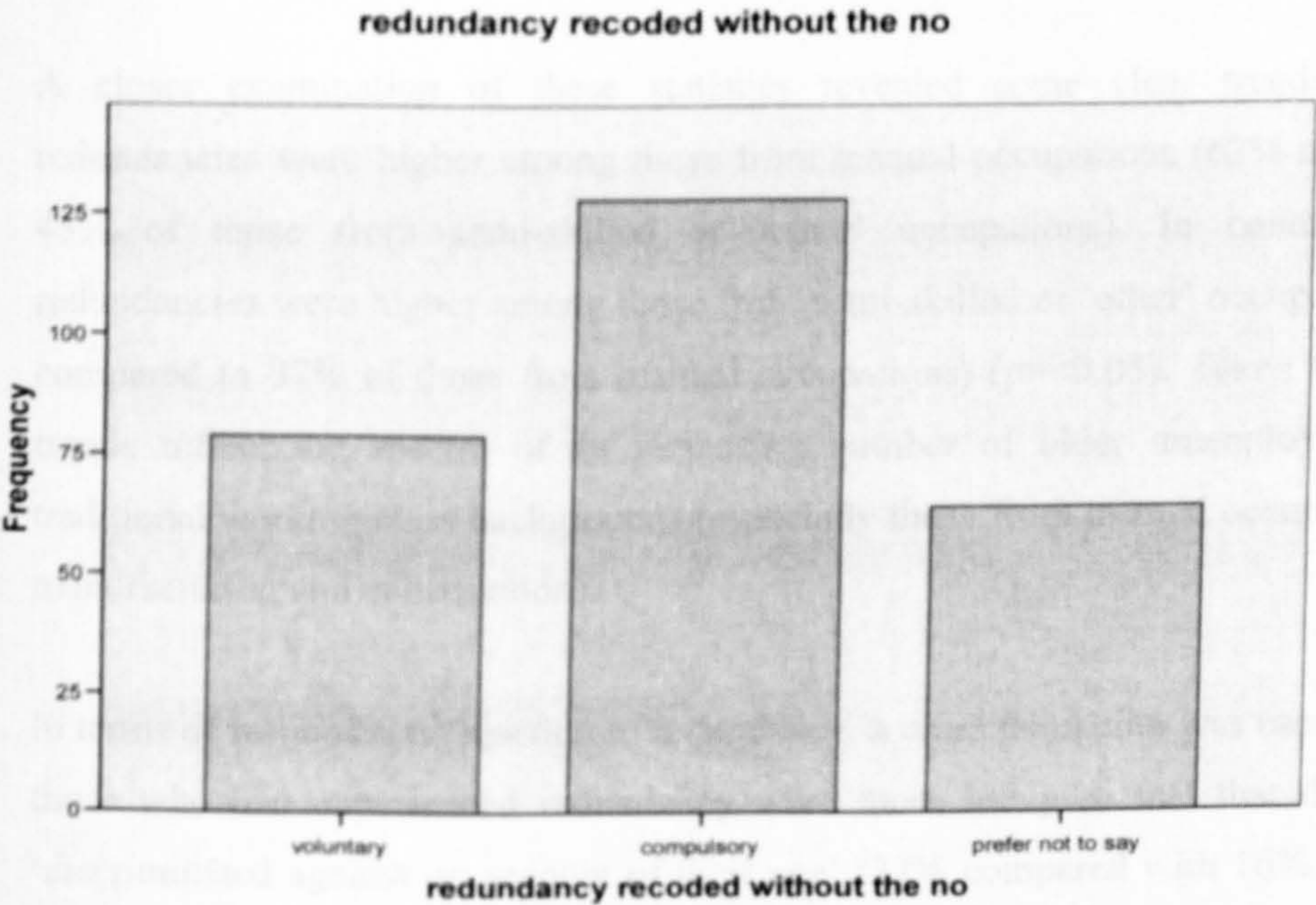
I prefer to work part time but the problem with part time work is that it can be difficult to move up. I think that it is one of the problems for older women because they haven't had the benefit of family friendly work practices and it's a real problem (Female 54, full-time worker).

Most of these women indicated that the years taken out of employment to have and raise children were viewed unfavourably by employers and moreover had a cumulative affect on their future position within the labour market. Some women said they had chosen not to have children until later in their career because they wanted to be taken seriously in the workplace; they felt it necessary to build and establish a career first.

Redundancy at Age 50 and Above

A main aim of this study was to know more about how the out of work over 50s fare in the jobs market. Forty six percent (n=300) of the valid sample had experienced job loss at age 50 or over. The majority of this sub-group (n=271) had exited employment on account of redundancy because of a business or plant closure or the restructuring of an organisation. Of these, 47% had experienced ‘compulsory redundancy’, 29% ‘voluntary redundancy’ and 24% ‘preferred not say’ whether the redundancy was compulsory or voluntary (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Distribution of the Different Types of Redundancy



Further examination and a cross tabulation with gender revealed that men in the sub sample were more likely than women to have experienced redundancy at age 50 or above (64% all men, as compared with 36% of all women surveyed). This was perhaps to be expected given that redundancy affected over half of all manual employees surveyed (58%), mostly in jobs traditionally dominated by men. It is important to note, however, that many other occupational groups had also been affected by redundancy. The results of a cross tabulation (Table 13 below) illustrate that in terms of occupational background, redundancy can cut across all grades of staff within a particular industry or organisation, although incidences of redundancy were significantly higher amongst those at the lower end of the employment spectrum, possibly reflecting wider changes in the nature of the labour market.

Table 13: Cross tabulation of main work area since school by redundancy

| Main Work Area | Redundancy No | Redundancy Yes |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Professional/managerial | 61 | 39 |
| Non-manual skilled | 65 | 35 |
| Manual | 42 | 57 |
| Semi-skilled and below | 45 | 55 |

(n=605, p=<0.01).

A closer examination of these statistics revealed some clear trends: compulsory redundancies were higher among those from manual occupations (63% as compared to 45% of those from semi-skilled or ‘other’ occupations). In contrast, voluntary redundancies were higher among those from semi-skilled or ‘other’ occupations (55% as compared to 37% of those from manual occupations) (p=<0.05). Taken together, these trends reflect the spectre of an increasing number of older unemployed men from traditional working class backgrounds (especially those from manual occupations such as manufacturing and construction).

In terms of respondents’ reaction to redundancy, a cross tabulation was used to show that those who had experienced redundancy were more likely to feel that they had been ‘discriminated against on account of their age’ (32% compared with 16% of those who had not experienced redundancy) (p=<0.01). This will be discussed in depth later on. Suffice to say for now that it does suggest that these people may possibly have been a target for redundancy or, less perniciously, that they may have felt obliged to step aside

for younger employees. In which case the notion that older people must 'make way' for their younger counterparts may have engendered in respondents a lower confidence in their right to work.

The interview data highlighted, in more detail, the myriad of ways in which people reacted to their redundancy. Many of the men interviewed had worked alongside younger men with small children and mortgages to pay for; they were acutely aware that redundancy for these men would represent very little in terms of remuneration. The prevalent view was that young men needed and deserved the opportunity to work and it did not matter if this occurred at the expense of older men. For example, one interviewee, with four children, told how he had been handed his compulsory redundancy letter, only to find out the next day that his colleague in the same department had applied for voluntary redundancy. Consequently, the interviewee's ninety days notice period was withdrawn and he was able to keep his job. His colleague was older than himself, had paid off his mortgage and decided to take a voluntary severance package. The interviewee felt that his own position, known by his colleague had played a part in that decision. Thus the extent to which *voluntary* redundancy is in fact entirely voluntary would appear to be debatable.

Some people were however more ambivalent. They weighed up the advantages of, in some cases, a relatively attractive redundancy payment against the disadvantages of having to leave a job they enjoyed. One interviewee had decided to 'trade off' the more enjoyable social aspect of her work in favour of an attractive redundancy payment. For her, ill health was also a factor:

I needed the money and I wasn't well so that part of it was great. But the other part of it...I liked X [name of company] I really did and the people there were brilliant. It was a hard decision to make (Female 54, job seeker).

For others redundancy was entirely beneficial because it meant early retirement from a job they disliked or had become bored with. In this way it was a relief or an escape from what could have been many more years of hard work. Of course, not all responses were positive. Several people felt upset and angry about their redundancy. Many felt rejected

or cast aside by a firm that they had worked for '*from boy to man*'. The comment below shows how redundancy was viewed by this interviewee as a form of betrayal:

It was a totally negative experience. I had worked there [company] for 25 years full time and I think I was well thought of and yet I felt that they grabbed my redundancy with both hands. Once I said I was interested in redundancy or showed an interest, it was just...out the door, no questions asked. I felt very, very, hurt (Male 54, job seeker).

Although many had expected the redundancy, it was still a shock when it happened. Most of these people were very clearly apprehensive about the future. Moreover, there was a sense that their age may make the job search process more difficult. Age played an important part in interviewees' perception of their own employability; they felt trapped in a curious plateau: 'too old' to find work but 'too young' to retire. This point is made elsewhere (see Casey and Laczko, 1989) and is a reminder of the vulnerability of displaced older workers.

Redundancy was shown to have a knock on effect for the entire family. For some of the men interviewed, there was the added impact of the loss of the male breadwinner role. Such loss was difficult to cope with, especially if their family was dependent upon their employment. This was well illustrated in the words of one interviewee:

I was made redundant a couple of years back and what I found is that it puts a lot of pressure on you, you're wife has got to work and you're sitting there trying to find a job. It's not what I'm used to (Male 55, part-time worker).

The main difference between the sexes was in relation to the ways in which the redundancy occurred. For the majority of men interviewed, redundancy was a very visible form of job displacement, which often affected the entire workforce whilst for the women, redundancy tended to be more of a low key affair, which often involved the contraction of part of the workforce, mainly through voluntary redundancy. That is not to imply, of course, that for women, redundancy was any less traumatic or painful. On the contrary, work provided many women with a sense of independence and an identity other

than wife and mother. Many of the women interviewed emphasised the financial aspect of work; they worked to earn money or to have some financial independence from their partner. Other women spoke of the social aspect of work, in particular, the need for adult conversation that work satisfied.

Age as a Factor in Redundancy

It was clear from the interview data that respondents' age was often felt to have been a factor in their redundancy, '*they [employer] were targeting the over 65's first and then targeting the over 55's*'. The targeting of older workers was perceived by most interviewees as ethically very dubious. Yet, age did appear to be a factor in individuals' own decisions to *volunteer* for redundancy. This was especially true of the men in the study, many of whom had worked for the same employer or in the same job role for many years. They were, to borrow a phrase from Wood (1981), 'company men' for whom work meant more than the physical hours they put in. However, after consultation with their family, many decided that a better option for them would be to volunteer for redundancy rather than stay and risk compulsory redundancy at a later date. The threat of age discrimination, a possible decline in health and the instability of the pensions industry at that time were also cited as pull factors in such decisions, as observed below:

Well I was there [in the company] for 25 years...I'm not in the best of health and I told my wife and my family and they said, 'I think you should pull out' because they [company] were going to review the redundancies in two years time...they felt that in two years time I might come out with nothing after all those years of service. So we had a family discussion and decided that I'd take the redundancy (Male 54, job seeker).

They [over fifties] felt as if they had to go because I got the feeling at that particular time last year that the pensions system didn't seem very stable (Male 55, part-time worker).

Most of the women interviewed, with the exception of those from skilled and professional backgrounds, were more hopeful of, and confident in, their ability to find further employment than were the men. Unlike the men they were confident that there would be work of a similar nature available to them and that, if necessary, they could

move into a new area without too much difficulty. Women were also more likely to have intermittent employment chronologies and consequently more experience of the jobs market than the men. It is hardly surprising therefore that as Wood found in his (1981) study, redundancy was primarily a concern for older men with a history of employment in one company or job role for most of their adult life.

Current Situation

Table 14 below shows respondents’ current situation, when considering the effects of redundancy as a variable, those who had experienced redundancy were more likely to be unemployed, than those who had not.

| Table 14: Cross tabulation of redundancy by respondents’ current situation | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|---------|
| | | Current Situation (%) | | | |
| | | Employed | Unemployed | Economically Inactive | Retired |
| Redundancy at age 50 or above | No | 57 | 8 | 11 | 24 |
| | Yes | 47 | 18 | 7 | 28 |

(n=618, p=<0.01)

As can be seen above, the proportion of the sub-sample in the category of ‘retired’ was relatively similar to those in the entire sample who did not leave work because of redundancy (28% and to 24% respectively). However, dividing the sample into ‘younger’ (50-59 years) and ‘older’ (60+ years) age groups, a marked difference was identified. Over 13% of those who had experienced redundancy were now ‘early retired’ (retired at 50-59 years old) as compared to only 2% of those who had not experienced redundancy (p=<0.01). This could possibly be due to a personal expectation about the likelihood (or rather unlikelihood) of finding further employment and/or the possible existence of age discrimination in the job search process. Alternatively, of course, it could reflect a decrease in the desire for work amongst this sub-group, with people retiring earlier through personal choice.

The younger end of the redundancy sub-cohort were also more likely to have returned to work (57%); return rates for those in their 60s were substantially lower (30%) (p=<0.01). Similar cross tabulation tests were used to examine the effects of other variables of

interest. As expected, those experiencing ill health or disability had less opportunity to return to work. Educational attainment also affected the possibility of re-employment, whereby those with 'high' (A'Level and above) educational attainment (but, not a trade qualification) were more likely to be re-employed than those with 'low' (none-GSCE level) educational attainment ($p=<0.05$). Those with trade qualifications were only slightly more likely to return to work than those with low or no qualifications (43%, compared to 36% respectively).

Re-employment

Respondents in the redundancy sub-group were asked how long after their redundancy did they consider work. A distinct trend was noted whereby almost three-quarters of respondents had looked for work or were re-employed "straight away", 15% started to look for work "less than 6 months after redundancy" and the rest (12%) had a break before they considered work, extending from "more than six months to 2 years or more". The length of time was dependent, to an extent, upon one's personal circumstances in that those who were better off financially were more likely to take a major break from employment as were those with a history of continuous employment with their previous employer. The comment below sums up the broad response:

I thought I'll take three months out, have a good relax, just pot about the house then start looking for work (Male 54, job seeker).

By contrast, some people looked for work straight away or even during the period of their redundancy notice. The impending redundancy and not having a job to move into was a difficult and stressful time for this group, as highlighted in the following quote:

I knew this [redundancy] was going to happen in October and in September I started to scan the papers and started to apply for work. I had an interview in the January at which I was unsuccessful and then just started to apply, apply, apply...but it was very demoralising because I was applying for jobs, I was still doing my work and still trying to prepare for the redundancy and it was really hard (Female 55, part time worker).

Of those who did return to work, a cross tabulation with gender revealed a distinct trend whereby men were more likely to be re-employed in full time (75%) than part time (25%) work, whereas relatively equal proportions of women were re-employed in both types of work (54% full time and 45% part time). The type of redundancy experienced (i.e. voluntary or compulsory) also affected the likelihood of full or part time work. A cross tabulation test was used to measure a possible association. As Table 15 illustrates compulsory redundancies were more closely associated with a return to full time work ($p<0.01$). The opposite effect was found in respect to voluntary redundancies.

| Table 15: Cross tabulation of redundancy type by hours currently worked | | | |
|---|--------------|------------------|-----------|
| | | Hours Worked (%) | |
| | | Full time | Part time |
| Redundancy aged 50 and above | Voluntary | 42 | 58 |
| | Compulsorily | 78 | 21 |

(n=97, $p<0.01$)

The interview data showed the reasons for part time work were wide and diverse and included elements of choice and necessity such as ill health, additional income (private pension or redundancy payment), personal preference and an inability to find full time work. Increased care commitments also featured highly amongst the women in the sample. In terms of personal preference many people wanted part time work to free up more time for themselves. Consider the comment below:

I could have done another factory job, but I thought I don't want that. I'm 58 this year. I love my holidays we went away four times last year so the job I've got now, it's a little job, just in you know a bingo hall picking up papers, throwing them in the bin. It suits me. It's an easy job (Male 57, part time worker).

As with many interviewees the participant above had intentionally looked for a less stressful job that he could sit out until his retirement. He felt that work helped to keep him fit and active. He wanted a 'little job' to top up his redundancy payment and the freedom to choose to work or to stop work.

A cross tabulation revealed that, in terms of the type of work undertaken, the redundancy sub-group were more likely to be employed at the lower end of the labour market as compared with the rest of the sample ($p \leq 0.01$). Table 16 also shows that only 9% of those who had experienced redundancy were re-employed in manual skilled work, despite the fact that 58% of those from manual skilled backgrounds had left work in their 50s on account of redundancy. It may indicate that former manual employees had not wanted to work in the same or similar occupation, or they had not been able to find work in that area.

| Table 16: Cross tabulation of redundancy by respondents' current wk area | | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----------------------|--------------------|--------|--------------|------------------------|
| | | Current Work Area (%) | | | | |
| | | Prof/ managerial | Non-man skilled | Manual | Semi-skilled | Unskilled and below |
| Redundancy at age 50 or above | No | 43 | 39 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| | Yes | 35 | 27 | 9 | 12 | 16 |

($n=312$, $p \leq 0.01$)

There was evidence also of a reduction in income from re-employment after redundancy. Cross tabulation revealed a trend whereby, of those who returned to employment, approximately 60% had taken a drop in their annual income. It was found that 62% of respondents currently earned a lower income of under £15,000 as compared with only 39% who had previously earned a similar amount. However, only 11% of respondents currently earned £25,000 or over as compared with 30% who had previously earned a similar amount. Although this certainly illustrates a trend, it is, of course, difficult to make any definitive conclusions based on average income levels alone because of the variation of employment types and regional differences. It is also difficult to determine from the statistical data alone whether respondents had moved into ‘better’ or ‘worse’ jobs, that is, whether they had been forced to take a job with lower pay, or had chosen to downscale or move into a less stressful job role. However, if one was to refer back to the qualitative data (p.124), the suggestion is that this would depend upon the element of choice involved.

It may also be of interest to note that displaced workers were slightly more likely to have reported experiencing age discrimination in their current job role (18%, as compared with 8% of non-displaced workers). This may mean that displaced older workers have moved into the type of work in which discrimination is more prevalent, or possibly that they have internalised the negative experiences of their job loss and/or are therefore more aware of how discrimination is manifest.

Unemployment at Age 50 and Above

Twelve percent of the total sample (81 people) described themselves as currently ‘unemployed’. Statistical testing was carried out to measure association between unemployment and the variables of gender and age. Cross tabulation showed that 61% of the unemployed sub sample were male and 38% were female ($p \leq 0.05$). The status of unemployed applied more to the younger end of the cohort (men and women in their 50s); 43% were aged 50-54, 45% were 55-59 and only 12% were 60 and above ($p \leq 0.01$). There was no statistically significant association between respondents’ previous employment, although slightly more people from manual and semi-skilled occupational backgrounds were currently unemployed.

In terms of the desire for work, Table 17 below shows that, as expected, this was strongest amongst unemployed (95%) with over half (54%) of those who were sick or disabled similarly expressing a desire for work ($p \leq 0.01$). It is also of interest to note that 17% of people who described themselves as ‘retired’ at the time of the data collection also expressed a desire to return to work.

| Table 17: Cross tabulation of would like to return to work by current situation | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|---------|
| | | Current Situation (%) | | | |
| | | Unemployed | Caring for relative/look after home | Sick/ Disabled | Retired |
| Would like to return to work? | Yes | 95 | 40 | 54 | 17 |
| | No | 5 | 60 | 46 | 82 |

(n=279, $p \leq 0.01$)

The desire to return to work was analysed in relation to the age of the sample. The results of this are shown in Table 18 overleaf. As can be seen, the desire for work progressively declined with age.

| Table 18: Cross tabulation of would like to return to work by respondents' age | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----------------------|-------|-------|-----|
| | | Age of Individual (%) | | | |
| | | 50-54 | 55-59 | 60-64 | 65+ |
| Would like to return to work? | Yes | 78 | 67 | 39 | 11 |
| | No | 22 | 32 | 60 | 89 |

(n=298, p=<0.01)

However, there is not enough detailed information to tell us how many of those who were early retired or economically inactive had previously been unemployed immediately after their job displacement. In addition, it is unclear as to whether their decision to stop, or to not look for work was taken out of choice or necessity. For example, access to a private occupational pension or redundancy payment has been shown to reduce the appeal of continued work after redundancy. Alternatively, the ‘discouraged worker effect’, the belief that there is no work available, has been shown to push individuals into early retirement. Age discrimination as a barrier to employment can also force one to withdraw from the jobs market. It is also difficult to tell from the statistical data alone how many of those who were currently economically inactive planned to return to work at some point in the future.

Perceived Barriers to Employment

Those who wanted to return to work (n= 123) were asked what they felt held them back. The most frequently cited barrier to re-employment was “not being able to find *suitable* work” (i.e. work that people are able to do) and was cited by around 40%. Other common barriers included a “lack of formal qualifications” (26%), “ill health” (22%) and “competition from younger people” for work (18%). As regards to age, there was a firm belief that “age discrimination” may intensify the job search process (25%) and some (19%) felt they were, or would be seen as, ‘too old’ to return to work.

Cross tabulation with respondents' age revealed that the tendency to report barriers to work was stronger amongst the young third agers (i.e. those currently in their 50s), though equal proportions of respondents of all ages cited age discrimination as a barrier (25%). This trend did not however reach statistical significance. Experiences of other forms discrimination in the work history also did not appear to affect the pattern of response. However, 75% of those who cited "age discrimination" as a barrier to work also reported experiencing such discrimination earlier in the work history (as compared to 20% of those who had not) ($p < 0.01$). One may argue therefore that personal experience(s) of age discrimination can have a negative impact upon one's perception of one's own employability, especially later in life. Similarly, a notable proportion (44%) of those who cited "depression" as a barrier to employment indicated that they had also experienced age discrimination earlier in their career, suggesting that the psychological impact of discrimination can extend beyond the actual event and be revisited at times of insecurity and vulnerability.

There was no statistically significant association between the sexes in terms of the pattern of response, yet men were slightly more likely to feel that there was "no work available for them" than women. Further examination of the data revealed that, although a small proportion overall, relatively equal proportions of women and men cited "family responsibilities" as a barrier to work (9% of women and 8% of men), thereby indicating men's increased care obligations in their middle and later years.

When considering effects of redundancy, it was notable that those who had experienced redundancy in their 50s and 60s ($n=300$) were also those most likely to cite perceived barriers to work. The most frequently cited barrier here was "not being able to find work" (49% compared with 36% of those who had not experienced redundancy). "Lack of formal qualifications" was cited by 39% of people in this group (compared with only 16% of those who had not experienced redundancy) ($p < 0.05$) and the "threat of competition from younger people" was cited by 21% (compared with 15% of those who had not experienced redundancy). In addition, those who had experienced redundancy were more likely to feel that they were perhaps "too old" to return to work (23% compared with 10% of those who had not experienced redundancy) ($p < 0.05$).

It is however impossible to tell from the statistical data alone how many and which of the barriers overlapped to lead ultimately to permanent exclusion from the labour market. More detailed information on the interplay of barriers to re-employment was provided by an analysis of the qualitative data. The most salient theme to have emerged here was the belief that one's age may intensify the search for work. However, for many the realisation that their age posed a problem was not immediate, but rather developed over time. Their age was never expected to be a constraint, mainly because the majority of the sample did not *feel* old. It was only when they failed to secure work that they realised their age may be the cause of discrimination. Many of these people were for the first time being labeled as 'old' even though they did not feel it. Consequently, strong feelings of disillusionment were expressed.

I am now 55 years old so people perceive you as old, but I don't feel it. But when looking for work you are confronted with it really (Male 55, job seeker).

My age didn't help, because I went to interviews and I thought this isn't real, because you read about it in the papers...people not taken on because of their age, but until it happens to you, you don't believe it (Male 62, volunteer).

I worked for thirty years with X [name of company]. I worked my way up in that time from a packer to a quality planning engineer, yet after I was made redundant and started to look for work, I was surprised that I wasn't getting any interviews. How can it be that one week you're a valued member of a team for a top company, then next week no one wants you? It had to be my age, simple as that (Male 54, full time worker).

For women, it was not only their age and their gender that conspired to discriminate, but their role within the family also played a part. Time taken out of employment childcare had reduced their work experience. This does, of course, apply to most women, yet conversations showed that for older women, the situation is often compounded by their age, "I think when you have been out of the jobs market as well, you know, intermittent, it becomes really difficult, especially at my age." Several of the women interviewed had started to look for work because their children had recently left home. These women had found that their role within the home had altered, and they had more opportunity to

participate in the labour market. However, they felt that prolonged break(s) in employment for childcare or eldercare would be rated unfavourably by employers or interpreted as a lack of commitment to work. This, they believed, was particularly unfair since their role as mother or homemaker was felt to be a 'job in itself' yet one that was devalued or degraded by employers. As one woman put it:

You can start a job and do these NVQs but nobody gives you an NVQ for being a mother. I mean you're a housewife, a manager, you're budgeting for the family or when a problem comes up, you're there or you've got sickness in the house, your children are ill, or whatever. You've got to think on your feet a lot of the time (Female 50, job seeker).

Women's detachment from the labour market also created a void in their computer based knowledge which was felt to affect their employability, as one interviewee explained:

It's the computer side of it because the technology then, there was no e-mail and you had to type up your own work, there were no word processors and so I do think that's part of what is holding people like myself back (Female 50, job seeker).

For those women who had been out of paid employment for some time, or who identified with a role within the home, the transition was especially difficult. As one woman rationalised:

There are women I know from X [area in the city] and you'll find that that's their community, that's their boundary and you'll find that they won't cross that boundary, they won't venture out. If you're our age and have no income or whatever, it can be hard and you'll get some women who haven't done very well in their education, but who are frightened [to work] because that's [the family], their safety net (Female 57, job seeker).

Another woman, who had taken early retirement to coincide with her husband's retirement, had found it difficult to adapt to the retirement experience. She indicated that she may like to return to work, but expected to face downward mobility into lower paid and lower status employment. It was also apparent to her that her expertise might not be as desirable as it had been in the past:

I had experience of being a manager, but I learned my skills a long time ago. How I learned might not suit an employer. I would not expect to be able to just pick up and run with it (Age 55, early retired).

Evidence of Age Discrimination in the Search for Work

Age discrimination is often cited as the main reason why unemployed older people feel that they are the least likely of all the age groups to secure work. Yet whilst most interviewees were adamant of its existence, some were less convinced feeling instead that certain people may be over sensitive about their age or simply perceive age discrimination when it is not there. There was however, agreement amongst the sample that many employers do, in fact, discriminate on the grounds of age. The point made here was that discrimination was not always easily observable. Moreover, that it was often expressed in age neutral language: “overqualified”, “too experienced” or “inflexible” were often cited as indirect or polite ways to say that one was simply too old. It was easy to see then how age discrimination could be internalised, rationalised or accepted as a regrettable, yet inevitable part of being an older unemployed adult. Consider the following quotes:

People have said to me that they felt discriminated against because they're older. It's a very personal thing though because you can only really say how it affects you. But if they are not the best candidate for the job, they might then take umbrage because they thought it was their age, but it mightn't be anything to do with that at all (Female 54, part time worker).

I wouldn't say directly, but I got the feeling that...you write after jobs and, you know 'sorry we can't take you on'. They [employers] don't specify why, they can't really, can they? They just can't do it (Male 55, job seeker).

Those suffering from ill health appeared to be at a heightened disadvantage.

I don't know whether it's age or maybe it's because I've got the health problem? Maybe my face doesn't fit? Who knows? They [employers] may have a first impression of you and say, 'I don't want him'. I'm not sure exactly why they don't want me (Male 54, job seeker).

My ex-partner has worked all his life in X [name of company], took a heart-attack because they nearly worked him to death and came out of that. Now he's better, he's finding it really hard. He just thought he'd walk from one job to the next because of his experience, but he can't. They [employers] either don't answer him or he gets refused and the minute they find out he's had a health problem, the heart attack, they don't want to know (Female 54, job seeker).

The insidious nature of age prejudice was further reflected in the view held by many in the sample that the request for information on age in an application form could prejudice their application regardless of whether the employer expressed a commitment to 'equality', "*they [employers] could paper sift anyone over the age of 40 or 45 that they don't want, so you end up in the bin and you haven't even had a chance have you?*" As a last resort many people altered their job search strategy by deliberately targeting and applying for work in employment areas where maturity was regarded as an advantage.

I suppose nobody ever turned round and said, 'no Mr X you're too old' because I was careful not to apply for jobs that specified, well they didn't actually [specify] age, but you could tell really by reading the advertisement what kind of person they were looking for. So because of that I didn't perhaps put myself in a position where I may have been discriminated against (Male 55, job seeker).

I think what I tended to do was to try to avoid putting my age down [on a job application form] because I don't look that old. I could get away with it. I know other people who have lied about their age to get work (Female 54, full-time worker).

One interviewee applied for a particular job because she was certain that she would not be discriminated against because of her age:

I went after this particular job. I knew that because it was for the over 50s [in a community resource centre] that if I went for an interview they couldn't possibly discriminate against me because of the nature of the work, and they'd probably be more amenable to someone who understood the situation (Female 55, full time worker).

Another interviewee who had been unemployed for over three months felt disillusioned with the whole job search process. He said he now intended to apply for a job in a well known supermarket because the company had a track record in the employment of older people:

I was reading yesterday in the news that X [name of supermarket] is taking on over 5000 over 50s. I wouldn't mind applying for one of them (Male 55, job seeker)

However, rejection from such employers was extremely difficult to take and left one respondent with the view that for him, re-employment was difficult, if not wholly impossible. Here the transition from unemployed to early retired is easily discernable. It would appear, from an analysis of the interview data, that the realisation that one's age may inhibit the job search process is, in fact, the first step towards early retirement.

In addition, there was a sense that, for men, their gender may also be the cause of some discrimination. Consider the comment below:

I've applied to X [name of supermarket] and I've had no luck. I think it's my age. The girl next door's daughter works in X [supermarket] and she said it shouldn't be my age because they have women of 60 odd and 70 odd there. But I had a letter from them - unsuccessful. So it must be something else (Male 54, job seeker).

The concept of double jeopardy as it related to older women appeared to express itself in the form of employer prejudice concerning an older, female appearance. Most unemployed women interviewed desperately wanted to work, but expressed considerable apprehension that they may be discriminated against because of the way they looked. Some even admitted to making an effort to appear younger for a job interview. This was especially the case for professional women and those who had been absent from the jobs market for some time. In contrast, none of the men interviewed mentioned an older

appearance as a potential concern to them. Thus a double standard did appear to be at work.

Many of the women interviewed felt that it is perhaps more acceptable for a man to age in employment than it is for woman. As one interviewee put it, *“for women, grey hair is a symbol of old age; for men, it is a mark of distinction”*. However, it is important to note that the evidence presented here is based upon self-reported data only. There is a possibility that some of the women interviewed may have been overtly sensitive to evaluation or to the loss of a youthful appearance, or that they simply perceived discrimination when it was not there. Even so, strong feelings of rejection were expressed:

Two women apply for a job. They're both smart, but one is more physically attractive than the other. Now in my opinion, the only way that the woman with the less attractive face, figure, whatever, is able to get ahead is by being smarter and playing the game a little bit more (Female 54, full time worker).

The Types of Jobs Deemed Suitable for ‘Older Workers’

There was also the perception amongst the sample that specific types of jobs were regarded by employers as ‘more suitable’ or ‘appropriate’ for an older person. For women these tended to be entry level work in the retail or service sector: *“I think basically they [employers] feel that a lot of older women who have a family and kids are working for what they class as pin money and just something to keep them occupied because they're bored basically”*. Whilst this may be the case for some, it was certainly not true of all. The stereotyping or typecasting of older people into particular types of jobs typically part-time and low-paid had the effect of limiting or restricting the range of employment opportunities available to them. One respondent also noted how older people tend not to be considered for work that is traditionally the preserve of young people *‘a younger person’s role’*:

It's the language they [employers] use as well, 'office junior' well I think I could be trained up but you just think oh 'office junior' they'd laugh at you if you turned up you know, 'I've come for the office junior job'. But how do they know? I might make a great office junior? (Female 50, job seeker).

The majority felt that they were not given the opportunity to prove their worth or showcase their talent. Indeed, the wastage of talent of people in their 50s and 60s was a common theme in the data:

I feel a lot of older people have got an awful lot to offer [employers] and what happens is their experience of life is overlooked. I find, and I say it to myself all the time, if I could just get a foot in the door, if they showed me exactly what to do then I'd pick it up no problem (Female 50, job seeker).

Support for Unemployed Older Workers

Support for this group was felt to be lacking. The few voluntary and community based projects and organisations that were available were rated favourably. Most interviewees felt that they did a good job of providing age-sensitive support, moreover, that they were empathetic and friendly in their approach. However, commercial and public sector projects such as the Jobcentre Plus were rated less favourably. Consensus of opinion here was that these organisations applied more of a broad brush approach to individuals' needs. There was also little indication that Jobcentre staff paid attention to the level of skill and expertise that people had formerly acquired. In fact, many interviewees said that they had been advised to accept temporary or insecure work because that was 'all that was available'.

There just doesn't seem to be anything [jobs] about or its just one weeks work, that's no good to me. I want full time work or even part time leading to full time, you know. I wouldn't mind that, but I couldn't be moving from one job to another all the time. That's just no good to anybody (Male 54).

Many people felt that they had been fobbed off with, or pushed into, temporary and insecure work, in what they believed to be a cynical attempt to move people into employment with little regard for the type of job undertaken.

You're just moved from different areas within a section: you're sick, you're not unemployed. If they put you on a work related scheme, you're not classed as unemployed until you're back on the Job Seekers Allowance. To me it's just juggling the [employment] figures (Male 54, job seeker).

One man told of a friend who had accepted temporary work without any forethought of how it may affect his entitlement to benefit once his contract ended. One can see here how when the work did end, the onerous task of claiming benefit began once more, thereby creating a seemingly endless cycle of activity and non-activity.

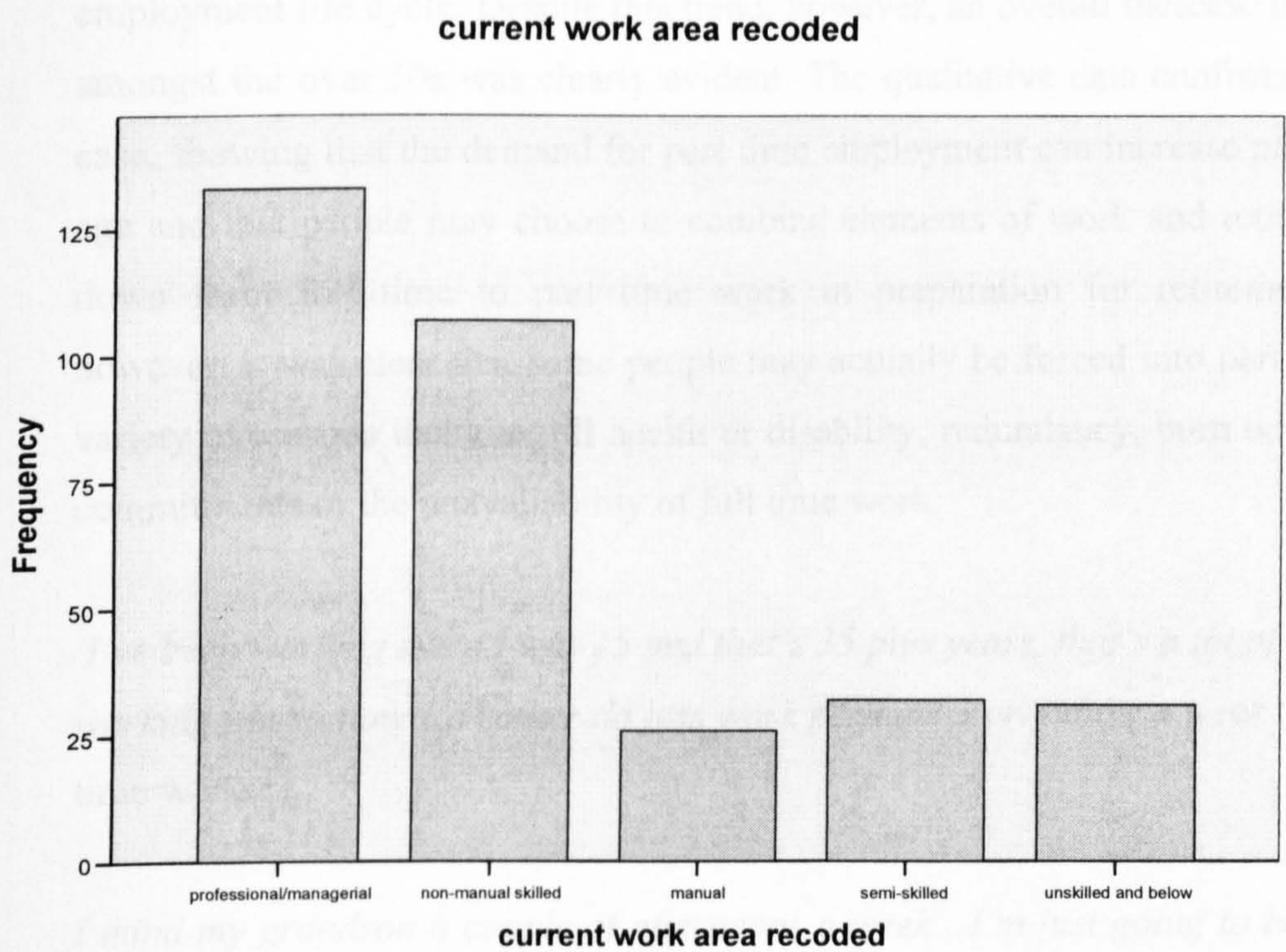
My mate had one day [temporary work] and he was on the disability [Incapacity Benefit]. He's younger than me. He's only 40 odd and he put his P45 in, signed off the sick and said, 'I'm starting work'. Ok. They signed him off. He had one day. They [employer] just said, 'that's it, you're finished'. Now he tried to get back on the sick, but they wouldn't let him because he'd signed himself off (Male 54, job seeker).

Lack of money was an evident source of worry, especially for those who were single at the time of the data collection and those with children to support. For married men, the thought of 'living off' their spouse or partner was resonant at the back of their mind. Yet the realisation that they were no longer the breadwinner did not appear to be as major a concern for them as one may have expected. Rather, it was the lack of work-related activity that was extremely difficult for these men to cope with. The search for work did of course require some sustained effort, yet it was not felt to be equivalent to, or a substitute for, the structure of the normal working day.

Current Experiences of Employment

The survey aimed to collect evidence regarding respondents’ current experiences of employment. Fifty two percent (n=339) of the sample were employed at the time of the data collection. Figure 7 below shows the type of employment undertaken. As can be seen, there was a cluster of respondents who were located at the upper end of the labour market. That the majority (40%) of work sub-sample were currently employed in professional, managerial and supervisory occupations/roles is perhaps to be expected in view of the workplace association between age and seniority.

Figure 7: Current Work Area Recoded



When considering the effects of gender, no discernable difference with respect to professional or managerial occupations was found. However, women were much more likely to be engaged in unskilled, non-manual occupations than men, (43% and 16% respectively), with this trend being reversed in respect to unskilled, manual employment ($p<0.01$). This could be reflective of the nature of women’s and men’s work. Regardless of the cause, it does suggest, however, that given that the occupational level reached was

linked with educational achievement, those with higher levels of education are best placed to challenge such stereotypes.

Work-Life Balance

A cross tabulation of the data revealed that whereas 17% of the valid sample (those currently employed) had previously worked more part time than full time hours, this figure had risen to 32% in respect to their current employment. Of particular interest here, was the fact that there had been a marked increase in part time work amongst men (20% as compared with less than 3% for the main part of their work history). Nevertheless older women were almost twice as likely as older men to be working part time (42% as compared with 20% respectively) ($p < 0.01$), a trend observable at all other points in the employment life cycle. Despite this trend, however, an overall increase in part time work amongst the over 50s was clearly evident. The qualitative data confirmed this to be the case, showing that the demand for part time employment can increase progressively with age and that people may choose to combine elements of work and retirement, or phase down from full time to part time work in preparation for retirement. Conversely, however, it was clear that some people may actually be forced into part time work for a variety of reasons including ill health or disability, redundancy, burn out, increased care commitments or the unavailability of full time work.

I've been working since I was 15 and that's 35 plus years, that's a lot of work, it's a long working life so now I'd rather do less work perhaps 3 or 4 days a week (Female 54, full-time worker).

I mind my grandson a couple of afternoons a week...I'm just going to be here whenever I'm needed because I enjoy it. I would need to work, but to work twenty-five hours gives me the best of both worlds (Female 54, part-time worker).

A number of women in the study had specific care responsibilities for older (parents, spouse or partner) as well as younger (children or grandchildren) dependents. In respect to the latter, it was fair to say that grandparenthood was viewed as both a pleasure and a joy whilst at the same time was an increasingly demanding role, with many trying to juggle the twin pressures of work and family life. There was also a sense of resentment or

unease regarding the expectation that the care of children should fall to the grandparent before the state. One respondent said that although she enjoyed taking care of her grandchild; it was a role she felt was deeply enriching, she also felt taken for granted by Government and society:

I think the Government plays on us...at the end of the day, they're stopping us from working because they know it's costing too much (financially) for our children to put their babies into nursery (Female 54, job seeker).

Another woman added:

A lot of women of my age are starting to do unpaid work looking after the grandchildren because you feel responsible. You have to give them [children] a helping hand, rightly or wrongly, and some children expect their parents to reduce their hours perhaps if they're working full time to make sure that their child is looked after (Female 55, full-time worker).

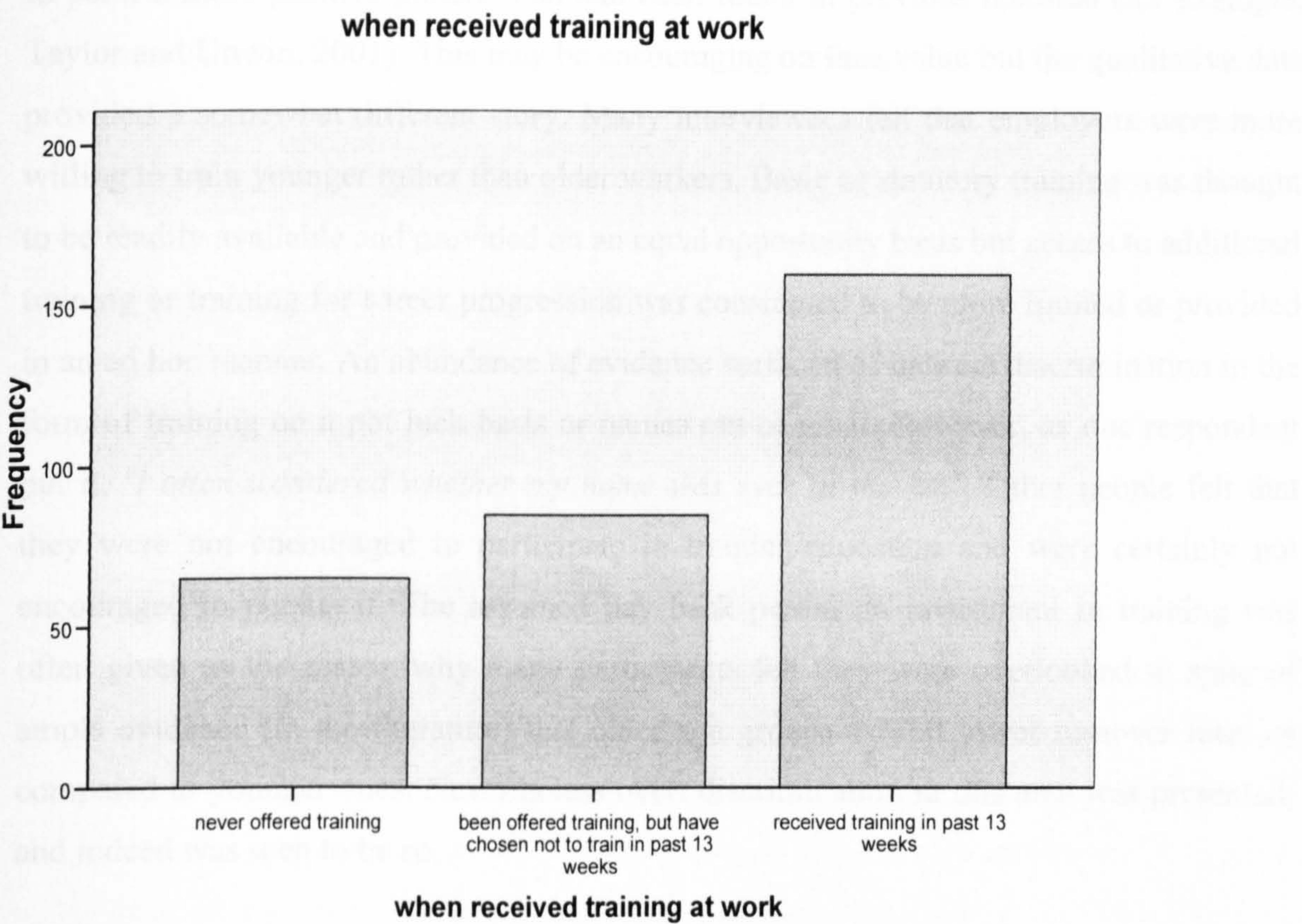
The comments above suggest that these women were making decisions that reflect their own sense of responsibilities for caring for others, even though the detail of these responsibilities may have changed over time. So in some ways the greater flexibility gained from part time work, is both a consequence of, and a precursor to, care provision.

Regardless of the reasons for part time employment, right across the sample the respondents were more likely to be working part time now than they had done previously. Indeed, a cross tabulation showed that the incidence of part time work correlated with one's age, rising fast after 55 years, then again after 60 years and once more after 65 years ($p < 0.01$).

Training, Promotion and Career Opportunities

Because the positive effects of training are so widely reported, the respondents to the questionnaire were asked when they last received training at work. The results of this are shown in Figure 8 overleaf.

Figure 8: When Respondents Last Received Training at Work



In order to examine if there was a difference between men and women with respect to training at work, a cross tabulation was undertaken. The result of this test revealed that men were more likely to have ‘not been offered training’ (30% compared to 12% of women). It was noticeable however that twice as many women than men had declined the opportunity for training (16% compared to 37% respectively). Table 19 below shows, however, that very little difference was found between the sexes in terms of those who had taken it up (54% and 51% respectively) ($p<0.01$).

| Table 19: Cross tabulation of gender by when received training at work | | | | |
|--|--------|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| | | When received training? (%) | | |
| | | Never offered | Been offered training, but not trained in past 13 weeks | Trained in past 13 weeks |
| Gender | Male | 30 | 16 | 54 |
| | Female | 12 | 37 | 51 |

(n=307, $p<0.01$)

Although the number of women *choosing* to decline training is obviously concerning, the fact that 78% of the total 'employed' sample had actually received training would seem to paint a more positive picture than had been found in previous research (for example, Taylor and Unwin, 2001). This may be encouraging on face value but the qualitative data provided a somewhat different story. Many interviewees felt that employers were more willing to train younger rather than older workers. Basic or statutory training was thought to be readily available and provided on an equal opportunity basis but access to additional training or training for career progression was considered to be more limited or provided in an ad hoc manner. An abundance of evidence surfaced of indirect discrimination in the form of training on a pot luck basis or names out of a hat. However, as one respondent put it, *'I often wondered whether my name was ever in the hat'*. Other people felt that they were not encouraged to participate in training/education and were certainly not encouraged to pursue it. The assumed pay back period on investment in training was often given as the reason why many participants felt they were overlooked in spite of ample evidence (in the literature) that older age groups exhibit lower turnover rates as compared to younger ones. Nevertheless overt discrimination in this area was presented, and indeed was seen to be so.

As far as going to university and getting other qualifications within my line of work, it was said that it's not really worth it for people who have only got a couple of years left [before retirement]. So that is ageism, isn't it? That's direct ageism (Female 54, full-time worker).

The quote above is, of course, unambiguous in its message in that this interviewee felt she would not be given the opportunity to progress because of her age and the assumed pay back period mentioned. Yet discrimination can also be subtle, in that some may accept the status quo without questioning the rationale for it, or indeed the consequence.

Personally there isn't a problem with the company I'm with now. But if you're looking to train people with a view to getting something in return, somebody who is in their 50s maybe isn't going to want to be that flexible, maybe isn't going to want to take on that long term view that the company wants and so by virtue of that, I feel that training can be a problem (Male 57, full-time worker).

Whilst these comments provide evidence of the ways in which work based training and/or educational opportunities may be denied, they must be seen within the context of how older workers viewed their prospects for promotion. Clearly, if promotion is not seen to be accessible, then the motivation to access avenues that may lead to promotion will understandably be lacking. Past experiences are also likely to be influencing factors, which is supported by the present study, when one considers that, according to a cross tabulation test, those who had experienced age discrimination at some point in their work history were more likely to believe that they receive fewer opportunities for promotion in their current job role (60%) than those who had not (32%) ($p < 0.01$). This may be that they are just more aware of the nature of discriminatory practices, or that, as with the quote above, they understand the experience of it.

Nevertheless, some of the interviewees told of people in their organisation who “*won't put that extra bit in*” because there was no point, mainly for the reasons outlined above. For women especially, there was a glass ceiling of age effect, similar to that observed by Itzin and Phillipson (1995), which seemed to account for the under-representation of women generally and specifically older women in senior management. Even in workplaces where the majority of employees were women, those at the very top were usually male. Successful women were thought to be that way because they ‘*played the game*’ or because they were aggressive and hard nosed, and consequently fitted the masculine culture of management.

What emerged from the data was that there was an accumulation of missed opportunities for both women and men, but women more so perhaps, resulting in many being less willing to attempt to access training or education that may have led to promotion. This is not to say, however, that the outside effects of discriminatory practice are not important influences, of course they are, but people also act on what they *believe* to be true. The effects of this are, as suggested by one interviewee:

I don't know whether it's because of my age or the way I've been treated in the department that I've lost that respect. I don't have the confidence to take on new challenges in the workplace because I feel as if I've had the stuffing knocked out of me. So I don't have the confidence I had say five years ago, which I think is quite sad. I do my job for the money, don't worry about the promotional side of it and look after myself outside of work (Female 55, full-time worker).

So personal experience or, more precisely, the cumulative effect of one's personal experience is a telling factor. If people are repeatedly denied opportunity, they are quite understandably going to become reluctant to continue to challenge the structures thought to be beyond their control. Put simply, they will start to lose heart. Consider the comment below:

If a woman of 50 wanted promotion she could certainly apply for it because we have equal opportunities legislation, but realistically she has to ask herself 'does she stand a chance?' Yes, she might be qualified. Yes, she might have all the experience, but the big drawback is, she's in her 50s! They'll look at it, 'well how long has she got left before she retires? (Female 54, full time worker).

Whilst there are resonances and similarities with earlier comments, the difference above is that this interviewee is not just talking about people aged 50 and over but, rather she is referring to the added dimension of one's gender. She is specifically taking about women in their 50s. It is of course not clear as to whether or not the interviewee had directly experienced discrimination or had been denied, for example, training at her place of work, but to a large extent, this does not matter. We not only learn from personal experience, but we also learn vicariously. Take this comment:

They restructured the company a while ago so there must have been about a dozen jobs that came up and there was a mixture of people applying for them and every single one of them went to someone under twenty-five and then everyone just sort of felt, well there's no point is there? (Female 55, full-time worker).

Motivation

When asked about their motivations for work, 84% of respondents cited “income” as their primary motivation, with a similarly high number (80%) rating “enjoyment of work” as an important motivation. “Work as a challenge” and “contribution to society” were rated equally as important as each other (66% and 67% respectively) with “time for oneself” and “status from work” also cited as being important, though not so strongly (59% and 54% respectively). The only discernable difference between women’s and men’s responses was found with respect to “contribution to society” with more women rating this motivation as important (73% as compared with 57% of men) ($p < 0.05$).

Cross tabulation analysis was used to measure association between other variables of interest. As might be expected, the vast majority (90%) of those who had been made (compulsory) redundant from their previous job cited “income” as the primary motivation for work and were more likely to rate “status from work” as an important motivation (64%) as compared with those who had volunteered for redundancy (39%) ($p < 0.05$). This perhaps reflects the way that one’s self definition is often dependent upon work and it may be that those who did not have a choice in terms of leaving their previous job had yet to negotiate an alternative way of looking at themselves.

There was also a notable difference between full time and part time workers in terms of their ranking of motivational factors. Full time workers rated “income” as the most important motivation (92% compared to 64% of part time workers) ($p < 0.01$), while part time workers rated “enjoyment of work” as the most important (82% compared to 79% of full time workers), though the difference here did not reach statistical significance. Nevertheless, the findings show that what motivated people to work therefore tended to be related to the different meanings that people attached or applied to work in terms of seeing it as a necessary chore, a central life interest, a burden or a source of pleasure, each of which were demonstrated by those who were interviewed.

In terms of gender, a common assumption in the literature is that while work may be regarded as an important source of identity for men, the same is not true of women (p.41). Yet there is little evidence from the data in the present study, to suggest that women are any less committed or interested in work than men. In fact, for some of the women interviewed, occupational ambition actually increased with age. These women (especially those who had previously been absent from the workforce) found that their career had taken off in their 50s while other women regarded this point in their life as a special time to pursue a career aspiration once put on hold. As one interviewee put it:

As the kids got older I became ambitious but I never really thought about it when they were little because I liked looking after them...and now they're very much older, yes, I'd like to explore other avenues in my work, develop my career (Female 50, full-time worker).

Equally the time taken out of employment to have or raise one's children did, in some ways, help to drive women. For example:

Some women in their 50s are ambitious characters, but I think some have done what I've done, taken a long time out [of the labour market] and then come back and realised that they are good at the job. They get a taste for that kind of power and become more ambitious than their male colleagues because they've had a lot of making up to do (Female 57, full-time worker).

These comments reflect the diverse nature of motivation(s) for paid employment and how one's personal history and circumstances can have an influence. It equally stresses the importance of taking a broad view when attempting to encourage women, especially older women, back into the labour force. It was also notable that there were several incidences when the dimension of age did not appear to be something that was viewed negatively. Indeed, in many ways it was seen as a positive aspect of one's identity in work: *"I guess because as you get older you have more skills and more experience. So I think it's an appreciation of the build up of skills."*

Current Experiences of Discrimination and Impact

Those who were employed at the time of the data collection (n=339) were asked whether or not they had experienced discrimination in respect to their current job role. This question mirrored that previously asked in respect to the respondents' work history. Overall, most people felt satisfied in their job role and many felt that they had experienced little or no discrimination of any sort. It appeared that, when compared to the level of discrimination reported earlier in the respondents' work history, discrimination did not appear to increase over time or with increased age. However, it must be noted that only those who were employed at the time of the data collection were able to express an opinion on this matter. It may be that this is a favoured group who have a positive relationship with work, or that based on the statistical data alone, age discrimination is mainly an issue for people at entry point into work (i.e. those who are unemployed) rather than one affecting those already established in the workforce.

The occurrence of discrimination on account of perceived 'older age' and 'other negative treatment' (12% and 23% respectively) were more common than discrimination on account of perceived 'younger age' and 'gender' (2% and 5% respectively). Further analysis and a cross tabulation found no statistically significant association according to the respondents' gender, age or indeed any other independent variable of interest. However, a trend was observable whereby, as may be expected, more women had experienced gender discrimination (10%) than men (only 3%). When considering age discrimination, this trend was very much reversed with 16% of men reporting that they had experienced such discrimination compared with only 9% of women. That said, less than 4% of men had experienced both, quite lower than that reported by women at around 10% which, although a relatively low proportion overall, is nevertheless suggestive of a double jeopardy for women. Of course, whether or not there is a connection between the ageism and sexism reported and, if so, whether such a connection is merely additive or in fact mutually reinforcing, can only be determined from an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data (to follow).

Cross tabulation of the data showed that the tendency to perceive discrimination based upon one's older age was stronger amongst the younger end (those aged 50-54) and older end (those aged 60 and over) of the cohort, rather than those in the middle, although the here difference was not statistically significant. This trend was also mirrored in respect to reports of gender discrimination: again the tendency to report such discrimination was higher amongst the young third agers and those aged 60 and above. But because the overall number of people who reported discrimination was low, once more, the association did not reach statistical significance. Nevertheless, put together, these results indicate the vulnerability of those in their early 50s, a trend that has appeared elsewhere in this study.

It was felt to be important to examine the strength of feeling about one's experiences of age discrimination. For example, one may tentatively consider that one has experienced unfavourable treatment, or one may feel quite vehemently that it has occurred. To this end, respondents were asked to rate on a 5 point Likert-type scale (ranging from 'strongly disagree' = 1 to 'strongly agree' = 5), how much they agreed or disagreed with 5 statements that were designed to examine the strength of such feeling. The items asked if respondents believed that, because of their age, they "received less favourable treatment from co-workers"; "had less say in decision making"; "received less pay"; "had fewer training opportunities" and; "had less opportunities for promotion".

Scores from 5-25 were available with a higher score indicating higher agreement with the direction (negative) of the scale and thus a higher strength of feeling. As may have been expected, those who had experienced age discrimination previously in their career recorded significantly higher scores than those who had not. However, those who had not indicated they had experienced negative treatment (past or present) still recorded a mean score of 10.60 with some (32%) having a higher score than this. The highest recording a score here was the maximum available of 25. Given this, it may have been the case that some of those who had indicated that they had not been the subject of discriminatory practice, indeed had, but either in isolated incidences or possibly, as it will be argued later, that they had failed to reflect fully upon their experience(s).

It is generally accepted that such measurements are designed to examine the totality of feeling towards, or about, something and as such it is unadvisable to examine individual items in isolation. However, it was thought to be of importance to see where this strength of feeling came from. The data showed that across the scale, the percentages for the first three items were relatively stable and generally below the statistical mid point, yet for the final two there was a sharp increase in those indicating agreement. These items dealt with issues of training and promotion and as such support the finding presented earlier concerning respondents' levels of dissatisfaction with regards to these issues (see p. 126). *So whilst age discrimination appeared to be a minority experience, it may be the case that discriminatory practices are mostly experienced in relation to training and promotion.*

In order to investigate if and how the response pattern was affected by the respondents' gender, the employed group were sub-divided into men and women. A chi-squared test of significance indicated that there was no statistically significant association between male's and females' responses, although the mean score for each item was slightly higher amongst the men than the women. However, it was still below the statistical mid-point. It was similarly low regardless of age, occupation, job hours, motivation and any other variable of interest.

It would appear then, based upon the quantitative data alone, that strength of feeling is not necessarily about individual relationships, but is reflective of organisational culture beyond the control of the workforce. To extend this a little further, it was felt important in the light of the results above to determine if the age/gender profile of the workforce had any influence upon individual experiences. Further examination and a cross tabulation revealed that experiences of discrimination were consistent regardless of the age and gender profile of the workforce, with the exception of those from mixed age and gender workforces who tended to experience low levels of discrimination of any sort, although the association did not reach statistical significance. The most obvious explanation for this trend is that individuals in this environment do not become isolated because of their age and/or their gender and that there is, in effect, safety in numbers. The data also suggest that having a mixed profile workforce actually encourages different groups to recognise other groups' strengths, so it may be that in such organisations preconceived beliefs are consistently challenged and adapted.

A Case of Double Jeopardy?

In terms of the qualitative data there was evidence of a double jeopardy for women: *“I think there is such a thing as multiple discrimination - age and gender - then you've got race and disability and, it's all compounded by age.”* Data showed the many ways in which interactions between ageism and sexism impacted upon the availability of opportunity and choice for women in the workplace. As summed up by one interviewee:

In my estimation, a woman in her 50s might be equally qualified, she might even be more experienced, certainly she'll have more life experience than a younger woman, but the majority of people who interview are men and they're going to think, well is she going to have the energy to do this, this and this? Then there's this young girl, she's quite pleasant and attractive, the assumption is that she'll have the get up and go (Female 55, full-time worker).

Another example provided, concerned the supposed invisibility of older women at work and the observation that those who did not accept their excluded status were viewed with suspicion or seen as deviant:

If you're a woman in a meeting you'll see nobody will take any notice of you, then some bloke will just repeat what you said and they'll [employers] say, 'yes, oh yes'. You think why did I bother? As you get older, you care less about what certain people think in a way, you're more ready to speak your mind, but then people don't like it...you're aggressive then, intimidating and scary (Female 54, student).

Generalised beliefs and perceptions about older women were thought to operate on two dimensions, related to (1) an older appearance; and (2) a perceived age related decline in work performance. In relation to an older appearance, many of the women interviewed identified at least one confrontation with a gender or sexual stereotype related to their age (i.e. mother hen): *“The young men in the office tell me...confide in me you know”*. Yet very few of the women interviewed took offence to this sort of interaction. Some did, however, find it difficult to cope with ageism related to the dominance of a youth culture and experienced inner conflict between success as identified by a youthful face, appearance and lifestyle, and what they saw as the rational need to avoid such superficial

concern with their image. But when viewed in the subtext, it was clear that far from being a trivial or superficial concern, the focus on youth and, in particular, a youthful appearance had a severe impact on women's self-esteem, especially for those who wanted to move up the career ladder. One woman recalled a sense of social isolation:

The reason why they [co-workers] treat you differently, it's a visual thing. I'm not saying I was drop dead gorgeous when I was younger because I wasn't, but they're far more likely to spend time with someone who appeals to them (Age 55, professional).

Yet some of the women interviewed were critical of other (older) women in their attempts to hold back or reverse the ageing process and many employed a strategy of detachment from their cohort, as illustrated in the quote below:

I think the general feeling is that I look younger than X [name of female co-worker] so X takes up the mantle of oldest person in the office, not me and she gets treated differently because of it. I think half of it's because she's got grey hair (Age 57, professional)

Concern over one's physical appearance tended to be higher among women in professional, male managed and hierarchal organisations. These were also the women who referred to a double standard in respect to male and female ageing in employment: *"It's still a male dominated society. Very few women in their 50s are as successful as men in their 50s...only the odd one"*.

By contrast, the majority of women in manual or lower paid work indicated that an *older* appearance did not represent a significant problem or impediment for them. Instead, women from this occupational group were more likely to report prejudice related to the job itself (e.g. cleaner) rather than their position as an older employee: *"If you're a cleaner people tend to look down on you a little bit. You're sort of stereotyped...rollers in the scarf and smoking [laughing]"* (Age 53, part time worker).

Aside from issues associated with appearance, some women involved in the type of work that demanded considerable adaptability or technical know-how reported confrontation with age based stereotypes and perceptions about their mental competence and intellectual capacity, some of which contained, or were felt to have contained, a gendered

or sexual element (i.e. the impact of menopause). Many indicated that their age had often been an issue in the way their employer or fellow employees regarded them. Other women were aware of ageism of this kind, but had never experienced or observed it in relation to their own employment and workplace. Ageism, when it did occur was often based around, or reinforced by the introduction of new technology.

We've got a new computer [in work] and everybody's having difficulty with it. It's a bit awkward. X [name of co-worker] said to me 'have you had your [computer] test yet?' I said 'no I haven't had it'. She said, 'well you've got to remember that as you get older it takes longer for your brain to absorb all that information'. I felt like screaming no, no it doesn't, it's just your perception of it (Female 57, full time worker).

Many of these women were worried that such age-related thinking might result in their work being discounted or undervalued by their employer. This was felt to be particularly unjust, as respondents believed that their abilities to work effectively had remained unchanged over time: *'Because I'm older the assumption is that I'm a little bit dodderly in the brain department, but that's just not true'.*

Other women felt that they may be denied promotion on account of their (older) age. Another woman added:

If we [department] were seconded to America there was always a reason why I was never chosen or it was always just names out of a hat. I often wondered whether my name was ever in the hat (Age 55, full time worker).

This contributed to a sense of social isolation and exclusion. There was also mention of a double standard in respect to how women and men age in employment.

I know they say there's a male menopause, but I think men of that age group [50 plus] are respected; they look more distinguished so for a women who's 50 and going grey...people go on appearances. I'm sure if you're at an interview...there's a nice, young woman stood in front of you - she could work for the next thirty years, who are you going to take on? (Female 50, job seeker).

I'm already in a job, but I wonder if I were my age and I came here [to her employer] for a job and there was a really fit, well-developed 23 year old whether I would even get a look in even if I had the qualifications? I'd like to think I would, but I'm not sure (Female 55, full time worker).

That women are 'never the right age' (Duncan and Loretto, 2004) was also supported by the data, as one woman explained:

Although people try and be very good and not be very sexist, I think they're [women] still looked upon...either if they're young they're going to leave and start a family, or if they're older they want pin money (Female, 54 full time worker).

In addition, the notion that women are valued in accordance to the conditions ascribed to their youth (sexual appeal, reproductive capacity) was reflected and played out in the data.

At 50 there are all the health issues around menopausal women: 'we don't want neurotic, emotional women in our employment'. What else? Yes women's expectations of themselves as well. There is influence certainly I guess from the media, that successful [female] employees are young, beautiful and glamorous so that's another aspect of it (Female 50 part time worker).

However, it was observable that not all women experienced ageism in the same way or to the same degree. For example, women in lower skilled employment areas tended to feel that their age was perhaps less significant to a perceived decline in work performance. In fact many of the women in manual skilled and repetitive work (i.e. factory work) felt that their experience was valued by their employer to such an extent that they were often given the most difficult jobs to perform. This could of course be a double edged sword.

You're left swinging to do the job and the younger ones come in and, how can I put it, they say 'I can't do that or I can't do this' and the boss says 'oh well it's all right then she can't do it so we'll put her something easier (Female, 50 part time worker).

The belief that one's age might result in lower pay and reduce opportunity for promotion was also acknowledged by some of these women, but it was perceived to be only a minor issue.

Retirement

In order to examine if there was a difference between respondents' ages and their experiences and meanings of retirement, a cross tabulation was undertaken. As expected, for both types of retirement (voluntary and enforced), those aged 60 and above were the most likely to be 'retired' at the time of the data collection (61% compared to only 8% of those in their 50s) ($p < 0.01$).

From the interview data, a common theme was that those who had chosen to retire, were more likely to view retirement as a new and positive phase in their life, as opposed to those who had not chosen retire. Thus, the level of choice involved was felt to be an important determinant of how one viewed retirement. Freely choosing to retire appeared to foster a positive reaction to retirement. For instance, those who had chosen to retire tended to view retirement as a time for self-fulfillment or a time to adopt a more leisurely lifestyle: *"I always said that when I retired I was going to set my own agenda...I think I retired at the right time"*. In contrast, those who left work involuntarily or for whom the timing of the retirement was unexpected or beyond their control, were more likely to view retirement in a negative way or find it difficult to adjust to the retirement experience. As one interviewee explained: *"I've seen women of 50 like X [name of friend] she took a stroke last year so she's finished and she misses that social aspect"*.

There was also evidence of reluctance on the part of some interviewees to retire. The reasons for this varied from person to person. Some enjoyed their job and wanted to continue to work for the foreseeable future. Others felt that they would miss the routine of work and the added social aspect. Feeling fit and able to work they questioned why an arbitrary age for retirement should ever be applied, and pondered how difficult it might be for them to make the transition into retirement.

I don't know what I would do with myself to be perfectly honest with you...right you've come to a certain age and now you've got to go [enforced retirement]. I would hope that this situation would have disappeared by the time my turn comes...it's a form of discrimination isn't it? You're sixty-five and you're not allowed to work anymore (Male 55, full-time worker).

A privileged minority were however looking forward to their retirement, especially the prospect of having more time for themselves. They looked forward to a period of rest and relaxation and to spending more time with the family.

Our children have finished University and we don't have anybody that we're sort of responsible for so we could afford to take a reduction [in pay] and have some time. Time is important to us now because as you get older, it's more important. It's not about working your socks off. It's about having holidays and thinking of your recreation, isn't it? (Female 54, part time worker).

Yet for others the thought of scaling down financially was difficult to contemplate: “*I don't know what I would do with myself...I really can't afford to live on an old age pension. I have an occupational pension, but it doesn't make me a millionaire by any manner or means.*” Women especially, were concerned over the financial implications of their retirement. For some, their typically poor paid and part time work had adversely affected their ability to secure a safety net of income for retirement which, as many pointed out, may exceed the time they will have spent in active employment. Hardest hit were those who had been unable to accumulate sufficient pension entitlement because of the time spent caring for others and the persistent gender pay gap. As one interviewee explained:

I didn't go out to work for a long time, I didn't have a pension to build up and because I wasn't married, I don't get any of my partner's pension and there are a lot of people in that position. I've got a pension here [current place of work] which I've just sorted out, but the best it's likely to do is to make me just ineligible for state benefits, know what I mean? It's that poverty trap (Female 55, part time worker).

Most people realised that retirement is a very personal issue and as such is likely to be viewed and experienced in a variety of ways depending upon the individual. Hence, the need for flexible or phased retirement with increased flexibility and choice in respect to the state pension age was forcefully articulated. There was also support for an equalisation of the SPA for both sexes. Most people felt that the current (at the time of the data collection) difference between men and women was, itself, a direct form of double jeopardy discrimination. The increased participation of women in the workforce was also felt to be at odds with what was regarded by most as an outdated and draconian policy:

I think the retirement age as a number, 65 or 60 if you're a woman, these figures were set a couple of generations ago and people now are far more active, and able, and I think there's also a different mind set (Male 60, retired).

The message to come from this section is perhaps best summed up by Loretto et al (2005 p. 480) who write “*Control over the conditions of retirement, at whatever age, is the key to enjoying a satisfactory older age*”.

Perceptions of ‘Older People’

This section is based solely upon the collection of qualitative data. It was a theme that emerged from interviews with participants and was not explicitly addressed in the questionnaire. In interviews, participants talked about how they viewed themselves and other ‘older people’ as well as the qualities they felt that they could bring to the workplace: “*I think people who are over fifty work harder than younger people. I really do. I also think they are more reliable.*”

With regards to experience, life experience was highlighted as a potential asset that older people could bring to the organisations they work for.

I think we bring a lot of life experience because we've had all sorts of ups and downs in our lives and we recognise that people are going through ups and downs all the time. It is good and bad, black and white; it is a mixture of both (Female 55, part time worker).

One interviewee identified life experience as a quality unique to older workers yet at the same time he could not conceive himself as an 'older person':

I don't really think of myself as an old person really. I know that I am 62 [pause] but perhaps life experience is one of the main qualities, that you can sort of chat to colleagues and all the rest of it and sort of try and point them in the right direction and perhaps you are a bit more steady than the younger ones (Male 62, full time worker).

There is obviously some sort of self-contradiction at work here. As with the interviewee above, many people in the cohort felt they had been altered by the years they had lived in terms of their experience of life. Yet, at the same time, they explicitly made the point that they did not *feel* old. As such, they embraced a youthful outlook on life or maintained the view that, 'you are only as old as you feel'.

You see age is just a number. I know a woman who is five years older than me, but she might as well be fifty years older and that's the difference. It's all to do with our outlook. I'm never going to be old, at least not in the head (Female 54, full time worker).

Yet stereotyping based upon one's age and the double jeopardy of age and gender prompted one interviewee to voice how she felt that some older women may lose their confidence:

You're up against younger women who look good. I mean if you're of a certain age, you're coming up to the menopause or whatever so you're facing a lot of other problems, you're getting grey...you do lose confidence even if you were a very confident person before (Female 50, job seeker).

Often such stereotyping was internalised by individuals, forming nagging doubts about their own abilities that were instantly dispelled once they were given the chance to challenge these doubts.

I have in the back of my mind that because of my age, I don't learn as fast as a younger person, but experience has told me that once I've learned, I've learned and I can learn to do new stuff. The job that I started has changed so much...we have to work with computers and once you're resigned to the fact that you've got to do it, then you do it (Female 55, full-time worker).

Yet for many people in their 50s the chance to conquer internalised views was felt to be denied somewhat due to employers' attitudes and practices towards older workers. The interviewees also talked about perceptions they had personally encountered and witnessed in wider society: *"I think society makes it very clear – it tells you that that when you get older things are limited"*.

I know that ageism is there. I know people view somebody with white hair and write them off. I mean there is that fear of becoming old; none of us can deny that. I mean I look in the mirror, but you pick yourself up and think well I am never going to be this young again! (Female 57, full time worker).

Related to this social aspect was the media's obsession with celebrity and the appetite of the consumer culture especially those at the younger end of the market, which was felt to have created an 'us and them' dynamic whereby if you ignore the hype and the marketers' messages to stay young the perception is that you have somehow given up on life:

I think the media aims adverts at them [young people] and its all part of this [pause] youth culture. X [name of daughter] buys a magazine and it's full of young celebrities who are fighting to stay young and to look older is to say that you have given up. I think that's why younger people look at older people and think they're second class because they don't fit that youthful image...that's my personal take on it (Female 55, working full-time).

Additionally there was a perception among the women interviewed that once women reach a **certain age** they are rendered invisible in society or are sidelined because they are viewed as older and therefore not as significant as they perhaps once were: *'We just*

get sidelined as if we don't have an opinion or we've never been there but that's age for you'

As with most participants, the woman from the quote above later went on to say that she found it difficult to come to terms with the realisation that in respect of societal standards and, to a certain degree, her own personal standards, she was seen as less attractive as she was when she was younger. She did not like what this did to her self esteem yet inside she felt that she had remained unchanged over time.

To sum up, it was evident that although people over fifty felt that they had many unique qualities and were capable of working for the foreseeable future, negative pre-conceptions and stereotypes that may be embedded in wider society inhibit the potential of this group. This is not only as a result of pre conceived ideas in the minds of employers or recruiters concerning the work capabilities of the over 50s but may also be attributed to individuals internalising these messages in some subliminal way, believing them to be true of themselves. The implications of this will be explored in the discussion chapter (Chapter VI).

Chapter IV. Influences on Self Efficacy and Life Satisfaction

What has emerged from the research so far is that issues of confidence are central to how those involved in the study viewed themselves, their situation and what they believed their future to hold. In many ways this was to be expected given that previous research has clearly highlighted the ways in which positive mental well being can have a positive effect upon one's life. For example, Nuehs (1990) found that life satisfaction was a key indicator of the readiness in which retirement was viewed, whilst Robertson et al (2002) found, amongst their sample of 50-74 year olds, that life satisfaction was positively related to the world of work. Specifically when individuals are not able to do what they want, in the particular case of work, they are more likely to negatively evaluate their overall quality of life. These constructs are of course useful in terms of evaluating such attitudes and feelings.

However, when considering experiences of discrimination, the pattern of the discrimination can often be mapped statistically, in that, one can chart the numbers of those who have experienced discrimination and examine if there is a statistically significant relationship with age, gender, ethnicity or indeed any other variable one may wish to use. Yet this would tell us very little about its overall impact. Given that the effects of discriminatory practices are experienced at a personal level, it would make sense to attempt to determine what the subjective impact is. It would, therefore, seem sensible to measure the two most obvious dimensions of one's subjective evaluation of self. First, life satisfaction which is derived from the judgments we make about our life and second, self efficacy which is related to the beliefs we have in our capability to succeed in a particular task. This can also be measured globally to assess the overall level of self efficacy one may have. It was hoped this process would be able to offer some insight as to whether negative life experiences (such as discrimination) affect global self-judgements.

Self Efficacy

The sample were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements about themselves and their life as a whole. The scale used to measure self efficacy was adapted from the widely used Jerusalem and Schwartz, General Self Efficacy Scale (GSE) (1992) to assess a general sense of individual perceived self efficacy (see Table 20).

Table 20: General Self Efficacy Scale (GSE)

1= ‘strongly disagree’ to 5= ‘strongly agree’

| | |
|----|---|
| 1 | I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough. |
| 2 | If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want. |
| 3 | It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals. |
| 4 | I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events. |
| 5 | Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations. |
| 6 | I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort. |
| 7 | I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities. |
| 8 | When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions. |
| 9 | If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution. |
| 10 | I can usually handle whatever comes my way. |

Source: Jerusalem and Schwartz, 1992

A main aim of the scale is to predict one's ability to cope with daily pressures and to adapt after experiencing stressful life events (which can include, for example, discrimination, redundancy and unemployment), making it particularly pertinent to the research. The 10 item scale was self-administered as part of the questionnaire. For each item, for example, ‘I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events’, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement on a 5 point scale. Jerusalem and Schwartz (1992) used a 4 point scale to avoid a neutral response which is in effect a *non* response. However, when piloted, the lack of a ‘neither’ category resulted in a number of incomplete or blank GSE's which prevented the response to each item being aggregated to form an overall score (the sum of self efficacy). Given that the 5 point scale is commonly used in public surveying, it is possible that the respondents had subconsciously come to rely upon, or seek security from, the 5 point format. It was therefore decided that a ‘neither’ response category would be offered. The psychometric

strength of the GSE scale has been evidenced widely (see Schwarzer, 1992) and Cronbach's alpha in the majority of studies range from .76 to .90.

The construct of perceived self efficacy is reflective of a positive self belief. It is the belief or expectation that one can accomplish a particular task or cope with adversity and change (Bandura, 1994). People with a strong sense of self efficacy do not shy away in the face of difficulty but show true determination, quickly recovering from failure or setback. They are not threatened by a challenging situation because they are confident that they can cope with it. Belief is the significant factor here. For example, one may reason that with appropriate training, exercise and a healthy lifestyle, one could possibly complete a marathon; however, this is not equivalent to having a strong sense of self efficacy. Rather, self efficacy is the personal belief concerning one's ability to successfully perform a particular task or behaviour. Positive self efficacy is, therefore, the belief that one *will* complete a marathon. According to Albert Bandura (1994), a strong sense of self efficacy reduces stress and vulnerability and facilitates goal setting and persistence in the face of adversity. It follows that a poor sense of self efficacy is accompanied by stress, anxiety and depression. People who doubt their capabilities tend to have low personal expectation and dwell upon failure or setback. They worry about specific problems they expect to encounter and tend to give up at the first sign of trouble (Bandura, 1994).

Life Satisfaction

The scale used to measure perceived life satisfaction was adapted from the Pavot and Diener (1993) Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (see Table 21). The SWLS is a 5 item, positively worded instrument used to measure global life satisfaction. It assesses satisfaction with one's life as a whole and does not tap into individual constructs (i.e. happiness), although positive coefficients have been found with favourable or pleasant emotions and subjective well being. Neither does the SWLS assess satisfaction with life across specific areas such as health but, rather, allows an individual to make a subjective judgement of his or her life by using the individual's own criteria (Pavot and Diener, 1993).

Table 21: Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)

1= ‘strongly disagree’ to 5= ‘strongly agree’

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | In most ways my life is close to my ideal. |
| 2 | The conditions of my life are excellent. |
| 3 | I am satisfied with my life. |
| 4 | So far I have gotten the important things I want in life. |
| 5 | If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. |

Source: Pavot and Diener (1993)

According to Kumar and Dhyani (1998 p. 47) life satisfaction refers to, “*the overall quality of life one has been able to enjoy during one's life*”. Hence, the assessment of life satisfaction is a personal judgmental process in which the amount of satisfaction one has depends upon a range of factors, such as, the goals one has set for oneself and the extent to which these goals are realized as well as the weight one places upon the different domains of life (i.e. health, success at work). As Pavot and Diener (1993 p 64) put it, “*A comparison of one's perceived life circumstances with a self-imposed standard or set of standards is presumably made, and to the degree that conditions match these standards, the person reports high life satisfaction*”.

Of the 5 items in the Pavot and Diener (1993) SWLS the item, ‘So far I have the important things I want in life’ was replaced with ‘I am just as happy as when I was younger’ so as to tap into a possible connection between the past and the present. As Efklides et al (2003) note, in the study of older people it may be useful to include a retrospective comparison element. This would also meet the need for adopting a holistic approach to the research (see methodology chapter). The criteria for scoring were based upon the method provided by Pavot and Diener (1993).

Given that these items are generated on the premise that life satisfaction is assessed on the individual's own standard of evaluation they are fairly general and abstract in nature referring to the past, for example, ‘If I lived my life over, I would change almost nothing’ as well as the present, for example, ‘The conditions of my life are excellent’, providing a long-term perspective. The SWLS has previously demonstrated strong internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha in the majority of studies ranging from .79 to .89 (see Pavot and Diener, 1993).

Of course, having such a subjective instrument in terms of allowing people the freedom to set their own criteria for evaluation can also be fairly limiting in the sense that a person may over-emphasize specific areas of their life, (for example, marriage, work, health) and other experiences that happen to be especially important to them at the time of assessment, and we would have no idea what these would be. Moreover, it is possible that a person may score a particular item higher because of the time frame on which it is based (either the past or the present). Pavot and Diener (1993 p.66) argue, “*A crucial aspect of developing the construct validity of the SWLS will be to understand the processes involved in arriving at a life satisfaction judgement*”, only then can we fully understand the meaning of high (and low) life satisfaction. Having said that, in drawing upon some of the qualitative data collected in the present study, it was hoped that we could arrive at a tentative explanation for, or interpretation of, a test score as well as support the relationship between global life satisfaction and particular variables of interest, for example, age and gender.

Results

Table 22 below shows the results of the scores for the two scales. Collapsing the data into a dichotomous index of ‘high’ and ‘low’ levels of self efficacy and life satisfaction showed that, overall, high levels of self efficacy were recorded by over 80% of the sample. Life satisfaction scores were somewhat lower with 65% of respondents recoding a high score).

| Table 22: Self Efficacy and Life Satisfaction Scores | | | | |
|--|---------------|---------------|-------|----------------|
| | Minimum Score | Maximum Score | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Self Efficacy (Range:10-50) | 10 | 50 | 37.70 | 5.803 |
| Life Satisfaction (Range: 6-30) | 6 | 30 | 20.59 | 4.805 |

A t-test was undertaken to determine if respondents’ current status was correlated with the results of the two scales (above). Results indicate a statistical association did exist, dependent upon the experiences both in the past and present that one may have or, have had, and in most cases these were in respect to the life satisfaction scores. For example,

significantly higher LS scores were recorded by those working as paid employees compared to those who were currently economically inactive (but not retired) ($p < 0.01$). Robertson et al (2002) also found that overall life satisfaction was often dependent upon evaluations one may make of oneself, or indeed one's situation, but over a period of time. That is, current life experiences are placed into a context of personal history and past experience, for example, a further t-test showed that those who had been made redundant had lower life satisfaction scores than those who had not ($p < 0.05$). Equally, those who had been out of work at some point or other because of sickness/disability also had lower scores than those who had not experienced such a profound life change. The same pattern emerged when considering whether people had experienced age discrimination ever in employment, with this also having a negative effect upon life satisfaction ($p < 0.01$).

Perhaps the most pertinent point here is that being out of work due to unemployment had highly significant negative effects upon life satisfaction. A clear relationship has thus developed whereby levels of life satisfaction are lower when people are affected by events or circumstances, or a series of either or both, which they have little or no control over. Indeed, a t-test revealed clear differences in levels of life satisfaction depending upon the reason for leaving one's previous employment, with lower levels reported by those whose departure had been enforced, and higher levels of life satisfaction reported by those who had chosen to leave ($p < 0.01$).

A similar trend was evident when considering those individuals who had experienced gender discrimination ever in employment. However, when controlling for respondents' gender, this was wholly dependent upon the scores for the women in the group. The score for the men was not found to be significant. When considered alongside the qualitative data, what emerged is that women were, perhaps more likely to internalise the effects of discrimination due to the nature of the workplace in which discriminatory practice is likely to occur more often against women than men and at many different points throughout the life course. Therefore, for the men in the study, such discriminatory practices may be an infrequent occurrence and more easily dealt with and less likely to have been internalised.

In relation to self efficacy, correlations were found between the life satisfaction scores and the self efficacy scores with the scores on one scale mirroring those on the other. Of course, we are not claiming a causal relationship here but are suggesting that there is likely to be some other unseen commonality(ies) at work. One particular way in which this may be viewed is that levels of self efficacy tend to be related to employment status, for example, the lowest levels of self efficacy were found amongst those members of the sample who reported themselves to be not working (but, not retired) ($p \leq 0.01$). It cannot be claimed at this point which is dependent upon the other. For example, it may be that withdrawal from the workplace causes a decline in confidence and therefore self efficacy. Equally, it may be that self efficacy has reduced on account of some other variable which has hindered a personal reconnection with the workplace. Regardless of where the lack of self efficacy came from, it is clear that self efficacy does have an influence upon some of the decisions that may be taken. This is, perhaps, the key finding to emerge when examining the data in relation to the two constructs: life satisfaction and self efficacy, in that, both past and current experiences play a major role in determining what position many people find themselves in. Moreover, the effects of discrimination and inequality can follow one throughout one's life. For example, the comment below highlighting an incident that occurred some 11 years ago is clearly still emotive for the interviewee:

When I applied [for a management role] I felt very disappointed and very hurt because I was told I hadn't got the job. It came out that the people said 'no' they wouldn't give it to me, because I was too old at 53, because they expected somebody younger (Female 62, part time worker).

Whilst this next comment shows how current experiences affect one's level of confidence:

...negative experience really, as, well I am now 55 years old so people perceive you as old but I don't feel it, but when looking for work you are confronted with it really (Male 55, full-time worker).

What people had seen and experienced in the past had a profound long term impact with some setbacks, serving a useful purpose in teaching the individual to cope with stressful life events. This is well illustrated in the words of one woman, who emerged stronger in the face of adversity:

I'm more determined, for it [age prejudice] not to bother me, therefore I make an extra effort and it's the same effort I made in the 1970s when I came up against prejudice because I was a woman. It's the same prejudice now except they're [employers] looking at me thinking, aged 50 - will be slow to learn (Female 57, full time worker).

Yet for others, there seemed a great deal of truth in the observation that the psychological effects of perceived discrimination increased over time and is compounded by ageism itself. Persistent setbacks can undermine belief in one's self efficacy causing one to harbour feelings of self-doubt, as put succinctly by one woman:

When you're 50 you've had a few people say 'no' to you and so that draws you back. I don't know if it is because of my age or the way I've been treated in the past that I don't have the confidence...I feel as if I've had the stuffing knocked out of me (Female 55, full-time worker).

This is consistent with research by London and Greller (1991) who found that employees' feelings about themselves are influenced to an extent by how co-workers perceive them. It is reasonable to assume then, that the stereotyping of older workers can have a negative affect upon one's self concept, influencing such matters concerning the level of self efficacy one may have (London, 1993 cited in Still and Timms, 1998).

According to Bandura (1994), one way of creating and sustaining self efficacy is through the vicarious experience provided by social role models. That is, seeing people in the same or similar position as oneself (i.e. other older workers) succeed by merit and sustained effort could be expected to have the positive effect of encouraging self efficacy. Conversely, seeing others fail or be passed over for promotion or, constantly undermined, may be expected to have the opposite effect. As one woman explained:

Take my work, for example, there are about seven managers, one is a woman. The managers are all different ages, from sort of 20 to 60 and there's one [young] woman. The rest of the workforce is old women and there's no way they're going to...I mean they've got plenty of experience and they've been working here for a long time, but they [employers] don't want to know. There are a lot of quite clever people in the workforce that just won't put that extra bit in because there's no point (Age 50-54, clerical worker).

Of course, the social model effect will depend upon the extent to which the observer identifies with the model. As already mentioned, age as a personal characteristic may not necessarily be the feature upon which an individual may base their social identity. One's chronological age may be very different to one's perceived or 'inner' age or the way one views oneself (and others) at particular points in life. If people see the model as being very different from themselves (i.e. their own perception of self) their success (or failure) will not make much impact upon self efficacy. But this should not negate the importance of, as implied throughout this study, success as being seen to be achievable. For instance, it is not enough to simply provide promotional routes, people must be seen to follow them through.

Social persuasion is the third way of encouraging self efficacy and is premised on the idea that people who have been persuaded that they can achieve a certain goal are likely to have their belief in their ability to succeed raised. By contrast, being told or made to feel that success is not achievable or out-of-reach is likely to undermine one's motivation and create its own validation that one will fail (Bandura, 1994).

To sum up, clearly issues of life satisfaction and self efficacy are interrelated and do have an impact upon the choices we are able to make. However, the underpinning element here concerns the amount of control one is able to exert over life's challenges and the direction one's life may take, for example, differences between groups of older people were shown to mediate depending upon individual circumstances and crucially upon the level of control one is able to exercise over one's life (e.g., whether one had wanted or been forced to retire). To put it succinctly, *"it is not just a question of whether one is employed, unemployed or retired, but whether one wants to be"* (Robertson et al, 2002 p.2).

Other research supports the view that unemployment and redundancy not only causes a lot of individual upset but also contributes to a reduction in psychological well being because of the resulting disruption to the individual's ability to plan and control their life (Burchell, 1994). Burchell (1994) also found that on aggregate men suffer more than women when faced with unemployment, arguably because women are more likely than men to get established back into the core labour force due to the 'feminization' of work (availability of work in female-dominated employment areas). It may also be that those with a history of unemployment or redundancy (who usually tend to be men) can be forced into a downward spiral, because of extended periods of job loss and job insecurity. Orpren (1995) also found 'job dependency' to be a moderator, in that, those who are financially dependent upon their jobs are particularly vulnerable to feelings of insecurity and self-doubt when their jobs are threatened. Based on the evidence presented here such insecurity is compounded by one's age, because employers are prejudiced against older workers or the perception is that they are. It was also the case that many of the unemployed men in the study had only managed to obtain temporary work which had the effect of lowering their expectations and leaving them with a sense of perhaps being 'too old' for permanent employment. Thus a vicious cycle emerges as temporary jobs lead to spells of unemployment (Burchell, 1999).

A body of literature does exist (see, for example, Warr, 1985) that support the findings demonstrated here, that good mental well being is not necessarily a matter of chance. Our environment, coupled with our ability to influence it, unquestionably has influence.

Chapter V. Results: Employer Strand of the Research

Profile of Sample Respondents

The questionnaire contained a range of mostly closed response questions about employers’ policies and practices towards ‘older workers’. At no point in the questionnaire was the term older worker pre-defined. In total, 81 employers responded to the questionnaire. Of these, 37% were men and 63% were women. In terms of respondents’ age, approximately 16% were aged under 30, 21% were 30-39, 33% were 40-49 and 28% were aged over 50. These respondents are referred to as ‘employers’ throughout, however the majority were, in fact, the representatives of major employers and included non-personnel staff (27%), general managers (23%), personnel managers (22%) and personnel co-ordinators (18%). A further 7% were owners or senior executives. Both public and private sectors were represented in the sample, and there was some variation in terms of industry (see Table 23 below). However, due to the relatively low proportions of employers in each industrial cell, the industrial sectors have been collapsed into an index of ‘construction and manufacturing’, ‘business’ and ‘service’ sectors. A similar approach was adopted by Taylor and Walker’s (1998) in their well known study of employers’ attitudes and practices towards older workers. In terms of size, employers were classified into ‘small’ for those with 50 or less employees (40%) ‘medium’ for those with more than 50 but less than 500 employees (50%) and ‘large’ with 500 or more employees (26%).

| Table 23: Percentage of Employers by Industrial Sector | |
|--|----|
| Industry (n=81) | % |
| Manufacturing/Production | 12 |
| Constriction | 7 |
| Retail | 14 |
| Service/Hotel/Catering | 10 |
| Banking/Business/Finance | 5 |
| Administration | 1 |
| Public Sector/Local Authority | 15 |
| Transport | 9 |
| Care/Social Work/Community | 10 |
| Wholesale/Distribution | 4 |
| Other | 14 |

Profile of Interview Participants

Fifteen 1 to 1 interviews took place between June 2004 and December 2005. One interviewee was aged under 30, 4 were aged 30-39, 2 were 40-49 and 8 were aged 50 and above. Eleven women and 4 men took part, perhaps reflecting the fact that the area of recruitment/personnel tend to attract more women than men. Overall, 5 interviewees were personnel managers, two were personnel co-ordinators, five were general managers, two were non-personal staff (including one training co-ordinator), and one interviewee was a partner in a family firm. Public and private sectors were represented, with the highest representation from private sector employers (11, with 4 from the public sector). In terms of industry, the full range of industrial sectors were represented, including government, hospitality, health care, retail, professional occupations, production, banking, transport and communication.

Age Profile of the Workforce

It was important to establish the age profile of the workforces that were represented by respondents in order to provide statistical information about the representation of older employees. Forty four percent of employers had workforces in which less than one quarter of their workforce was aged 50 and above, while one in five (21%) stated that between one quarter and one half of their staff were aged 50 and over. A similar proportion (19%) had no employees of that age group. The average ages of the employees in the organisations that responded to the survey ranged from 18-52 years old, with an overall (mean) age of 38 (consistent with the prime age of employment theory). According to an analysis of the qualitative data, the most common reason for the under representation of employees in the 50 plus age category was an apparent lack of older applicants. Responses included:

I've never thought about it too much, but we actually don't have a huge number of people above 50 applying for work (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).

The problem really is finding people of that age group because most of them are a settled group (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

Other employers were similarly unaware of their own potential to affect the age profile of their workforces. One interviewee was, however, less ambivalent in his response, attributing the lack of over 50s in his workforce to a personal preference for a younger team:

I've never really worked with an older designer [pause] we have a young group so we all like football, music, we all go out for a drink so you can all...it might be you all start talking about work, which sometimes you will do, and then you're bouncing ideas off one another (Male 30-39, Partner, Marketing).

There was a statistically significant association between the size of the workforce and the proportion of older employees. Generally speaking, the larger the workforce, the greater the proportion of employees aged 50 or above. The association is significant using the non-parametric version of an ANOVA test². One may argue here that possibly larger organisations are more proactive in targeting older age groups or that employers in such workforces have the backing of a robust range of policies and beneficial employment conditions, including pension entitlement and union membership, which offer more security to older people as they approach retirement age.

According to one interviewee, the workplace association between age and seniority of post was one possible explanation for such a trend, with managerial roles believed to be more widely available to employees within larger organisations:

² Some of the data was skewed due to a relatively small number of very large organisations in the sample. Here non-parametric tests were used. Where the data was of normal distribution, parametric tests were used.

You might get an older person who'll work his way up and go from being a designer to a manager and that's probably what happens more and more, they move from designers to managers. I'd imagine if you went up to a much bigger agency you would find some older managers there and the director might be anything up to 50 (Male 30-39, Partner, Marketing).

In the UK much has been made about the ageing of the population and its predicted impact on the age structure of workforces. Yet, almost 6 out of 10 employers indicated that the average age of their employees was “remaining stable” or exhibiting “no real change” while 26% felt that it was “increasing” (see Table 24 below).

| Table 24: Frequency showing whether the average age of workforces were increasing | | |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| Average age increasing? | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Yes | 21 | 26 |
| No | 29 | 37 |
| About the same/remaining constant | 29 | 37 |

(n=79 missing=2)

The qualitative data collected did, however, provide evidence of age differences in terms of the types of jobs undertaken by employees within particular workplaces.

Within the food and beverage area, the average age of our staff would be about 18 whereas up in housekeeping...probably about 45-50 as an average age (Female 30-39, HR Co-ordinator, Service Sector).

The perception held by interviewees that particular types of jobs seemed to attract, or be associated with, particular age groups is mentioned elsewhere. It was felt to be important therefore to determine if and how this varied by industrial sector. The main industrial sectors were ‘manufacturing and construction’, ‘service’ and ‘business’. A cross tabulation revealed a trend whereby respondents in the business sector and the service sector were more likely to say that the average age of their workforces was “remaining constant” (46% and 40%, respectively); this compared with only 21% of employers in manufacturing and construction, who were almost twice as likely to say that the average age of their workforce was “increasing” (47%) than those in the service sector (27%) and four times as likely as those in the business sector (14%). However, this finding did not

reach statistical significance. Nevertheless a distinct trend was noted and is perhaps reflective of the progressive decline in the numbers of younger people entering manual labour and trade professions.

In terms of the proportion of *male* employees aged 50 and over, this varied from one employee to 70% of the workforce. Altogether, 68% of employers provided information on this matter. Of these, 46% reported that the proportion of men aged 50 and above was less than 25% of the workforce, while 19% said that men in this age group accounted for between one quarter and one half of the workforce, and 23% had no male employees aged 50 and above. A similar trend was evident in respect to *female* employees aged 50 and above. The proportion here varied from one employee to 75% of the workforce. Sixty-nine employers responded this time. Of these, 48% reported that the proportion of older women was less than 25% of the workforce, while 17 percent said that older women accounted for between one quarter and one half of the entire workforce and 26% had no female employees aged 50 and above.

There was no difference between the (mean) percent of older men (14%) and that of older women (15%) in the organisations that responded to the survey. However, when the mean for men and women is viewed in respect to the size of the organisation, a cross tabulation analysis showed that, in small organisations (less than 50 employees), the proportion of male workers aged 50 and above is notably higher (12%, compared to 5% of female workers of the equivalent age). Yet, no statistically significant difference was found between the sexes in medium (20% for both) and large organisations (26% and 24% respectively).

Further examination and a cross tabulation with industry revealed that in large workforces, but not medium or small sized ones, women aged 50 and above tended to be concentrated within industries that have traditionally been regarded as 'female employment' areas (such as shop work). The qualitative data, however, identified awareness amongst some employers that this situation was changing. The general feeling was that the numbers of women entering formally male dominated professions was increasing and progress towards gender equality was being made. Yet such a trend was felt to affect younger women more so than older ones. Indeed, there was ample evidence

to show that the traditional notion of ‘women’s work’ continued to characterise the employment of so many women in their 50s. Consider the comments below:

We have one female worker in IT even though we try to encourage them, but I think it’s an area where traditionally, in the past, women haven’t gone into, but are now beginning to do so (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business Sector).

I think seriously it’s going to take the next generation to break through that [gender] barrier because when I was younger you were not given the opportunities that you are today to have a career, but I’m glad to say that the world is a completely different place now. I just think it’s going to take some time for it to filter through the workplace (Female 53, HR Manager, Business Sector).

Further analysis and a cross tabulation revealed a distinct trend whereby men were more evenly spread out amongst the sectors and not concentrated within any specified areas, possibly indicating a loosening of the cultural association between (certain types of) work and men/masculinity. It may also reflect changes in the nature of the labour market which have forced many older men out of traditional ‘male employment’ areas (such as manufacturing and construction).

Employer Policies and Practices

Respondents were asked if they provided flexible work options in order to explore the variety of opportunities available. Policy related issues were also examined to ascertain whether employers protected their staff from age discriminatory practices, and to identify their attitudes towards recent age-related Government initiatives.

Research has shown that flexible work options have the potential to reconcile common work-life tensions including the need to care for an elderly relative or spouse, the desire to spend more time with the family, or to combine elements of work and retirement (Department of Work and Pensions, 2002). Flexibility can take many forms including part-time work, job sharing, structured career breaks, working from home and special leave for people with sick dependents.

Almost three quarters of respondents offered some form of flexible work options which may be expected to benefit their older members of staff. Table 25 below shows that the vast majority of employers did offer part-time hours while seven out of ten offered short term contracts. Rather less however, provided career breaks and the opportunity to work from home. Arguably, these latter two options are expected to be offered by more progressive employers, than those offering only part-time work availability.

| Table 25: Provision of Flexible Work | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| Cell Percentages | | | | | | |
| | Part-time | Short contracts | Job share | Career breaks | Work at home | Special leave |
| Yes | 91 | 67 | 48 | 30 | 43 | 60 |
| No | 9 | 33 | 52 | 70 | 57 | 40 |

(n=81 total for each cell)

Statistical testing was carried out to measure a possible association between the size of the firm and the provision of flexible employment. A cross tabulation revealed that the larger the organisation, the more likely the employer was to provide a greater range of flexible work arrangements. For example, when collapsed into an index of large (500 or more employees) and small (under 500 employees) it was found that large organisations were more than twice as likely to provide job sharing as an available option for staff, than small-sized organisations (81%, compared with 35% respectively) ($p<0.01$) (see Table 26 below).

| Table 26: Cross tabulation of size of organization by provision of job share | | |
|--|--------------------------|----|
| Size of Organisation | Provide Job Sharing? (%) | |
| | Yes | No |
| Under 500 | 35 | 65 |
| 500 and over | 81 | 19 |

(n=79, missing 2, $p<0.01$)

Yet an analysis of the qualitative data told a very different story. In spite of the fact that many of the smaller firms did not have formal written policies on flexible work place, they were, by virtue of their size, very personable in their approach to staff, and were often able to offer extremely flexible and creative ways of accommodating individual needs.

I think bigger firms tend to be sort of hard and fast, they don't have the personal approach with staff that we are able to provide (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

Some people work term-time. Some people work a shorter working week. Some work mornings. Some work evenings. Some work shorter hours, coming in five days, but just doing 10-2 or whatever. So it's broad ranging. We don't define it. If people make a proposal, suggestion or request we'll consider what they are saying and see if we can accommodate it (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business Sector).

In terms of industry, a cross tabulation analysis revealed a distinct trend whereby employers from the business sector and service sector were more likely to provide flexible work arrangements (82% and 73% respectively) than those from the construction/manufacturing sector (55%). The association however was not statistically significant. A trend was also evident in terms of the types of options offered. A closer examination of the statistics revealed that employers from the business sector were more likely to provide job sharing (68%) than those from the construction/manufacturing sector (50%). They were also more likely to provide short term contracts (86% compared to 55% respectively) and career breaks (50% compared to 25%) which may, in part, be due to the increased flexibility that is usually offered within say, for example, an office environment. One may argue here therefore that it is perhaps less likely for employers in a construction environment to offer the same rates of flexibility due to the predominance of a mostly male workforce, typically requiring full time labour market attachment. Yet there was a sense amongst some of the employers interviewed that, apart from issues of demand, a possible explanation for the trend observed relates to the gendered order of society whereby the expectation is that the male is the main provider.

I think that because the culture has been that women come back to work [after children]and if they come back to work, they come back to work part time because they've got family commitments...that whole ethos, it's easier for it to be accepted now (Female 50-59, HR Director, Care Profession).

I think some men do want to carry on working because that's their role; they still have the role of the breadwinner whereas I don't think it's as hard for women to retire earlier especially if they have a partner who's in work (Female 50-59, HR Manager, Business Sector).

Age-Related Policies

Employers' awareness of the forthcoming (at the time of the data collection) Age Regulations (October, 2006) was explored. Age-related issues concerning policies and practices were also raised with employers including if and how they protected their staff against age discrimination, and what measures they employed in this respect. It was also important to determine the level of employer awareness about New Labour's anti-ageism voluntary code of practice. The Code of Practice, introduced in 1998, was initially designed to raise awareness of age discriminatory practice, yet over half of respondents in the present study (56%) had still not heard of it. Despite this 4 out of 5 (79%) employers questioned did have age incorporated into their existing equal opportunities policy to protect staff against age discrimination.

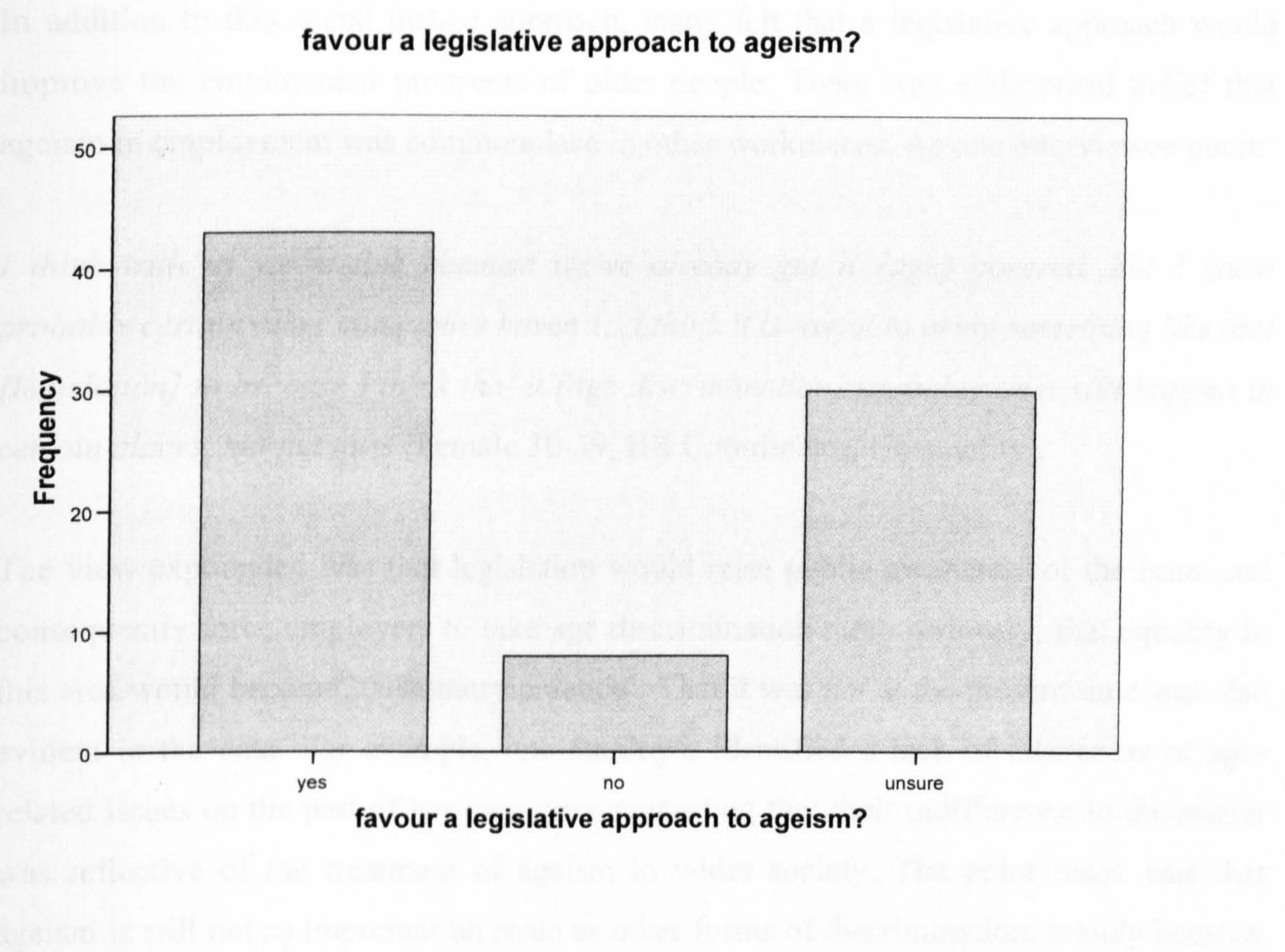
Such a rounded approach to the prevention of discrimination was a common theme in the qualitative data.

We don't discriminate in terms of race, colour and sex. We treat people as individuals here (Female 30-39, Training Coordinator, Retail).

We've got an equal opportunities policy in place so we don't discriminate on the grounds of age, sex, race or nationality (Female 30-39, HR Coordinator, Hospitality).

Asked if they were in favour of a legislative approach to combat age discrimination, 53% of employers said they were ‘in favour’ as opposed to only 9% ‘against’. Figure 10 below also illustrates the large proportion (37%) of employers who were ‘unsure’

Figure 9: Employers’ Response to a Legislative Approach to Age Discrimination



In terms of the employer’s own age, a cross tabulation of the data revealed a distinct trend whereby the older the employer the more likely they were to favour a legislative approach. It was also the case that male employers had more definite opinions on this matter; the statistics showed that men were more likely to favour legislation (60%) than women (49%) who tended to be more ‘unsure’ about this issue (45% compared to 23% of men). This latter finding indicates ambivalence on the part of women surveyed, which is not completely unexpected, if one is to consider that today’s female employers are likely to have experienced, first hand, the benefits as well as the struggles of the fight for (gender) equality at work.

The qualitative data provided some indication of the reasons for and against a legislative approach. Those in favour of legislation were mainly of the opinion that age equality should be accorded as much attention as other diversity issues or, at the very least, that it should be placed in the same category, *“I think that if they [employers] have it there for race and everything else, then it should be there for age”*.

In addition to this social justice approach, many felt that a legislative approach would improve the employment prospects of older people. There was widespread belief that ageism in employment was commonplace in other workplaces. As one interviewee put it:

I think with us we're fine because we've already got it [age] covered, but I know probably certain other companies haven't...I think it is useful to bring something like that [legislation] in because I think that it [age discrimination] probably does still happen in certain places, but not ours (Female 30-39, HR Coordinator, Hospitality).

The view expounded was that legislation would raise public awareness of the issue and consequently force employers to take age discrimination more seriously; that equality in this area would become ‘customary practice’. That it was not at the present time was also evident in the data. For example, one employer identified a lack of awareness of age-related issues on the part of her managers suggesting that their indifference to the matter was reflective of the treatment of ageism in wider society. The point made was that ageism is still not as important an issue as other forms of discrimination, mainly because it is not yet (at the time of the data collection) prohibited by law:

A Statute of Parliament makes such a difference. If I was to ask them [managers] the question [do they protect staff against discrimination] specifically on ethnicity, they would say that they bend over backwards to ensure that that's right. If I asked them with regards to gender, they would probably say the same, but I think its probably customary practice. If you say it on ageism, I don't think it would even have entered their minds...[but] the majority of them would be horrified at the thought that they were discriminating (Female 50-59, HR Director, Care Profession).

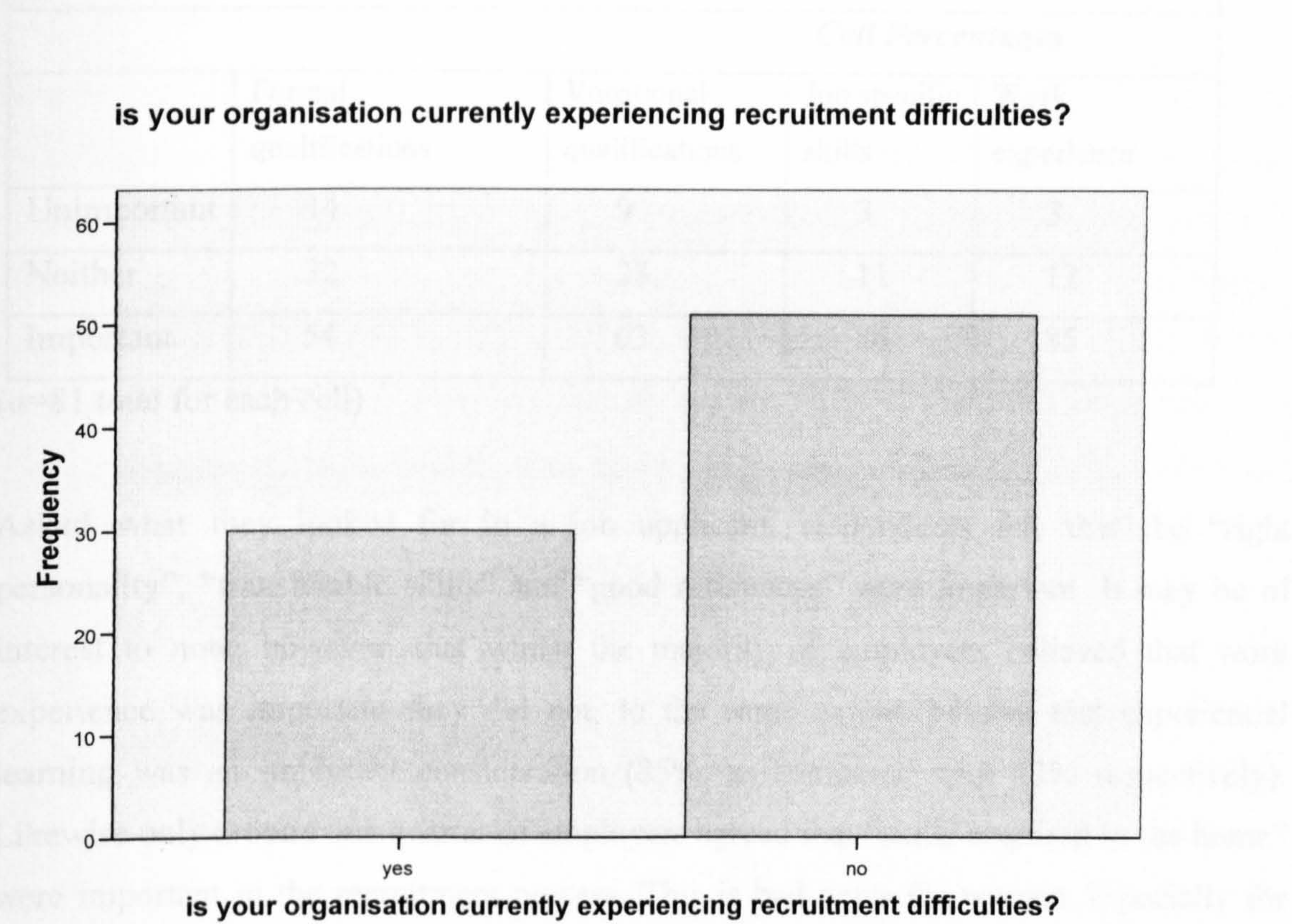
Those who were less enthusiastic about legislation felt that it would add too much bureaucracy to the workplace and take power away from the market place. They also questioned the effectiveness of a legislative approach arguing that it would increase the proportion of older people only in areas where it would be easy to do so rather than in more costly areas which require investment. Another interviewee put forward the view that legislation might actually work against the older person, if it prevented the positive discrimination of a particular age group:

People are frightened to put in adverts 'may suit an older person' because it's discriminatory and the next you know 'well why wouldn't suit a younger person, that's discriminatory' so the legislation would hamper the other; its one against the other. So if you put in an advert 'may suit...' you get some bright spark turn round and say that's discrimination and then we're in a situation (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

Recruitment

In this section, the issue of recruitment is considered including the selection procedure used to recruit new members of staff. It is specifically concerned with how the recruitment process may impinge upon the older applicant and the use of age as a factor in employment. Over a third of employers surveyed were experiencing recruitment problems (see Figure 10 below). Further examination and a cross tabulation revealed that those in the manufacturing and construction sector were having the hardest time recruiting new staff (45%); the least likely to be doing so were those in the business sector (28%). The need to recruit new staff was expressed by over 40% of employers in large and medium-sized organisations (48% and 42% respectively), and around 25% of those in small sized organisations. Hence, recruitment was a significant issue for employers in a wide variety of organisations and across industrial sectors.

Figure 10: The Extent of Recruitment Difficulties



Employers' Criteria for Recruitment

It was important to establish employers' criteria for recruitment as this may influence the available opportunities for displaced older workers. As Table 27 below illustrates the majority of employers (86%) stated that "job specific skills" were an important requirement in the recruitment of staff, indicating the demand for certain skills when short listing for a particular post. A similar proportion of employers (85%) rated previous "work experience" as important. Slightly less (54%) however rated "formal qualifications" important, perhaps suggesting that the majority of employers are focusing on job appropriate skills as well as or as an alternative to traditional paper qualifications.

| Table 27: Employers' Criteria for Recruitment | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Cell Percentages</i> | | | | |
| | Formal qualifications | Vocational qualifications | Job specific skills | Work experience |
| Unimportant | 14 | 9 | 3 | 3 |
| Neither | 32 | 28 | 11 | 12 |
| Important | 54 | 63 | 86 | 85 |

(n=81 total for each cell)

Asked what they looked for in a job applicant, respondents felt that the “right personality”, “transferable skills” and “good references” were important. It may be of interest to note, however, that whilst the majority of employers believed that work experience was important they did not, to the same extent, believe that experiential learning was an important consideration (85%, as compared with 52% respectively). Likewise only around one quarter of employers agreed that “skills acquired in the home” were important in the recruitment process. This is bad news for women, especially for those in their 50s who have come to regard their mid-life as a special time to pursue a career ambition once put on hold. Based on the survey data alone, it would appear that being involved in the running of a home and caring for one’s children and other dependents counts for very little in the eyes of employers. Yet in the context of a changing business world, it may be advisable for employers to start to search for more creative and less restrictive ways of recruiting the ‘best person for the job’.

Cross tabulation analysis was used to examine the effects of other variables of interest, and revealed some distinct trends. Female employers were more likely to agree that “skills acquired in the home” were important in the recruitment of new staff (33%) than male employers (13%), perhaps able to draw upon their own experiences. Amongst the sectors, employers in the business community were more likely to agree that “skills acquired at home were important” (43%) than those in the service sector (23%) and in manufacturing and construction (10%), possibly reflecting the gender structure of the workforces within the different industries.

Age as a Factor in Employment

Almost half of all employers (48%) stated that a person's age was unimportant in the recruitment of staff as compared with only 10 percent that said that age was an important consideration, indicating a more age positive approach to recruitment than had been found in previous research (see, for example, Taylor and Walker, 1998). A notable proportion (42%) however had no definite opinion on this matter and provided a neutral response ('neither important nor unimportant'). This would suggest that employers were perhaps sensitive to age-related issues in the run up to the Age Regulations (October, 2006) and were careful not to respond or to respond in neutral terms only, or more encouragingly, that age as a factor in employment had diminished in importance.

Analysis of the qualitative data also emphasised neutrality in employer responses; it was felt that older applicants should be showed no special treatment yet neither should they be discriminated against. The observation was that age should not matter.

We don't put a limit on age. We don't put a limit on anybody. As far as we are concerned it's the individual that suits the role...so we'll interview them (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).

Other employers were, however, more clear and direct in stating their preferences for particular age groups, as illustrated by the following quotes:

We tend to employ people up to 35. That's because of the industry, it's dead creative, all the computers we use are very up to date, very modern so yes it's because of the industry (Male 30-39, Business Partner, Marketing).

It's a very competitive industry and a lot of people tend to sort of have younger people working for them because obviously in the past younger people have worked for less money. But we'd rather employ the older person in the same job role...these people have got a wealth of talent and experience behind them (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

Both of the comments above provide insight into how employers' perceptions of age may in fact formulate into assumptions regarding an individual's suitability for the job in question. It also indicates validity or justification on the part of the employers for the use of such inferred preferences for example referring to factors such as inexperience when making decisions based upon one's age. Both cite how specific age groups are preferred, but for very different reasons. The first attributes his company's need for younger workers as reflective of the need to employ people with superior knowledge of computer technology, presuming that the creativity required in this field is more easily obtainable from those at the younger end of the labour market. While the second values the older person's experience, presuming an absence of experience in younger workers. In both cases, presumed characteristics of older (and younger) workers were considered in respect to whether they would suit the demands of the industry. In a similar vein, the majority of interviewees felt that older applicants may be less able to cope with physically demanding work (this will be explored later).

The Term 'Older Worker'

In the interviews with participants the term *older worker* was explored in some depth. The quote below illustrates the potential confusion this posed:

To be honest, I don't have a pre-conceived vision of what an older worker is. You know we've got a few people above retirement age working for us. They are not perceived, in any way, as being classified as old. But then they are older than other members of staff. It's a hard one to discuss (Male 40-49, General Manager, Corporate Hospitality).

Similar confusion was evident in the results of the survey. Employers were asked to consider the age at which they may classify a person as an 'older worker'. Two employers said they had no definite opinion on the matter, perhaps suggesting that the question was conceptually difficult to answer, while 6 said that they did not use the term ('older worker') because they found it derogatory or unhelpful. Of those that did specify an age, there was a range from 30 years to 80 years for both women and men (see Table 28 overleaf). Seven percent of employers said that women become *older* at age 40 or under while 6% held the same view in respect to men (this included 2 employers who stated an age of 30 for both sexes). Around one third of employers considered women to

be older between the ages of forty one and fifty, while slightly fewer (36%) applied the same age range in respect to men. The average (mean) age for women was 55 compared to 56 for men.

| Table 28: Age at which an individual is classified as an ‘older worker’ | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Cell Percentages | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Not use phrase | No opinion | 30 | 40 | 45 | 50 | 55 | 60 | 65 | 70 | 80 |
| Woman | 6 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 28 | 10 | 23 | 13 | 0 | 1 |
| Man | 6 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 27 | 11 | 20 | 17 | 1 | 1 |

(n=77 for total cells in each row)

Cross tabulation analysis revealed that, in terms of the employers’ own age, there was a distinct trend whereby the older the employer, the more likely they were to perceive an individual as ‘older’ at earlier ages. For example, 31% of employers aged 18-39 categorised men as older if they were aged 50 or under as compared with 43% of 40-49 year olds and 48% of those aged 50 or above. The trend was the same in respect to women. This finding was rather unexpected in view of the common expectation that, as one participant observed, *“there is a perception amongst the young whereby they think that anyone over twenty-five is old”*.

In respect to the interview data, the age at which an employee was classified as an ‘older worker’ was felt to be affected to some extent by the ethos of the company in which people worked. If a company tended to recruit from a younger cohort, this may foster an attitude amongst fellow workers whereby people are perceived as older at relatively young ages. For instance, in the quote below ‘older’ is classified as anything over the age of 30:

Some companies have an absolute cut off point and will not take people on of a certain age, but I think there is a perception that once you go past 30, 35, you are an older worker (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).

The survey also asked employers to consider the age at which a person may be considered to be 'too old' for selection. They were asked to consider this question in respect to their most common job role. Fifteen percent (n=12) said that age was "no barrier" to recruitment, while 14 percent chose not to answer the question. Those who did respond were asked to specify for women and for men. For men, the maximum age for selection ranged from 30 years to 80 years. For women, there was a range of 25 years to 90 years. A sizable proportion (39%) of employers considered men to be 'too old' at 60 years of age or under. Rather more (46%) however considered women to be too old at the same age. There was an average age of 62 for both women and men. Yet notably, one employer stated that women were 'too old' at 40 while the same employer felt that men were 'too old' at 50, some ten years later.

Further statistical analysis was carried out to measure the association of other variables of interest. When considering the effects of the size of the organisation, the average (mean) age at which employers from large organisations considered people to be 'too old' to recruit was 58 as compared with those from medium-sized organisations who provided an average age of 59 and those from small organisations with an average age of 65; this latter finding supporting the age-sensitive approach mentioned earlier in respect to employers with smaller workforces (see p. 160), though the association here did not reach statistical significance. There were some important industrial trends as well. The average age at which employers from manufacturing and construction considered people to perhaps be 'too old' to recruit was 55 for women and 58 for men, some 5 years lower than the average ages stated by employers from the service sector (64 years for both women and men) and the business sector (65 years for both sexes). This finding may be related to the possible decline in the physical health of older workers.

In the interviews with employers, the possible difficulties that older workers may face in terms of adapting to particular job roles were discussed. Many employers felt that whilst some older workers are physically unable or less able to adapt to a physically demanding role, others (i.e. older labourers) can actually be much fitter than their younger counterparts by virtue of their experience of hard physical work, which has helped to shape and tone their bodies. Nevertheless, age was the focus of the rationale provided in the quote below:

Because the production could be considered to be [pause] not heavy work, but you're talking about a 12 hour shift, you're on your feet probably for quite a lot of the time and you're also moving around...some of the work environment around the machines particularly, will be hot and humid and dusty so its not an industry that is well matched to older people, just because of the amount of physical work (Female 41, Human Resource Manager, Manufacturer).

It should be noted however that in the quote above, the employer was specifically referring to the potential problems of recruiting older people into a particular job role. She was much more positive about her own, older members of staff, “*we have some very, very fit [older] men and the work they do actually keeps them fit*”. This was also believed to be true of her older female staff who were regarded as a very special cohort:

A lot of the women that started with us would have done hand packing [jobs] because of their manually dexterity, but the manual side of it has disappeared completely. We have some [women] from time to time, but you can see the numbers decreasing as those women that joined originally retire and because we're not filling in the same amount over all...but I mean they've [older women] adapted in the same way as their male colleagues to working on the line as operators who are practically minded. You know they've lived with the machines a long time, they've seen them evolve as well, and so could strip them just as well as the man working next to them (Female 41, HR Manager, Manufacturer).

When recruiting for a managerial post 17% of employers who completed the survey stated that age was “no barrier” to recruitment. However, over half of the rest felt that women more so than men were too old at age 60 and under (52% as compared with 42% respectively). In the interview data, one employer expressed a definite preference for younger age groups, suggesting that those aged 20-40 years are easier to mould. He added that the older the manager, the more set in their ways they are:

I think there is a perception that when it comes to management, I would probably look at those people in the sort of 25-40 age group and, those aged 30-35 would probably be at the top of my list before I looked at the other extremes...I think there is a presumption that younger people are easier to manipulate in terms of getting your company message across...thereafter people are a bit wiser, I suppose, and not quite so easily swayed (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).

The age at which, managerial appointments were usually made also varied, ranging from 25 years to 55 years. However, the majority of appointments followed the 'Golden Decade' model (Itzin and Phillipson, 1993) of 30-40 years (63%). Thus the relative inequality of women's access to the upper echelons of management, may be partly to do with their lack of participation in work during the 'Golden Decade' as well as employers' perceptions of a particular age group from which they prefer to recruit to management.

The pressure that some senior women can be expected to face on returning to work after maternity leave perhaps fearing that a break in employment might adversely affect their career, was well understood by one interviewee who said:

I think women naturally maybe want to have children and can affect their career because we had one woman here who had been on maternity leave and she came back within a month because she wanted to keep the relationship with the client and that can, it shouldn't, but it can be damaged, if there is a break. It can be a bit cut throat (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).

In the interview data there was evidence of support for the notion that women face a double jeopardy of gender and age discrimination, particularly in respect to the under-representation of older women in senior management.

There are not many women in management. There's about, I'd say 110 people out of your 400 who I would say are team leaders, now out of those possibly only 20 are women and they're probably quite young actually. I suppose it depends what you say young is. I'm the most senior female manager on the site at 41 and I think that's young [laughing] (Female 41, HR Manager, Manufacturing).

I mean we have a high percentage of women in post, but [pause]...I bet you if you look across the sector as a whole, at the number of executive directors who are men, that would be a very interesting study to undertake. I think if you look at the percentage of men as opposed to women, it wouldn't be a true reflection or representation of the [entire] workforce because we have a lot more female than male employees but just not in management (Female 50-59, HR Director, Health Profession).

Women in their 50s were felt to be doubly affected and were often held back or judged in relation to employers' perceptions concerning gender expectations about women of a **certain age**. The employer in the quote below draws upon her own experience to illustrate this point:

I've been in the sector a long time, but you still bump into people who you knew from a previous existence, from before you got to the elevated position of Director in your title, and they say 'you've done well for yourself' and you say, you know, 'yes' and then afterwards you think, I wonder if they'd of said that to a man of my age and whether they would have said that a women who was 15 years younger because I think there is a perception of where you should be and what a surprise that is (Female 50-59, HR Director, Health Profession).

The Operation of Age Restrictions

Whilst a notable proportion of employers (17%) applied age restrictions to certain job roles or tasks, it was noted that most were in fact statutory or for health and safety and, applied to younger as well as older workers (i.e. 18 years of age for bar work). The most common age restriction was 65 years of age for a driver role. However, more of an accommodating approach was captured in the qualitative data, in which employers were able to explain their own attitudes behind the operation of age restrictions. One employer said that despite the DVLA setting an upper age limit³, if the applicant passed his/her medical test at that age, he would employ them. He also said that he had employed 'retired' people in the past and would continue to do so. Similarly another employer

³ At age 70 a person must apply to renew their licence (DVLA)

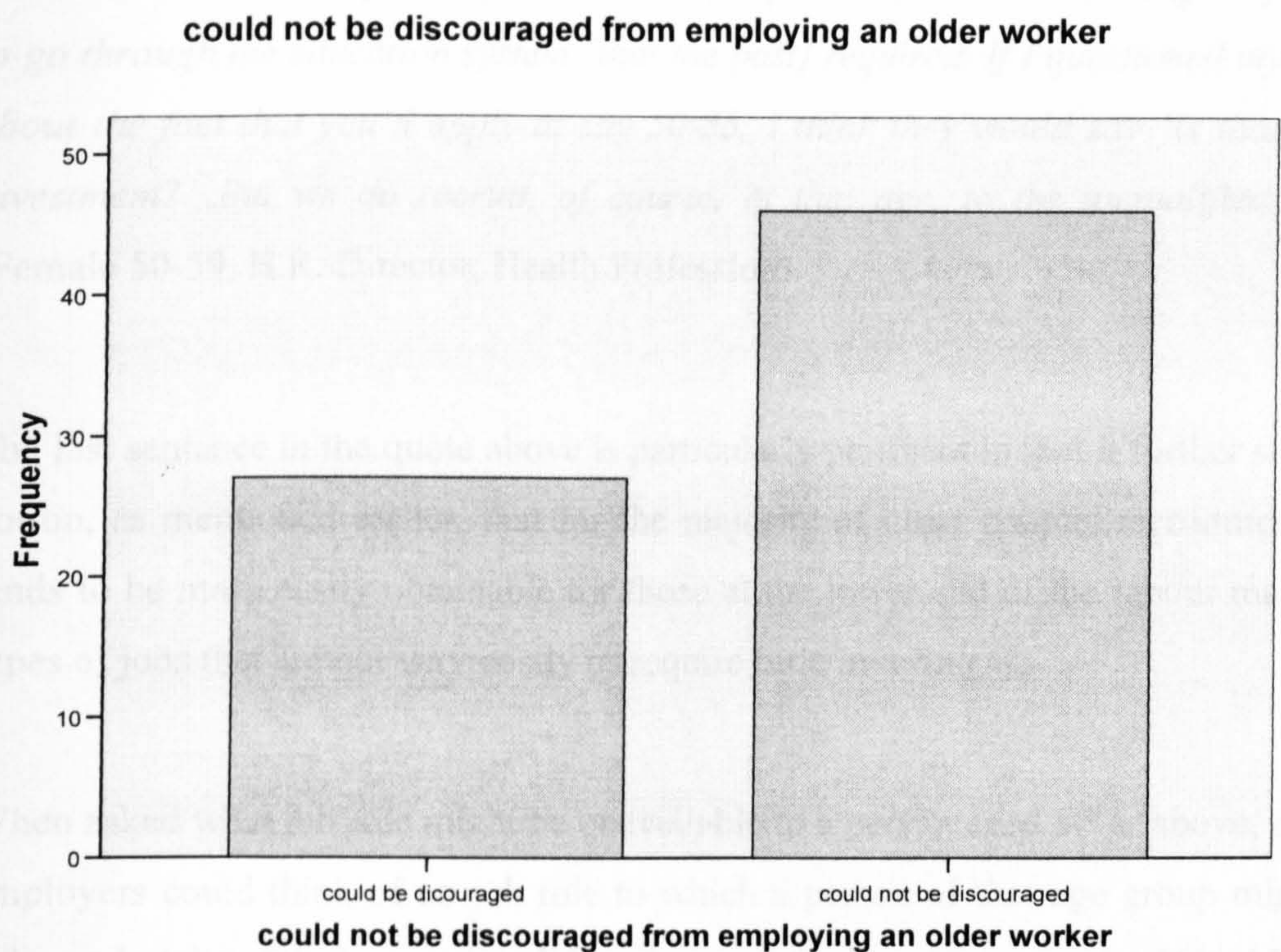
discussed the issue of apprenticeships, highlighting its cultural association with youth and how this may, she hoped, alter in the future:

We do have an age limit [for apprenticeships] but that's because of the funding we receive from X [Government Department]. Now whether that will change when the age discrimination legislation comes in? We take on anybody from sort of 16 to sort of A' levels or if somebody has taken a year out...that's all fine, but at the moment the funding doesn't allow us to take sort of 20, 30, 40, 50 year olds (Female 41, HR Manager, Manufacturer).

Thus even where employers hold positive attitudes towards the employment of older workers, external forces may conspire to discriminate thereby preventing them from exercising true age equality.

When asked if they could be discouraged from employing an older person, a third (37%) of respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they “could be discouraged” (see Figure 11 below).

Figure 11 Can Employers be Discouraged From Recruiting an Older Worker?



The reasons provided were more often attributed to factors outside the control of the individual employer as opposed to a personal preference for younger workers. For example, some employers (16% in total) felt that their employment policy (i.e. insurance coverage) may prevent them from employing an older person. Others (11%) mentioned the assumed pay back period on the time spent in employment before an individual reaches state retirement age and, similarly (6%) cited the assumed low return on investment in training an older individual. In terms of the latter, it was clear from the interview data that issues concerning the costs of employing older people were used as *reasonable* justification for discrimination especially for recruitment to ‘career employment’ or a professional job role.

I would support managers if they were to say to me [pause]...if you're trying to get someone to move into a career at that age [50 plus], that's hugely difficult because you do have to look at the years of service that people can give and their capacity to be able to go through the education system [that the post] required. If I questioned my managers about the fact that you'd apply at say 50-55, I think they would say 'Is that worth the investment?' But we do recruit, of course, at that age, to the unqualified workforce (Female 50-59, H.R. Director, Health Profession).

The last sentence in the quote above is particularly pertinent in that it further supports the notion, as mentioned earlier, that for the majority of older people, recruitment to work tends to be more easily obtainable for those at the lower end of the labour market in the types of jobs that are not very costly or require little investment.

When asked what job role might be unavailable to a person aged 50 or above, one in five employers could think of no job role to which a person of that age group might not be able undertake. Of those who did state a particular role or task, 16% identified a physically demanding role and 9% identified a technical or computer-based role. Just under half did not answer the question, perhaps indicating that it was difficult to answer in the abstract or that realistically there was no preclusion for a 50 plus applicant. Yet cynically, one has to question whether employers' preconceptions about age, which may operate in the workforce and perhaps lead to discriminatory practices, could not be conveyed with confidence to the researcher at this point in the wider debate surrounding the forthcoming Age Regulations (October 2006).

The interview data however did provided evidence of job typing in employers' perceptions of the particular roles deemed more suitable and/or applicable to an older worker as well as expectations about older workers' motivations to work.

We have advertised in the past for a mechanic and age didn't matter, but we couldn't find anyone of that age [50 plus]who still wanted to do it because it's such a physically demanding role; it's a young man's job if you like. The older man will take on the yard man role or delivery driver or whatever (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

I don't think there are any older people [in the organisation] who have any great ambitions about anything but that may be down to the job they're doing and the fact that they're getting on in years and, quite honestly, have different priorities in the sense that they are quite happy to come to work, enjoy the social environment of work and the money, and then go off to do what they want to do for the rest of the time (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).

From the quote above it is possible to see how the perception of older workers as essentially peripheral workers is formulated. Yet there was also a perception amongst some employers that older workers were in fact more suited to or, expected to move into, well paid, professional or managerial roles. Two extremes were therefore articulated, with very little in between.

I wouldn't expect an older person to come for a junior designer's job. One: the wages they wouldn't want the wages. Two: we're a young person's industry because we're designer lead. If I was employing someone older it would be on a managerial level or an accounts handler level (Male 30-39, Partner, Marketing).

I think in certain roles here – in our back operations it's the salary, the rate of pay and the job itself that probably puts them [older workers] off because if they are older or more experienced, they're not going to want to come in at that level. However, when we have other roles advertised such as our IT roles they're older and they come in at a good rate of pay and benefits so we tend to find the age group within that area is a lot higher [older] (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).

Retention Issues

The results of the survey showed that 29% of employers were experiencing retention difficulties. Yet a cross tabulation analysis revealed that over half (54%) of employers who admitted they were finding it hard to retain staff also operated a mandatory retirement scheme with an average retirement age of 65, a factor which may be expected to create future tensions in terms of both recruitment and retention. Only 45% of

respondents to the questionnaire offered the option of later retirement and even less (23%) provided partial or gradual retirement. There was, however, evidence of some employers moving towards a more flexible approach to retirement in the light of their retention problems *“we’ve certainly been looking at what we could do about the recruitment profile and if we want to encourage more people to stay on”*. It was also the case that employers who provided flexible work arrangements were slightly less likely to be experiencing retention problems. Although not statistically significant, this latter finding suggests the importance of flexibility in prolonging labour market attachment.

Training

The issue of training is an area of research which has found that fewer people over the age of 40 are either not being put forward for training or are unwilling to take up offers of training (Taylor and Urwin, 2001). In respect to the present study, a notable proportion of employers (9%) said that they did not provide training for people past the age of 50.

Yet overall 64% of employers disagreed with the assertion that, “it is a better investment to train younger rather than older workers”. When asked at what age a person might be considered to be ‘too old’ to train, less than half (46%) of employers said that one’s age did not present a problem. One in three, however, did not answer the question. Of those that did respond, 7% set a maximum age of 55-59 for male employees while 10% set the same threshold in respect to their female employees. Rather more set an upper limit of 60 or above for men (28%) and women (25%).

In the interviews with employers, several reasons were put forward for the imposition of age limits in respect to training. The most common of these was the supposed return on investment in training a worker past a specific age. Yet even where no formal age limits were in place, employer attitudes could be seen to restrict older workers’ access especially in areas where training was costly.

If you had an applicant who was 55 who'd been in X [profession] the same time as somebody who was 35, I don't think you'd find discrimination there. But in terms of recruiting to train, managers would not recruit at the upper end of the age group. They might question even people returning at that age who had been out of the service [for some time]...part of that would be the amount of time you would need, the capacity to catch up...so I think you might find there'd be reluctance on that front. It wouldn't overtly be that, but it would always be at the back of the manager's mind (Female 50-59 HR Director).

Yet, another employer emphasised the importance of training for all age groups. On closer inspection, however, we see that her commitment refers to basic skills and statutory training only, the latter of which all employees must undertake by law:

We do provide a lot of training within X [name of organisation] regardless of if they're on a casual contract or a full time contract, they still need all the statutory training because they have to have that, but they also need all the basic skills (Female 30-39, HR Co-ordinator, Service Sector).

There was also evidence that both older and younger workers may find it equally as difficult to adapt to training but for different reasons related to their age:

You get some youngsters who are very difficult to motivate and train and equally sometimes older people can get stuck in their ways, but there is an equal proportion of both, I think. We obviously have some training issues with older people, but conversely we have just as many problems with younger people, trying to get them into the right attitude so it balances itself out (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).

The quote above was supported by similar comments that were based around the supposed characteristics of particular age groups and could be said to reflect wider assumptions about older and younger people. Specifically, that younger people are 'immature' and 'unreliable' while older people are 'set in their ways' and 'less able to adapt to change and new technology'.

A minority of employers were however finding creative and innovative ways of training their staff (such as ‘learning blocks’ – see discussion chapter for detail here), showing sensitivity to employees’ individual needs, especially around the issue of age.

Retirement and Pensions

Cross tabulation analysis revealed that only 40% of employers were using partial retirement options in conjunction with the provision of later retirement ($p<0.05$). Employers’ attitudes and practices towards retirement varied between the different types of organisations that took part in the survey. In identifying whether employers operated a mandatory retirement age or offered more flexible retirement options, it was possible to obtain some indication of the viewpoints held by employers regarding their exit strategies. Cross tabulations with gender and age also offered some valuable insights (to follow). Table 29 below shows the provision of the various retirement options.

| Table 29: Employers’ Retirement Options | | | | |
|---|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Cell Percentages | | | | |
| | Mandatory Retirement | Later Retirement | Partial Retirement | Voluntary Early Retirement |
| Yes | 47 | 38 | 27 | 41 |
| No | 52 | 61 | 73 | 59 |

(n=78 for each cell, apart from the first cell which had a total of 80)

Just under half (47 in total) of employers had a mandatory retirement scheme in place. Of these, 76% set a retirement age of 65 for men, compared to 63% who set the same age for women. A notable proportion of employers (13%) did not know the average age at which their staff usually retired. Of those that did, 59% indicated that male employees usually retired between the ages of 60 and 65 while female employees retired earlier, usually at age 60 or under. There was however evidence of some flexibility, both in terms of the nature of retirement and the retirement process itself with 38% of employers offering the option of later retirement and 27% offering partial or gradual retirement (for example, a reduction in working hours). Yet rather more (41%) offered voluntary early retirement, which ranged from 50 years to 65 years of age. In terms of later retirement, a third of employers operating such a scheme did not set a maximum retirement age (preferring

instead to use a case by case approach), 47% set an upper age of 65-70 and 20% allowed their staff to continue working after age 70.

According to the interview data, there was some indication that customary retirement policy and practice may alter in respect to the expected rise in the state pension age, and proscription of the (forthcoming) law.

The way the company describes it [retirement policy] at the minute is [65] that's the mandatory age but we've had a lot of people asking about continuing in work until they're 70, and I'm sure in the future it will change. But it's just at the minute that's the way the company is kind of geared up for the pension, but with increasing pressure and I'm sure possibly with the help of some legislation, it will change (Female 41, HR Manager, Manufacturer).

Yet some employers identified a perceived need on the part of their staff to retire earlier because of burn out or the pressure of a senior role, or because their older staff wanted more time to spend with family or to travel. But there were just as many employers who said their staff wanted to work beyond normal retirement ages or to the option to scale down into a less stressful and strenuous job role. Typical responses included:

I think some men [pause] and some women may seize the opportunity for the last five years to push their pension up and for a bit of a challenge, but some are winding down and think I don't want to be bothered anymore (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).

We don't have a fixed [retirement] age, the approach is very much a case of myself saying to them [employees] when they reach that age 'are you continuing or not?' and they mostly all will positively say 'yes we would like to continue' so that is the end of it (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).

Yet there was evidence of inequality in respect to the retirement process itself. For instance, one employer from the service sector, allowed staff to work beyond the normal retirement age, but applied certain conditions that had to be adhered to first:

We do allow people to stay on past 65. They don't have to finish then [65] but we look at what their shifts will be, what days they're looking at, and they have to have a doctor's check every year, just to make sure that it's [work] not affecting them (Female 30-39, HR Co-ordinator, Service Sector).

On the one hand, the comment above may be read as a positive approach to retirement; possibly a more accommodating approach. However, in respect to the doctor's check, it should be noted that there is very little evidence to support the claim that job performance may decline with age or that older people are any less capable of working than their younger counterparts (Walker, 1997). Issues of insurance may however take over here. A more obvious example of inequality can be observed in the quote below in which the option to stay on is provided to some, but not all employees:

We've just had somebody retire. He was actually the Chief Executive and so he was a little bit older. He was 64. You tend to find that when people are in executive positions they tend to stay that little bit longer, it's usually agreed that they can (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business Sector).

There was evidence also of perceived differences between women's and men's approaches to retirement, the assumption here was that for men, the freedom to request the desire or need to retire early or, to scale down from full time to part time work was not present in the same way as it was for women:

I think, and this is only anecdotal, men don't tend to put themselves forward and ask that question, 'I don't want to retire, but I don't want to work full time until I'm 65, but I wouldn't mind actually taking early retirement, and coming back and working on a part time basis (Female 50-59, HR Director, Health Profession).

The majority of employers had a positive approach to retirement offering succession planning, exit interviews and pre-retirement rundowns whereby six to seven months before retirement staff drop a shift and then five months before drop two shifts and so on

in order to help them prepare for the retirement transition. There was also evidence of people moving into transitional jobs within the same company, allowing them to combine elements of work and retirement. The desire to retain experienced staff was often a determining factor in whether flexible retirement options were offered.

With respect to the survey data, further examination and a cross tabulation with industry revealed a distinct trend whereby employers from the manufacturing/ construction sector were more likely to have mandatory retirement schemes in place (55%) than those from the service sector (27%), although the association did not reach statistical significance. There was similarly no significant association between the industrial sectors in respect to whether they offered partial or later retirement, although employers in the business sector were slightly more likely to offer the latter (44%) than those from the manufacturing/construction sector (30%). Thus the pattern to emerge is one whereby employers in manufacturing/construction were having the hardest time in terms of managing the retirement of their older staff.

Analysis of the interview data provided some explanation here.

I think in an industry like mine it's not as easy as in some places because the work is hard on an older frame. We're the first place I've ever worked in where we have limited...we've had some people move into more office-based work, but if you think about the fact that we've only got 40 people that work there anyway it's limited chances and then for some people it really isn't what they want. They've worked all their life in the X [name of factory] and an office-based job just isn't [pause] it's very different to what they've been used to (Female 41, HR Manager, Manufacturer).

In the past, manual employees retired either before or at the SPA. More recently, however, the concept of the 'bridge job' (Platman, 2004), entered into at the end of one's career employment has become an important resource for the displaced older worker. However, the bridge job is mostly a phenomenon of the service sector where it is easier to provide such transitional work. Displaced older manual workers have tended therefore to be confined to the option of temporary work or non-employment. However, one employer in the sample felt that with some imagination and foresight, important elements

of the bridge job could possibly be applied to the construction industry, helping more older people to remain in the jobs they enjoy. The workplace concept of Work Ability (Ilmarinen and Tuomi, 2004) is also touched upon in the following quote below:

Rather than have to leave work for a job in X [name of well known supermarket], why not have [pause] a little job or less hours in the business you've worked in for so long? So that could work. We [employers] need to spread it out so that its not just confined to the retail sector, but its companies like [pause] mine where it would be viewed as hard to do and it's not brilliantly practical, but what you would have is somebody who has a lot of experience and a mature head (Female 41, HR Manager, Manufacturer).

The employer later explained that the reason why she felt it may not be “*brilliantly practical*” was because such flexible work options/work adaptability were not common place in the predominantly male environment in which she worked. She added, “*it would take a lot of persuading*”.

State Pension Age (SPA)

In order to find out employers' own attitudes towards retirement, respondents were asked at what age should the state pension age be set. Forty-nine percent felt that the SPA for men should set at age 60 or under as compared to 57% who provided the same response in respect to women. Hence, there was some support for lowering the male pension age to 60. The Government's favoured option of extending the pension age to over 65 was supported by only 7% of employers. When considering the effects of gender, cross tabulation analysis revealed that female employers were more likely to feel that the state pension age for women and men should be under 60 years of age (59% and 66% respectively) than male employers (32% and 43% respectively), who were more likely to say that it should be over 60 years of age (68% and 57%), although the difference here was not statistically significant. The broad sentiment of those interviewed was that there should be a flexible decade of retirement (Schuller & Walker, 1990) and more choice in the retirement process:

Everybody is saying that you should raise the retirement age to 70 and allow people to work until then. I don't. I think there should be a choice [pause]...you can retire between a particular age range. If you want to retire, you can retire. If you want to stay, you can stay. I think there should be flexibility there. I just think it is wrong to force people either way, particularly today when people have more choices in so many other areas and aspects of their lives (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).

Beliefs Concerning the Work Capabilities of Older Workers

Whilst organisations may have age-related policies in place to combat discriminatory practice, it is the employer or recruiter who is usually responsible for the day-to-day decision making and hence probing the views held by this group would seem pertinent to the research.

Employer beliefs concerning the employment of older workers were measured with 12 items based upon research by Redman and Snape (2002) (see Table 30 below).

| Table: 30: Questionnaire items on employers' beliefs about older workers |
|--|
| I believe older <i>male</i> workers are: |
| Hard to train |
| Have no interest in being |
| Are resistant to change |
| Are unreliable |
| Are not effective at their job |
| Are unproductive |
| Have poor communication skills |
| Are unwilling to take direction |
| Are difficult to get on with |
| Are unable to learn quickly |
| Are unable to accept new technology |
| Have a poor sickness record |

In Redman and Snapes' (2002) survey of teacher ageism, stereotypical beliefs about older employees were measure on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from: 'much less so than younger workers' (=1) to 'much more so than younger workers' (=5) so that a high score is equal to a more favourable belief. In the present study, the scale was adapted and the items repeated to take account of employees' gender. So the first 15 items were viewed in respect to older women: 'I believe that older female employees...' whilst the second 15

items were viewed in respect to older men: ‘I believe that older male employees...’. Independent variables included employers’ age and gender, number of employees and industrial sector.

The beliefs held by employers towards older workers were, on balance, more positive than negative (see Table 31 and 32 below), yet some traditional stereotypes held firm.

| Table 31: Frequency showing the perceived work capabilities of older (male) workers | | |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| Work Capability (older <i>male</i> workers) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Less so than younger employees | 32 | 39 |
| No difference (neutral response) | 26 | 33 |
| More so than younger workers | 23 | 28 |

(n=76)

| Table 32: Frequency showing the perceived work capabilities of older (female) workers | | |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| Work Capability (older <i>females</i> workers) | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Less so than younger employees | 37 | 46 |
| No difference (neutral response) | 26 | 32 |
| More so than younger workers | 18 | 22 |

(n=77)

Perceived strengths and weaknesses of older workers were expressed. For example, employers were concerned about the ability or willingness of older workers to adapt to change and to accept new technology, but felt that older workers were more reliable and easier to get on with than their younger counterparts. Although it is accepted that Likert scales are typically used to measure the totality of feelings towards something (i.e. employers’ perceptions of the work capability of older workers) and, as such, it is unadvisable to examine each individual item, it was felt important to see where older workers were perceived to be more or less capable than younger workers (Table 33). Such an approach has similarly been adopted in other research (see, for example, Lyon and Pollard, 1997).

| Table 33: Comparison of the work capability of older workers by workers' gender | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Less so than younger workers % | No difference % | More so than younger workers % | Total responses (n=) |
| I believe older <i>male</i> workers are: | | | | |
| Hard to train | 21 | 63 | 16 | 76 |
| Have no interest in being | 20 | 66 | 14 | 76 |
| Are resistant to change | 10 | 54 | 35 | 76 |
| Are unreliable | 51 | 43 | 5 | 76 |
| Are not effective at their job | 27 | 70 | 3 | 76 |
| Are unproductive | 26 | 71 | 3 | 76 |
| Have poor communication skills | 33 | 64 | 3 | 76 |
| Are unwilling to take direction | 21 | 59 | 20 | 76 |
| Are difficult to get on with | 18 | 69 | 12 | 76 |
| Are unable to learn quickly | 18 | 65 | 16 | 76 |
| Are unable to accept new technology | 9 | 55 | 35 | 76 |
| Have a poor sickness record | 31 | 59 | 9 | 76 |
| I believe older <i>female</i> workers are: | | | | |
| Hard to train | 22 | 64 | 14 | 77 |
| Have no interest in being | 26 | 62 | 12 | 77 |
| Are resistant to change | 17 | 51 | 32 | 77 |
| Are unreliable | 57 | 36 | 6 | 77 |
| Are not effective at their job | 26 | 70 | 4 | 77 |
| Are unproductive | 26 | 70 | 4 | 77 |
| Have poor communication skills | 32 | 60 | 8 | 77 |
| Are unwilling to take direction | 26 | 62 | 12 | 77 |
| Are difficult to get on with | 24 | 63 | 12 | 77 |
| Are unable to learn quickly | 17 | 67 | 16 | 77 |
| Are unable to accept new technology | 14 | 52 | 34 | 77 |
| Have a poor sickness record | 36 | 53 | 10 | 77 |

Clearly, in response patterns, there was a measure of neutrality. One in three employers felt that there was no difference between the work capabilities of older and younger workers. This age-neutral response pattern was reiterated throughout in the interview data.

I would always try and look at the individual because you can have a really hard working very conscientious young person but you can have a lazy young person as well: 'I want to come in at 9 and leave at 5, take my money and don't want to do much for it'. But equally, I think, that older people can be the same (Female 53, HR Manager, Business Sector).

Related to the comment above was the fact that the majority of employers expressed a preference for a mixed aged workforce as a means of achieving the right balance between perceived youth and maturity.

I've had reports that the environment is nicer and the mixture of ages as well...where they [younger workers] were initially quite sceptical of older people joining the workforce, they actually have quite a laugh with them and sometimes they ask them for advise in a sort of fatherly way and the mixture means that you haven't got lots of people of the same age competing, it balances itself out (Female 41, HR Manager, Manufacturer).

The older guy who works here and the younger guy, whilst they're a generation apart, and they've got different values, you tend to find that there is quite a lot of respect from the younger guy towards the older man whereas when there are two younger guys, they [pause]want to see each other struggle (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

Age-prejudice did however appear to be more prevalent amongst employers who demanded considerable adaptability or creativity from their workforce.

I wouldn't expect someone 40 plus definitely 50 plus to come and sit in here tomorrow and have a clue about any of the software. I'd expect a lot of older people now to be able to use computers but PCs so a lot of them will never have heard of the software we use (Male 30-39, Partner, Marketing).

Further cross tabulations were carried out to measure a possible association between the beliefs held, and the variables of age, gender and size of organisation. The employer's own age was found to be positively related to the beliefs held, in that the older the employer, the more likely they were to rate older workers more favourably than younger workers. For example, 70% of employers aged 50 and over felt that older women were more effective at their job; this compared with 56% of employers aged 40-49 and 20% of those aged under 40 who tended to feel there was no difference based upon employee age ($p < 0.05$). A similar trend emerged in relation to older men. A possible explanation here is that older employers, consciously or otherwise, view those with characteristics (i.e. age) similar to themselves more favourably or that they are able to relate to and/or have an affinity with people at the same point in the life course, or possibly, to draw upon a

stereotype, that they are 'older and wiser' and as such, are more appreciative of the skills and value of the older workforce.

One employer felt that older workers were no more difficult to train than their younger counterparts but that some lacked the confidence required to embrace new technology. She based her view upon her own experience of belonging to that social category:

I think that we [50 plus] don't sort of embrace new technology very quickly [laughing]. I say to X [name of younger colleague] 'Help!' I think younger people pick that [new technology] up much more quickly, but I know I can master it [pause]...I think we do it to ourselves because I can remember, when I worked for another company and they put a computer in front of me I thought, 'oh my...' I didn't even know how to switch it on. Now I'm fine with them [computers] and I've realised that if you're frightened, you need to take the plunge and tackle it (Female 53, HR Manager, Business Sector).

Because of her experience, the employer from the quote above actively encouraged her older members of staff to pursue training opportunities and avenues that may lead to promotion, yet there was little evidence that this age-sensitive approach was formally incorporated into employers' training packages and promotional routes.

Perceived differences between the sexes were also evident in that there was a distinct trend whereby older women workers were viewed rather more positively than men of the same age despite the fact that, as mentioned earlier, employers tended to feel that women were perhaps 'too old' to recruit at younger ages than men. Employers were more likely to feel that older women were: more reliable, more willing to take direction and less difficult to get on with than their male counterparts. How much of these 'soft' characteristics may be related to perceived feminine attributes (i.e. empathy, domesticity) is unclear. Yet it was also the case that older women were believed to be less resistant to change and better able to accept new technology than men of the same age group. On the other hand, employers were more likely to feel that older men learned more quickly than older women. No perceived differences were reported in respect to productivity.

In terms of the size of the organisation, it was found that employers from small organisations tended to hold more favourable beliefs about older workers as compared to those from medium-sized and large organisations. Although no statistically significant result was recorded, a distinct trend was observable. For example, 59% felt that older men were more effective at their job than younger ones; this compared with 39% of employers from medium sized organisations and 14% of those from large organizations, who tended to feel that there was no difference based upon age. A similar trend emerged in relation to older women. A possible explanation for such a trend is that employers with smaller workforces are more likely to have close and personal contact with individual staff (of all ages and at all levels) and those with direct contact with a (known) older employee can perhaps use their relationship as a reference point when considering matters relating to age. They may, therefore, be expected to hold more positive views of older people. This explanation was confirmed by the interview data. For example in the quote below the employer uses his own experiences of a known older employee to form his attitude. Where the employer does not have (positive) experience of older workers, common myths and stereotypes may be more influential.

The last bloke we had, he had a little part time job as a caretaker here and he left us for full time work because obviously he liked the caretaker job. But he was exceptional, as you do find older people, because prior to that we had another older person and we had no complaints whatsoever (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

Employers' Attitudes towards Older Workers

Employer attitudes towards older workers was measured on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree'. Most of the employers surveyed had very clear attitudes towards older workers. The majority (88%) agreed with the statement that, "older workers have as much to offer as younger workers" 82% did not agree that, "older workers should step aside for younger workers" and 3 in 4 employers similarly did not agree that, "older workers should be the first to be made redundant". A less positive response was recorded in respect to the statement that, 'it is a better investment to train younger rather than older workers' with a notable proportion 36% deciding not to agree with this statement.

Further examination of the data and a cross tabulation analysis revealed that employers with age incorporated into their equal opportunities policy were more likely to disagree with the statement that, “older workers have less to offer than younger workers” (93%) as compared with those who had not (82%) ($p \leq 0.01$). In addition, it was noted that those employers who said that they could *not* be discouraged from employing older workers were more likely to disagree that they “preferred to work with younger rather than older workers” (62%) as compared with those who said that they could be discouraged (33%), although here the association did not reach statistical significance. A similar trend was evident whereby employers who said they could *not* be discouraged from employing older workers were also more likely to disagree with the statement “it is a better investment to train younger rather than older workers” (69%) compared with those who said they could be discouraged (48%).

The interview data confirmed the traditional stereotype of older workers as reliable and trustworthy. They were also viewed positively in respect to their experience and mature perspective, and were believed to play an important role in nurturing younger or less experienced staff. Another area in which older people were believed to excel was in respect to how they dealt with the public. The perception here was that older workers have better interpersonal skills and credibility with the people, and that they are able to reassure the customer about a particular product/service. One employer, from a well known DIY chain, felt that this was related to our (the public's) inclination to trust a fatherly or motherly figure. Similarly, another employer, from a supermarket chain, felt that customers were more likely to ask for older workers' advice on recipes, ingredients and food products because they have '*more experience of cooking meals for their families*'. Other typical opinions included:

I think its good to have older people working here in as much as that when the public come in their perception of them is well this guy is an older guy he's no fool (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

Older workers are more confident; they will come and talk to you whereas the younger ones will tend to group together. An older person won't have any issue with coming to you if they have a problem ...it will be done in a nice way. It's just confidence with life really (Female 30-39, HR Co-ordinator, Service Sector).

I'd say the strengths of an older person are they've got a better understanding of life in a way, it sounds a bit crazy, but they can deal with the younger fellas better because like [pause] the younger fellas get a lot of ribbin [hassle] whereas an older fella will take people under his wing and give them some good solid advice because he's been there and done it, basically (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

On the other hand, there was some limited evidence that older workers were viewed as rather more resistant to change and new technology than their younger counterparts. One employer was particularly sceptical of the extent to which older workers would be able to adapt to sophisticated computer technology: *"I wouldn't expect someone 40 plus, definitely 50 plus to come and sit in here tomorrow and have a clue about any of the software"*. Thus in an era of technological change and the 'knowledge economy' older employees can be seriously disadvantaged from the perception that they will not be able to adapt. The issue of adaptability is still, it would appear, their 'Achilles Heel' (Lyon and Pollard, 1997).

Many other economic myths were, however, discredited by employers. For instance, employers believed that older workers were on the whole no less flexible or committed than younger workers, which is good news for those already in employment. Yet there was some ambiguity with regards to certain issues, for example, absenteeism. Some employers felt that older workers were more likely to be absent from work due to the possibility of an age related decline in health, whilst others felt that older workers were in fact less likely to be absent on account of their strong work ethic, a characteristic believed to be specific to their particular cohort: *"If you look at our sickness and attendance [rate] you'll see that the younger workers let us down far more than the older ones. I think it is generational"*.

To sum up, most employers displayed more positive than negative attitudes towards older workers. Indeed, the survey results bear this out; 63% of employers said that they would not be discouraged from employing an older worker. However, around one third of employers said they could be discouraged, usually for reasons that they believed could be justified on reasonable, functionalist grounds (i.e. the 'pay back' period). Regardless of the justification, however, the end consequence is still the same, which is bad news for the majority of displaced older workers.

Chapter VI. Discussion and Conclusion

The overall aim of this study was to examine the nature and extent of age discrimination in paid employment, and to determine by direct comparison, its effects upon women and men aged 50 and above. To achieve this aim a number of objectives were formulated (p. 5) which required input from employers across the UK (Strand B), and women and men aged 50 and above (Strand A). The intention of this chapter is to address each objective in relation to the findings pertaining to each strand.

Strand A: Women and Men Aged 50 and Above

Before providing a discussion of the objectives it is perhaps important to say something about the study cohort. At a conceptual level the most significant finding to have emerged from the data was in respect to what it means to be 'older'. Previous research (i.e. Taylor and Walker, 1998) had used the fixed category of older to account for what is, in fact, a very broad period of middle to later life. The trend in both policy and research has been that older people are consistently defined as those aged 50 and above. Yet such a universal approach has failed to take account of the impact of wider social, cultural and contextual factors across the human lifespan (Arber et al, 2003) which has had the effect of creating a distinct homogenous group. Indeed, the fact that the younger end of the cohort (i.e. those currently in their 50s) have grown up in a period marked by profound social and economic change has largely been ignored or downplayed by the bulk of the research to date. What is more, as the present study has demonstrated, the use of the term older can in itself be self-defeating and disempowering. The result is that rather than define a particular position on the life course, the term is more often used to categorise a specific *type* of individual.

The term 'older' is confusing because it is used to describe two processes: an objective statement of fact (maturation) and a subjective evaluation (social age) both of which are often inherent contradictions, yet to describe both processes, we use the term older interchangeably.

Very few of the people in this study felt 'older' was a term applicable to them, as they simply did not recognise themselves as such: "*I never ever thought I was getting old, and I still don't think of myself as older*", even if there was an underlying sense that employers and wider society did. A possible explanation for this is that the term 'older' has actually formed, or become part of, a wider social stereotype about this group who, (according to the stereotype), are unproductive, dependent and not very interesting. In effect, a problematised and stigmatised group. The point made here is that until old age as a distinct social construct is eliminated or its meaning altered and placed into the reality of the everyday lives of *older people*, ageism will continue to flourish. Arguably then, the problem is not to do with the word itself, but the cultural and social meaning attached, which ultimately ends up as a question of semantics.

Despite this, Bytheway (1995) has called for the elimination of the category of old age and, with it, the use of the term older. His point is that old age is merely a cultural construct and that a move towards the concept of agelessness will remove the foundation upon which ageism is built. Old age is, "*a construction that has a certain popular utility in sustaining ageism within societies that need scapegoats*" (Bytheway, 1995 p. 119). His viewpoint is, however, challenged by Andrews (1999 p. 302) who asks: "*will eliminating the category [of old age] simultaneously eliminate the dynamics of the oppression?*" She argues that in eliminating the category, we deprive older people of part of their identity and the sense of achievement in the years they have lived. It is the equivalent, she says, of eliminating sexism and racism by challenging the existence of sex and race (Andrews, 1999), (of course it is noted that these positions can be challenged in relation to the social construction of sexuality and ethnicity). Nevertheless, the point remains the same, namely, that the theory of agelessness undermines the personal and social significance of one's age. The people in this study repeatedly made the point that they experienced growing older as part of a continuation of their own self, yet at the same time, they felt that the process of ageing had given them a deeper understanding of who they were, and they appreciated the value of reaching that understanding.

Trying to come up with resolution to both arguments is beyond the scope of this research. To do that more research is needed. Research which places older people at the centre of the research process so that we avoid the temptation to generalise instead of challenging the cultural definition of what it means to be older. Such an integrative approach would, no doubt, provide useful insight into the shared aspects of ageing as well as offer important examples of discontinuity and difference.

Nevertheless, there was an underlying sense throughout this study, that those currently in their 50s and 60s are part of a distinct cohort for whom the 'retirement uniform of twin set and pearls' (Bull, 2005) is no longer applicable. In the words of one participant, "*my father when he was my age was a much older man than I am by virtue of the society that was in place*". This cohort has grown up and grown older in a period marked by profound social, political and economic change (for example, the Second Wave of Feminism, the raft of equality legislation).

Most of the study population had been the catalysts for these changes and not the passive observers. This is particularly true of women in the sample who had been amongst the first of many to rediscover an identity outside the home (see p. 31) and who had entered formerly male-dominated professions such as law and accountancy. Unquestionably, the world they helped to create is more fair and tolerant in respect to women. It is a cruel irony therefore that these women now have yet another hurdle to overcome in the form of age discrimination, as one woman in the study put it, "*we were pioneers for the [contraceptive] Pill. We were the first to climb the career ladder. Yet we're facing discrimination because we're older and we've got such a lot to offer*". It was also noted that the first wave of career women who had, each in their own way, made important contributions to the feminist movement *now* felt a sense of resentment towards younger generations of women, for whom opportunity appeared open ended and who continued to enter occupations that were previously closed off to them. To clarify, the resentment was not aimed at the younger women themselves, but rather the unfairness of the situation.

Having said something about the uniqueness of the cohort it is important now to address the main objective of this study: that was to determine the nature and extent of age discrimination reported by the sample population. According to the quantitative data most employed older people had experienced little or no discrimination of any sort, however,

opportunities for training and promotion were generally felt to be lacking. What emerged here was that whilst part of the quantitative data was quite encouraging in that a relatively small number of people considered that they had been the subject of direct discrimination, when examined a little closer, the data suggested that the practice is much more widespread. The same was found in respect to the qualitative data. The discrimination reported here tended to be more implicit than explicit in nature, expressed through double standards and inferred judgements concerning individual's real or perceived age.

The study also found that people's experiences of discrimination were strongly influenced by what they had seen and experienced in the past. All the data together indicated that previous experience(s) of discrimination does make one more aware of how it can manifest and consequently that one may be able to recognise it more easily, and/or that discrimination may be a cumulative stressor, extending beyond the actual event to increase its effects over time. Equally, the data also indicated that, when given the opportunity or encouragement to reflect upon one's experiences, one is able to see where and how discrimination may have occurred. The suggestion here is that too many people accept current practices and attitudes as the norm or as isolated incidents, often without challenge or consideration of what they actually represent.

For many of the men in the study the realisation that they were now vulnerable, on account of their (older) age, was often a new phenomenon, which did elicit a higher degree of acknowledgement of discrimination in the questionnaire than it did for the women. One has to bear in mind here that women have historically been disadvantaged in the workplace. Thus they may be more likely than men to internalise an experience of discrimination, or come to accept it as *just* an inevitable part of being older and female in the workplace. Moreover, previous research on sex and race discrimination found that women tended not to respond to a direct, single item question as was used in the questionnaire (i.e. 'Have you experienced age discrimination?'). The distinguishing feature of using such direct and simplistic phrasing is that women either deny or do not recognise their experiences. As Corning (2002 p. 118) observed, "...asking a woman whether she, herself, has been discriminated against most often results in a flat no". Therefore, attempts at triangulation in the present study revealed an inconsistency between some of the qualitative and quantitative data. The open-ended responses of some

of the women (but not the men interviewed) indicated significantly higher levels of perceived discrimination than those recorded in their closed responses in the questionnaire.

The tendency of women to deny discrimination when questioned in such a way has unsurprisingly had major implications for the assessment and conceptualization of discrimination. In light of this, Corning (2002 p. 118) advises, “...*in assessing perceived discrimination, for substantive (as well as psychometric) reasons, direct single-item, dichotomous-response means of assessment (e.g. ‘Have you ever been discriminated against’)* should be avoided”. That such an approach was *not* avoided in the present study should not necessarily be viewed in a negative light however. It has helped to highlight the importance of using one or more research approaches (both of a qualitative and quantitative nature) as means of assessment, rather than opt for one set of findings as providing the ultimate viewpoint. It has also identified a crucial difference between women and men in relation to the nature of the perceived discrimination.

Women tended to be more responsive in an interview situation, perhaps because they were asked not only about their personal experiences of age-related discrimination, but also to compare their own situation to that of others. A similar method was used by Corning (2002) in his investigation of the relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological distress amongst women. It is a method grounded in social comparison theory, whereby people are encouraged to evaluate their own position by comparing their situation to that of others – recognition of a discrepancy or imbalance is what is known as social deprivation (i.e. a sense of inequality).

Such inconsistency is perhaps to be expected given the sensitive and emotional nature of the subject matter (discussed on p. 20). It is possible then that these women preferred to talk about their experiences in their own words and on their own terms rather than respond via a tick box in a questionnaire. It may also be the case that a rapport was established between interviewer and interviewee thereby encouraging the verbalisation of experiences. It is also likely that the potential to perceive discrimination, especially in its more subtle and disguised forms is affected, to some extent, by the interview process itself, in which respondents are encouraged to reflect on specific problems they may have encountered at work. As a result, it may be reasonable to assume that some of the women

interviewed were previously unaware that they had possibly been discriminated against or had, as already mentioned, internalised these experiences. Another source of discrepancy may be due to the methods used - that is, the nature or essence of qualitative and quantitative research itself. For example, it can be difficult to objectively or quantifiably measure something, in this case discrimination, which for many people is clearly subjective or expressed in a subtle or implicit manner.

The respondents' current position within the employment lifecycle may also provide some explanation as to why, statistically, more men than women reported age discrimination in respect to their current job role. Those who are approaching an age at which they are likely to retire may be expected to be more willing to admit or declare experience(s) of discrimination. It is already predicted that the majority of discrimination cases following the introduction of the Age Regulations (October, 2006) will be brought about by highly paid and articulate retired or close to retiring 'company men' unhappy with their severance package who have, in effect, nothing to lose and everything to gain (Attwell, 2005).

Nevertheless, direct experience(s) of discrimination appeared to be a minority occurrence. When it did occur it was mainly in terms of training and promotion. The vast majority of those in work had received training in their current job role. However, what was observable was that a significant proportion (see p. 123) had chosen to decline an opportunity for training or education. Many felt that they had not been encouraged to participate or they were less willing to take part in training that may lead to promotion, because promotion was not accessible to employees of their age, or the perception was that it was not. The message here for employers is that they do need to consider why the older members of their workforces are often reluctant to take part in training and education and pursue promotion. It is not enough to just provide avenues towards promotion, but people (of all ages) must be seen to be able to follow these opportunities through. It follows that promotion ought to be based upon ability and competence and not some other variable that one has no control over, for example, one's age.

Given that discrimination appeared to be related to the culture of the workplace, it would seem sensible to probe further, the relationship between age and employment. A salient feature of the data concerning individuals' current employment (p. 121) was the rise of

part time work. Part time work was found to correlate with age, with numbers rising fast after 55 years, and further sharp increases after 60 years and then once more after 65 years. What was evident from the research was that this gradual withdrawal from the labour market had mixed blessings. On the one hand, it may have provided a soft landing into retirement as part of a pre-planned exit strategy. Equally, it may have been that as the financial pressures of one's family or children diminish, then time is taken for oneself. On the other hand, however, some of the evidence suggested that not everyone welcomed the transition from full time to part time work, especially if they had no choice in the matter (i.e. if the motivator was ill health).

In line with the above, the responsibilities many of the women faced in terms of increased care provision appeared to have an influence upon the work patterns they followed. It is interesting to note that whilst there was a significant increase in part time work amongst men, none of the men interviewed suggested that this was a direct consequence of care provision. That is not to say men do not become involved in providing care, as clearly many do, but the burden of care and the pressure to actively accept less hours and consequently, less money, is arguably not a major factor or issue for them as a group.

Again, this is perhaps reflective of a gender-ordered society in which women are expected to provide the main caring role. Yet it may also be related to the organisational structure of the workplace one may be employed in: can one be employed part time there or not? In terms of numbers, men in the study tended to work in male-dominated organisations. Conversely, a similar pattern emerged in respect of women. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the organisations men tended to work in did not appear to be as orientated towards part time and family friendly work as the organisations that were female dominated. There are, of course, sociological and cultural explanations for this but nevertheless, the opportunity to work part time in one's normal place of work was greater for women than for men. This is supported by the finding (p.122) that twice as many women worked part time as did men. It therefore follows that more women have the opportunity to provide care, regardless of the motive or influence.

Most of the study population expressed the need to work beyond the age of 60 to maintain a reasonable level of income. This was especially true of women, many of whom were, as the literature suggested, concerned about their pension entitlement, possibly due to the care of children and other dependents. However, some wanted to reduce their hours in the run up to retirement or, move to part time work to help their own children return to work by providing childcare for their grandchildren.

That is not to say that all older people want to slow down or scale down. Many of the study population were eager to carve out new careers or change existing ones. Similarly, others expressed a desire to move up rather than down or indeed take a sideward step across the career ladder. It was also apparent that many of those who were unemployed at the time of the data collection wanted 'career employment' in the sense that they did not want to accept the type of work that could be described as a 'dead-end-job' (Bihagen and Ohls, 2004), that is, poorly paid employment with limited career prospects. Equally, there was some reluctance on the part of the sample to accept the type of work that has commonly become known as the 'McJob' (Lindsey and Mcquaid, 2004), such as entry-level work in the retail or service sector. Yet employers in these sectors (e.g. B&Q), are praised for their enthusiastic approach to the employment of older people who, they tell us, are perfectly able to do the job and are more likely to stay in the longer term. However, whilst these employers are seen as being especially promising (not least by the study population themselves) they have, albeit unintentionally, also been instrumental in expounding the notion of, as one participant put it, "*jobs for the oldies*". So rather than alleviate unemployment and poverty among this group they have, in fact, helped to extol the notion that certain *types* of jobs are deemed more suitable for older people, thereby perpetuating traditional stereotypes (both positive and negative) of the ageing workforce. One must also consider the type of jobs that are more likely to be available to older people within these sectors (i.e. usually limited to shop floor level).

Taking a more cynical position, the targeting of older people into service or retail sector work could be regarded as a shrewd PR campaign, especially given the rapid expansion of these sectors and shortage of younger workers. Regardless of the motivation however, the danger is that the labour market will become increasingly age-segregated and that flexibility will become a concept that is only understood and indeed realised, within the context of part-time, low-paid retail or service sector employment. Based on the evidence

presented here, flexibility should be accompanied by greater employment protection and extended to all types of jobs and at every sector and level. Such flexibility on behalf of all unquestionably has benefit for all concerned.

It is important to mention at this point that, in respect to employment, only the experiences of those in public and private sectors were recognised. Furthermore, there was considerable evidence to suggest that organisational structures within these sectors had a major influence upon workplace culture, which, in turn, affected equality issues. In view of this, a pertinent question to consider is: How might the voluntary sector have compared? Research by Grant et al (2006), on age discrimination encountered by older employees in voluntary sector employment, found little evidence of discrimination. Instead, the vast majority of those surveyed said they felt satisfied in their current job role. The authors concluded that this was because of the culture of the sector itself “*staff felt valued...they had the opportunity to reach their potential*” (Grant et al, 2006 p. 162). The perceived egalitarian and inclusive approach described within this sector was said to foster positive feeling about employees’ relationships with their respective organisations. For some, this was demonstrated in the input they could make on organisational issues “*they felt their voices were heard*” (Grant et al, 2006 p. 162), whilst for others, it was the openness of the management structure and the accessibility of the senior management.

The above comment probably sets into context the main difference between the voluntary sector and the public and private sectors. The fact that staff in the voluntary sector were able to negotiate for example, training packages for themselves to suit their needs is demonstrative of the relationship between the voluntary sector as an employer and its employees, where there is recognition of the mutual dependency upon each other by both parties. This relationship is perhaps lacking in both public and private sectors and is without question related to workplace culture. The different imperative upon which the voluntary sector is founded (not-for-profit), has arguably allowed a culture to develop that is more in tune with the needs of its workforce and those needs seem able to be articulated with greater confidence. Another difference is that personal goals are seen to be more achievable, which would appear to facilitate a greater confidence and, as such, a greater willingness to pursue goals. One can see then that the provision of equitable treatment can make for a more settled and contented workforce. However, unfortunately, one of the key points to have emerged from data concerning public and private sector

employees was that there appeared to be in some ways an acceptance, however grudgingly, that older workers are treated differently.

Another objective of the research was to determine the impact that redundancy had on those aged 50 and above. Experiences of redundancy varied considerably and were interpreted in a variety of ways. For some, redundancy was a relief or escape from a job they were dissatisfied with or had wanted to leave, or was used to fund a smooth route into retirement. Whilst for others, redundancy was an entirely traumatic event, especially so when the realisation of a lack of available work became apparent. Losing one's job was also shown to have a negative effect upon one's confidence and self esteem as not only work routines are lost but also the social support and camaraderie once enjoyed. For women especially, the focus was on their social contact with other people and the friendships they had formed.

One may recall that in the literature (p.36) there was an underlying sense that redundancy affects women in a qualitatively different and arguably more passive way than it does men. Furthermore, that this was believed to be related to the structure of a patriarchal society in which women place family above work (Bruegal, 1979). However, based on the evidence presented here, the type of orientation advanced by Bruegal (1979) is based upon an out-dated and stereotypical view of women. This is reiterated by Wood (1981) whose own research found that most women do not consider their life in a kind of rigid either/or conception or category, i.e., marriage versus work. It must also be noted that there are some women in society who have always worked and these types of women will undoubtedly feel some sense of disadvantage from job loss or displacement. Second, whilst masculinity is historically bound up with work and the public sphere, and femininity with marriage and the private sphere, the feminisation of work and the contemporary notion of the 'career woman' have each signalled the increasing importance of work to women. As Still and Timms (1998 p. 44) put it, "*it is now recognised that work is just as important for women as it is for men*".

Many of the women in the present study spoke of redundancy in terms of opportunity. That is, the opportunity to evaluate one's life thus far and to re-direct it, if necessary. They had used their redundancy payment to enter a new phase of working life or to pursue an educational or other life ambition once put on hold – what this study has described as the 'Shirley Valentine' syndrome. Where redundancy had coincided with a transitional life event (i.e. children leaving home) time for oneself 'me-time' was also taken.

It was also found that one's previous occupational status affected one's employability. For example, unskilled or semi-skilled men whose skill set had become out-dated were the least likely to feel that they would be re-employed. Continuity played an important role here in the sense that these men were initially reluctant to take on work which they had no experience of and were therefore more likely to drop out of the labour market. Skilled men, on the other hand, had less trouble in accessing paid work and more choice in respect to the type of work available. Unskilled women were also more hopeful of re-employment, especially if they were not too particular. Moreover, the fact that they had more experience of intermittent employment; moving from job to job or between employment and non-employment (for example, to accommodate childcare arrangements) stood in their favour, as they had more recent experience (than men) of the job search process. These women were also reassured, to an extent, by the expansion of female-dominated employment (i.e. shop work), which they felt they could fall back on if necessary. However, many expressed a sense of being 'stuck in a rut' in so far as their previous employment was concerned and looked forward to a different type of job.

These findings reflect those reported by Wood (1981), in his comparative study of women and men in a redundancy situation. Wood (1981 p. 675) says, "*the unskilled men snatched at jobs, the skilled men could be more choosy and the women had a confidence that they could always find work which was roughly equivalent to what they were currently doing*". However, it should be noted that the women in Wood's (ibid.) study were of an unskilled/semi-skilled occupational background. In the present study, the views of skilled and professional women were also taken into account. Surprisingly perhaps, it was noted that these women had difficulty in accessing work of a comparable nature. Here, we have a reversal of fortune or oppositional effect to what had occurred between the unskilled and skilled men. It was found that the unskilled women were more

confident of re-employment than the skilled/professional women, who were acutely conscious of their age. There was an underlying sense amongst these women that employers would be prejudiced against them. Many had applied for work only to be turned down because they were told they were overqualified or too experienced. Thus many settled for what was available and experienced a downward shift from a higher to lower income bracket.

Of course, there is a paradox here in that whilst unskilled women were more likely than skilled/professional women and also men to be re-employed, the type and nature of the job they expected to secure was usually the least well-paid and protected in society. The consensus of opinion then is that women (especially older women) still tend to be preferred for the kind of work that is readily available, sex-segregated and poorly paid.

For those in the sample who had been unable to find work the cumulative experience of rejected job applications and continued unemployment often resulted in permanent exclusion from the labour market. As the literature suggested (p. 24), these people tend to assume the status of early retired instead of unemployed or out of work because they had lost all hope of work. The message here is that success has to be seen to be achievable. Previous research (FEU, 1989 p. 27) does suggest that the majority of older unemployed people "*do not want to sit out their years until they reach state pensionable age*" furthermore, the results here support that. There was both a strong desire from those who were disengaged from the workforce to engage in meaningful work and a need on the part of employers to recruit and retain staff. Nevertheless, a myriad of barriers to re-employment were identified (see p. 111). The experience of unemployment itself was also a major barrier in terms of reducing one's self esteem and life satisfaction. This was particularly evident in the qualitative data. The effects of unemployment in a work orientated society are that people start to lose heart and are left with a distorted sense of self (FEU, 1989). For those who had been employed for the majority of their working life, to find now that they may be considered to be 'too old' for work was felt to be both demoralising and discriminatory. To put it crudely, and in the words of one participant, it was a, "*smack in the face*" to all those who had worked and paid their taxes.

Yet support for this group was felt to be lacking and what support was available was a common target for criticism. There was evidence from the cohort that Job Centre staff and employment advisers (i.e. from private agencies) did not consider older people's potential and that some were in fact ageist in their approach. The need to train, retrain and up-date one's skills whilst unemployed was also identified by the cohort as this, it was felt, would help them to improve their employment prospects. Additional help and tailored Information and Guidance (IAG) may also be of benefit here, especially, as for many this was their first experience of unemployment.

The third objective of the study was to attempt to determine whether women and men experience age discrimination in different ways and to different degrees according to their gender. The evidence pointed to differences as well as similarities. The experiences of the women interviewed were notably different to those of the men in terms of the source and manifestation of the discrimination and were often compounded by sexism. One may conclude therefore that for women, the nature of the discrimination experienced did follow the format of 'gendered ageism' (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995) whereby stereotypical beliefs about one's gender and age combine to form a distinct form of prejudice with unique characteristics and discriminatory processes (see p.20 of the literature). This prejudice differs from other forms of 'isms' (i.e. racism, sexism) in that it categorises individuals on the basis of two social categories: (1) their gender and (2) their age. Although parallels are drawn between it and other forms of difference, the social stigma attached to the process of ageing, (and to female ageing in particular), led to a process of self-denial and self-separation, that attachment to a particular race or sex does not normally entail. As Andrews (1999 p. 309) explained, "*While difference is celebrated in axes such as race, gender, religion and nationality, the same is not true for [older] age*". Indeed, in contrast to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) self-separation and self-disassociation from other, older women was a common theme in the data.

Most of these women were acutely aware of the physical and physiological state of other women in their cohort and were critical, consciously or otherwise, of their attempts to hold back or reverse the ageing process. Some employed a strategy of distance and detachment, to the extent of imposing ageist stereotypes on older women around them (for example, that they are *older* because they have "grey hair" or an "old fashioned

lifestyle”). These women experienced internal conflict between, on the one hand, the physical appearance of the face and body and, on the other hand, the mental and spiritual sense that they had remained unchanged over time. The ‘stranger in the mirror’ analogy is of relevance here (as mentioned in the literature, p. 9). This cognitive split between the mind, body and spirit has become a popular theme in the study of older people: ‘How old am I?’ versus ‘How old do I feel’ (see, for example, Featherstone and Hepworth, 1989).

For unemployed women, the fear was that they would be discriminated against because of an older appearance. As a result, many had made a conscious effort to appear to look younger for job interviews. For those already in work, to look feminine and youthful, to remain unchanged and unblemished and to combat physical wear and tear became a strong predictor of whether they felt secure and confident in their position at work. Yet very few of the women interviewed said they had experienced inappropriate reference to, or demeaning remarks about, their physical appearance. Rather, it was something that was sensed or perceived because of the type of society in which we live. Indeed, the female need to remain youthful has been regarded in the academic literature as a concern to *every* woman; however, the older women in this study have further revealed a double burden of societal ageism and sexism that is under-emphasised in past empirical work.

Most of the above is consistent with much related past theory and research. Therefore, what unique contribution has the study made to the debate? In contrast to previous research, consideration was given to the differences as well as the similarities and shared aspects of women’s experiences of ageism and how these might relate to broader social and economic factors (i.e. job type). For example, it was apparent that women in professional or career employment had a greater awareness of the concept of double jeopardy and were more likely than ‘non career’ women to have experienced or observed discrimination in their most recent job role. A possible explanation for the typological difference observed is that the women in lower paid and lower skilled employment received social approval from a job deemed appropriate for their gender and which may be considered an extension of their domestic role, or that they were more inclined to the familial aspect of their life. Discrimination, when it did occur, was based more on the job itself and was believed to express itself in the form of reduced pay and fewer benefits which, of course, are not to be underestimated or overlooked in their own right, especially since past research has revealed a situation whereby older women are clustered

into in work that is underpaid and unprotected. It may also be the case that women in non career and/or part time employment were exempt in most cases from the pressure of occupational ambition or the fear of competition and replacement, or that gender and age inequality was simply more visible to women in male managed and hierarchical or bureaucratic workplaces. The latter of which this study felt was more likely to be the case.

Men did not appear to be affected in the same way. A possible explanation is that whereas masculinity is traditionally associated with independence, power and control (which are not directly or negatively affected by one's age), femininity is traditionally associated with beauty and is equated with youth and passivity (which in a youth-orientated society are certainly threatened by one's age, specifically the loss of a youthful appearance). Thus different standards are applied to women and those standards have ultimately permeated the world of work.

Have men escaped the negative connotation of old age? Not really. Several of the women in the present study alluded to the idea that it is perhaps more acceptable for older women to admit the need for freedom from the work ethic or to scale down into part time employment because female identity is not traditionally interwoven with, or dependent upon, the woman's ability to earn a decent wage. Implicit within this notion is the idea that work is essentially a masculine affair and that movement away from the worker role may be read as an example of weakness or loss of control, especially for those men who have grown up under the conventional notion that the male is the main provider "*It's certainly difficult for men because I know some men who have been made redundant at 50 and they just haven't been able to get back into the jobs market at all, except in very, very low paid jobs...it's very easy to lose confidence*"(Female, 50 job seeker).

There was evidence also of a more explicit gender dimension at work, as many of the unemployed men in the study had tried (often as a last resort), but failed to enter female-dominated employment, for example, in the service sector. It was felt that employers in these sectors were biased towards older women because women are perceived to look and sound right for the role and are expected to be more likely than men, especially those from a manual labour background, to have the inclination to carry out such work.

Despite this, there was a sense throughout that the present cohort of older men had already made their economic contribution to society and were now willing to consider the type of work where required skill(s) could be accessed at a low cost. That is not to say, however, that there was any sort of undermining or crisis of masculinity at play here or that their previous employment did not have symbolic significance as indeed it did. Rather, that these men had already proven their worth and self-identity at work.

Thus one may argue that it is in fact the younger man who has the greatest problem in respect to the relatively recently identified crisis of masculinity (McDowell, 2001), if indeed masculinity is directly related to the lack of traditional rough and tumble type work available and not a range of social, economic and psychological factors as the results here would suggest is the case. Indeed, results from the present study indicate that the equation between masculinity and work per se is too simple a connection to make – certainly it is easy to overstate the relationship between the two.

Data provided do support the notion that men currently in their 50s and 60s are part of a unique and distinct cohort of older men. Whilst their female counterparts have undoubtedly been affected by, and benefited from, greater equality between the sexes, the results of this study show that men have also been affected in terms of their own experiences and what they have learned vicariously. This is an issue that has hitherto been under-researched and certainly under-theorised, yet it would appear to offer an important insight into contemporary male experiences of ageing. For instance, many of the men in the present study had embraced new roles in the family (i.e. carers of grandchildren) and could be said to have a radically different outlook on life to those before them.

What should be mentioned at this point is that it is impossible to tell from the data available whether giving up work because of age-related decline in health is interpreted by the individual as being more painful, vis a vis a man's position in work, than giving up work because of a structural issue, for example redundancy which can affect an entire workforce. Previous research (Gilbert et al, 2005) has shown that men do not cope very well with physical decline, nor does the workplace, for it has simply never had to – but the male worker can now expect to live and work beyond the point at which he is able to carry out physically intensive work.

However, based on the evidence from the Employer Strand (p. 153) it is more likely that these men will be forced to leave their jobs and retrain in another area. The need to retrain or re-skill in one's current job role or to enter a new type of job was a recurrent theme in the research as was the issue of continued education. The need to undertake education that would be of value to the labour market was however outside the remit of this study. Nevertheless, it was a major issue raised by the cohort itself and for that reason is deemed worthy of some discussion. Both employers and employees are more cognisant of how technical change and market driven policy has made work a more uncertain and temporary affair. Whether because of these labour market changes or a shift in mindset, employees are now more ready to accept the loss of the concept of a job for life. Furthermore, as the present study has demonstrated, most older people were not equipped or were simply not given the opportunity to re-train, re-skill or undertake education when faced with redundancy or other job displacement. The main problem identified in respect of continued education was that whilst a small number of the cohort were what was termed, 'serial learners' (p. 90), the vast majority only considered learning as a reaction *to* something. This could have been for example, redundancy, ill health or bereavement. The point being that the learning culture so eagerly advocated and promoted by amongst others the incumbent New Labour Government, pass many by. One in four people (28% of the total sample) expressed the desire to study at HE level and, whereas this does not necessarily mean they have the intention or inclination to do so, it does illustrate the potential interest and possible demand for formal education that may exist. Nevertheless, only 10% of the entire sample were undertaking study at any level. This is somewhat at odds with New Labour's strong commitment to the promotion of 'education for all'.

The above pledge was heralded as the Government's vision to effect a transition away from the traditional notion of education, towards one of education that could be accessed throughout the life course (DfEE, 1998). However, when viewed from the experiences of older learners it is much less obvious how they are to be included in this vision. The question here has to be, can society reasonably expect those who have been out of, or absent from, the education system for years to readily change employment direction? The economic and personal costs are eminently obvious especially for those with a limited educational background. According to New Labour the key is to encourage learning across the life course and like that recommended for training in work allow flexibility in

the learning experience that suits the individual. No longer should education be based on the measles theory “*catch it early and get it over with*” (Ince, 2005 p. 23). Rather, education should have a deeper meaning. This, it is hoped, will enable forthcoming generations of older people to have the experience of education in their later years and to be more proactive in accessing it.

For the present generation, however, the flexibility called for, undoubtedly has to be in terms of more wider and far reaching marketing of courses in every discipline and at every level. Encouraging people to make small, manageable steps within the context of extended support networks can also help to mitigate some of the effects that a lack of confidence or a sense of perhaps being ‘too old’ for study may bring. For community-based education which, according to the sample, goes some way further in achieving the above, it has to be in the provision of learning that is seen as relevant and accessible. It is important therefore that education at community level be provided and that it should include the opportunity for both formal and informal study as clearly ‘education for its own sake’ must not be precluded and is important in its own right. Moreover, there should be vocational content available for those wishing to enhance their employment prospects as well as academic content for those wishing to take their studies further.

In terms of those already studying, five groups could be said to have emerged from the data. They are: serial learners; education strategists; first returnees; community engagers and; reactionaries (see p. 90). There will be, of course, some blurring of the edges here. However, what is apparent from the typology is that, with the exception of the first group, education was seen and acted upon as a reaction to some kind of life event. That is, rather than being proactive in terms of updating one’s skills and knowledge, a majority of the cohort waited for, in the main, a major negative life event and used education as an antidote to that. We do have to think about this, however, in the context of modern-day employment practice whereby employees are now expected to regularly update their skills and knowledge and to keep pace with technological change. This in itself may be a concern, in that, if education is seen as an antidote to a problem, rather than something undertaken in tandem with wider developments in work and employment, many of those who have been reluctant to update their knowledge may find the skills they have relied upon thus far, outdated at a time when they are needed most.

This may not be so much of an issue for people close to retirement, for as the data has demonstrated, as this time approaches, one's motivation for education tends to change. This group also tend to be more active in the (community) education sphere. Rather it is those in their 50s and early 60s who are the cohort in limbo insofar as accessing education is concerned. It is also the case that many people view continued education, especially higher education, as an alien concept or feel that it is perhaps out of reach to people like themselves where no one in their family has previously undertaken study at that level. However, it must be remembered that those in their 50s could ostensibly have upwards of 20 years of active work ahead of them. It is also worth considering two points; first, those who have some experience of post compulsory education are more likely to access education later in life and second, the well-being fostered through continued learning undoubtedly has benefits for the individual and the economy, as well as supporting good health and mental well being. The challenge then must be to ensure that education is continually accessible and relevant and that stereotypes and discriminatory (institutional and personal) practices are continually monitored and challenged.

To sum up Strand A of the research, older workers are a diverse and complex group, many of whom face multiple pressures in the latter part of their working lives. What perhaps is the underpinning element of all of the above is the notion of control and choice. Far too often individuals are denied the chance to have control over the direction of their life due to control being taken away. Whilst this is true for many social groups one has to remember that, as has been highlighted throughout, being discriminated against on account of one's age, that is losing that element of control, may be a relatively new phenomenon for individuals to cope with. As such, it is likely to be the case that many are lacking the experience to deal with this new added aspect. The consequence is a denial of choice due to the interaction of both internal and external factors.

There were however certain limitations to the Strand A of the research due to the inherent nature of collecting attitudinal data. The Strand is based on self-reported data which is, in effect, only one side of the story and therefore caution must be exercised when making any conclusive comment about actual behaviour that is thought to have occurred. As Duncan and Loretto (2004) note, there is the possibility that some people may be overly sensitive to evaluation whilst others may underestimate, or mask, the degree of the

discrimination experienced if their jobs are especially important to them. Consider also the potential impact of the Halo Effect Theory (Coren, 1993). This theory is often used in social psychology to refer to the view that if a person is regarded as having some good qualities there is a preconception or bias towards the assumption that he/she will have more or all good qualities (Coren, 1993). For example, a polite child is often thought to be well behaved and considerate. When used in the context of discrimination research, the halo effect may arguably question the extent to which self-reported evidence of perceived ageism is truly genuine and independent of all other factors or whether the respondents questioned generally disliked their jobs or felt that they had been unfairly treated for some reason or other. In his study of student judgements concerning their attitudes towards racism and sexism, Coren (1993) found that there was a positive link between what exactly the students thought of their teacher and their potential to perceive their teacher as culturally biased in some respect. In other words, if the students did not like the course or their teacher they were more likely to perceive their teacher as racist and sexist.

It is possible then that some of the sample may have perceived age discrimination when it was not there, because of the negative regard in which they held their organisation, employer or job. Additionally, results suggested that this may also be due to the negative regard in which some people view their own abilities and competencies. That said, the more objective data obtained from the questionnaire for example about training and promotion, did validate the more subjective data about discrimination. What is more, the evidence collected from the employers (to follow) did support the existence of age discrimination in modern day employment practice, especially in respect to the more implicit nature of the phenomenon (i.e. inferred preferences for younger employees).

Despite the possible limitations noted above, the present study is one of the few pieces of academic research to consider the importance of an integrative approach to the study of older people by applying multiple research methods. It is premised on the idea that, "*the present circumstance of older people can only be understood with reference to their past*" (Arber et al, 2003 p. 3). Thus consideration was given to the part played by individual difference and to broader societal and psychological factors, for example, self-efficacy. Such an approach indicated that the relationship between age and employment is more complex than previous evidence has suggested.

The study has also brought into sharper focus the many ways in which aspects, notions and attitudes concerning age are present in almost all aspects of work and affect different types of older workers in a variety of ways. Yet the current relationship between age and employment cuts much deeper than the continued disadvantage of older workers. At its core, it is about the social construction of age and how it is supported and reinforced by the employment process in which, for example, becoming an adult has traditionally been rewarded by adult rates of pay. It is generally accepted that younger and older people are at transitional phases in the life course, moving towards and away from the central stage of adulthood (Glover and Branine, 1997). Adulthood, is therefore judged differently to youth and maturity because it is “*not perceived as being uncomfortably close to one or other end of the life span*” (Glover and Branine, 1997 p. 276). This has led to the notion of there being a prime age within an individual's employment spectrum; that being the point where an employee is regarded as being at his or her most productive.

Added to this is the concept of retirement which, as the literature suggested (p. 7), has traditionally been used as the marker for the onset of old age, regardless of the psychological age of the individual. Therefore, retirement may be seen as “*the driving force behind the wider development of ageism in modern societies*” (Walker, 1990 p. 59). These examples, taken with evidence from this study, present the world of work as a microcosm for wider society, whereby age-based norms and assumptions are absorbed into the fabric, language and culture of organisations which, in turn, has the effect of supporting and reinforcing our understanding of *age* in wider society.

Strand B: Employers

The first objective concerning Strand B of the research was to attempt to determine the construction and operation of (older) age in the workplace or to put it more succinctly, if and how age is used as a factor in employment. The study found evidence of employers using age and where appropriate, gender, as criterion by which to classify a particular *type* of employee. Almost half of the sample used the term ‘older worker’ to describe or refer to a mature member of staff, suggesting that these individuals were seen as a separate and distinct category where employment matters were considered. The average (mean) age at which an employee was felt to become ‘older’ was 55 years for women and 56 years for men. However, the notion that women are considered to be older at earlier

points than their male counterparts (see p. 33) was more vehemently articulated in the qualitative data in which there was an inherent assumption on the part of employers that women were, to put it crudely, 'past it' at younger ages than men.

A case in point was an employer from the private sector who cited 30 as the age at which an employee became older. When asked 'why?' she indicated that her response was in respect to women only, and was a reflection of the culture of the firm and not her own opinion. Regardless of where the response came from however the obvious question to ask has to be, if women are perceived to be older earlier than men, are they then, in turn, treated as such? For example, are women considered to be too old for promotion at earlier points than men? Results suggest that this is indeed the case (see p. 172). It was observed, for example, that the majority of managerial appointments made tended to follow the Golden Decade (term originally used by Itzin and Phillipson, 1995) of 30-40 years which can discriminate against women who have taken time out of employment for childcare. In this context, the challenges older women face are those not only to do with being female and trying to break through the glass ceiling but they now find themselves positioned with men against a 'silver ceiling' (cited in Redman and Snape, 2002) of age, which is arguably more rigid and difficult to dismantle.

As previous research (for example, Arber and Ginn, 1991) has shown, this type of inequality is partly the result of the differences between male and female employment chronologies. As one may recall from the literature (p.15), the organisation of work is typically structured to accommodate the male chronology of employment, which is fluid, linear and clearly defined, and as the present study indicates, most women are unable to conform to a chronology of full employment. The break(s) in employment that many women take to have and to raise children for example has been shown (see Strand A) to adversely affect them at work in respect to promotion and, on a conceptual level, in respect to the view that women are not as committed as men. More recently however, there has been evidence of a shift in mindset. Take for example, the introduction of positive policy on maternity leave and structured career break(s). However, for many older women, the cumulative effect of missed opportunity due to childbirth and childcare was shown to at least, in part, account for the under-representation of older women in senior management. A particular difficulty for women, as identified by the employers in the present study, was that prolonged periods out of employment were often viewed as

unproductive despite the fact that these women had supported the informal economy through their unpaid work in the home.

Results additionally suggest that many women return to work with renewed energy and vigour and are often keen to pursue a career at a time when men are beginning tire. One may recall the number of women in Strand A of the research who had recently changed career or life direction. Evidence was provided that supports the claim of Szinovacz (1991), that women often come to regard their middle-to-later life as a special period in which to pursue a career ambition once put on hold for childcare or eldercare. It would seem nonsensical therefore to continue to define women's potential in terms of age or presumed number of years until retirement.

Leaving aside the issue of gender for a moment, what was clearly evident from the study was the employers' need to pursue a policy of age positivism and to be seen to be 'age positive'. Many employers were reticent to identify an age at which they perhaps might consider a person to be 'too old' to employ. Of course, whilst this may be viewed entirely optimistically in that it may indicate a cultural shift in the ways in which age is viewed in the workplace, it may just as well indicate sensitivity to age-related issues in the run up to the Age Regulations (October, 2006), with employers careful not to respond, or to respond in neutral terms only. To put it succinctly, that the imminence of the legislation had perhaps made those responsible for recruitment a bit twitchy.

Previous research (e.g. McVitee et al, 2003) has identified a trend whereby some employers have used age neutral terminology to attribute a lack of older employees to factors beyond their control (i.e. an absence of older applicants). In the present study, the rhetorical discourse of 'equality' (in terms of EO policy) was often used by employers as a broad-brush response at interview possibly because it explained away or avoided the discussion of potentially discriminatory practice i.e., "*we don't discriminate on the grounds of age...that's covered by our EO policy*". Did this mean that the principle of [age] equality was merely incorporated into policy and ignored in practice? Suffice to say for now that the existence of a formal EO policy said very little about employers' covert attitudes towards older employees.

Perhaps the most obvious indication of discrimination in Strand B was the use of upper age limits in recruitment and selection, which were surprisingly wide in scope (ranging from 25 to 90 years of age), though most converged around age 60. There was also evidence of a gender difference in perspective, demonstrative in the words of one (male) employer who felt that women were 'too old' to employ at 40 while men were 'too old' at 50, some ten years later. Other age limits were imposed by external funders, notably Government, and served to reduce an employer's ability to include those aged over 21 on apprenticeships. This type of restriction is reflective of the conceptual relationship between the employment process and the human life cycle in that both are of the same expectation that one must achieve certain positions/standards by specific ages – take, for example, the association between (old) age and seniority: it is the notion that the Seven Ages of Man can (in part) be replicated in an employment context. Therefore, by implication it would be incomprehensible to conceive of an older person undertaking an apprenticeship. Yet in terms of creating a skilled workforce for the future such an assumption would, on the face of it, be deemed short-sighted and discriminatory.

Significant statistical relationships were found between whether employers operated age limits in recruitment and selection and the incidence of those who were suffering skill shortages and retention problems. It was noted that employers who were reluctant to employ people of a specific age were also those most likely to be finding it difficult to recruit and retain staff; they would rather compete for a smaller pool of younger job searchers than consider older ones. This result is consistent with what Taylor and Walker (1994) found over a decade ago (see p. 26). Thus it would be fair to say that in the intervening period, demographic pressure alone has not been enough to improve the employment prospects of older people. Whether or not the recently enacted Age Regulations (October, 2006) will have enough legislative bite to make a difference is yet to be seen. It will be some time before the consequences of the Regulations can be fully observed and interpreted.

More worrying for the moment was the fact that most of the employers in the present study who had applied age limits and restrictions were unable to identify valid reasons for the application of these restrictions (p. 173). Such practice not only has a damaging human cost but also imposes serious financial pressures upon employers considering the

financial cost of advertising, interviewing or buying in the services of recruitment agencies which makes the management of labour shortages a costly occurrence.

The second objective concerning employers was to examine the relationship between employers' attitudes towards, and practices affecting, older employees. On the issue of recruitment, employment practice largely followed traditional selection procedures in that a narrow range of criteria were being used to determine suitability, which often had the effect of rendering invisible one's experience and/or practical life based skills. The latter of which are not easily defined or pinned down and would include, for example, skills acquired in the running of a home.

Moreover, there was an inconsistency in terms of the recruitment of older people when compared to the (mostly) positive ways in which most employers viewed their own older staff. One may recall from the literature (p.26) that a 'known' older employee is often viewed favourably and considered effective within a firm, however this might not be reflected the firm's recruitment practices (Lyon and Pollard, 1997). Similarly, other UK research has shown that whilst employers' attitudes are influenced by widely held prejudice about age, the connection between them is too simplistic to account for how employers' attitudes are formed and how they seep into practice (Loretto and White, 2006). What also mattered were employers' experiences (or lack of) with older employees. Results here do go some way in supporting the claim that attitudes influenced by employers' experiences with older employees tend to be linked with positive practice while those reliant upon stereotypes are more often associated with less positive practice. The danger is that where older employees are not known to the employer, the employer's only recourse is to stereotype. As Loretto and White (2006) observed, it is too easy for employers to underestimate the talent and potential of older workers where such individuals are not present in their firm.

In taking the theory of the 'known' older employee a step further, the present study also considered the age of the employer as a possible factor. Given the above, it is perhaps unsurprising that the employer's own age was positively related to the attitudes held, in that, the older the employer, the more likely they were to rate older employees more favourably than younger ones. This may well be due to the employer here having first

hand experience of being older and thus an appreciation of the positive factors associated with age.

With regard to the actual nature of employers' attitudes towards older employees, there was evidence of both positive attributes such as, reliability, honesty, confidence, loyalty to the firm, better work ethic and superior interpersonal skills and some negative drawbacks for example ill health, resistance to change and poor computer skills. Both of which converged around the assumption that older peoples' skills are soft and qualitative in nature as opposed to dynamic and quantitative. There was evidence also of a hybrid dimension (Loretto and White, 2006), i.e., absenteeism which was viewed with ambivalence by some employers (see p. 192). These findings confirm what previous research has found (see, for example, Taylor and Walker, 1998). What was new however was the impact that various structural forces had on employers' attitudes and practices towards older employees. For instance, the advantage of close and personable communication, that the employers in smaller organisations had with individual staff, tended to culminate in a greater appreciation and treatment of older employees. Practically, as well, they had less corporate red tape to negotiate and were better able to adopt a flexible approach, overriding for example retirement policy, to retain a valuable member of staff.

Complex and hierarchical structures common to large organisations have previously been shown to preside over, if not create, much of the inequity between women and men and, more recently, the use of age as a mechanism for downsizing or redundancy. In the present study, large organisations were those least likely to be age positive (based upon qualitative data), despite the fact that many had stringent equal opportunity procedures in place. That is not to imply that such policy and procedure is not important; of course it is important. It would however be wrong to assume that policy is always translated into practice, for as the present study has shown, this is not uniformly the case. Rather, for policy to work effectively, it has to permeate into the consciousness of the individual employer and the culture and values of the organisation.

In addition to the size of the organisation, there was evidence of sectoral differences in employers' practices affecting older employees. The manufacturing/construction sector had the greatest problem in accommodating the older workforce. It was significantly less

likely than the other main sectors (service/retail and business) to provide flexible work arrangements, perhaps because as a predominantly male workforce, it had never had to do so in the past, at least not to the extent that they are currently demanded. There was evidence also of discrimination in respect to the age at which the sector considered a person to perhaps be too old to employ (58 years), some five years earlier than the average age(s) stated by the other main sectors. It follows logically that the manufacturing/construction sector was having the hardest time recruiting and retaining staff. Thus there would appear to be a strong economic imperative for the introduction of a more flexible and supportive approach to the employment of older workers in this sector.

The issue of increased life expectancy provides some explanation for the sectoral differences observed. For the first time in the history of work and employment, the manual employee will need to, and be expected to, work beyond the point at which he/she will be able to perform physically intensive work (Gilbert et al, 2005). Yet the moral compulsion to work ignores the impact of physical decline which is, without doubt, one of the most important challenges facing the manufacturing/construction sector of the economy. How can it reconcile the need of the individual to continue to work and the economic cost of the individual's physical decline? Most employers in the manufacturing/construction sector were using strategic methods in response (i.e. offering the option of early retirement) while a few had adopted a wait and see stance or were responding only when necessary, often on an individual needs basis.

As has been shown in previous chapters of this study, such tactical and cautious responses can seriously undermine the talent, knowledge and experience of the older individual. The result is that many older employees are pressurised to leave jobs they enjoy with little chance of re-employment. Surely then it is profitable in every sense for employers to provide strategies of adaptation, which would lessen the need for intensive physical labour whilst, at the same time, enable older employees to continue to contribute to the firm in valuable and meaningful ways. This would involve, for example, the option to move within an employee's field of expertise to a less physically demanding role, or change fields altogether i.e., from the factory to the office (though the latter may be met with reluctance on the part of the individual because it may mean the loss of a skill/craft) as well as the opportunity to apply to become a trainer, inspector or supervisor.

Of course the best way to tackle the situation is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. One may argue that employers should be compelled to provide remedial and preventative action to protect employees against a possible decline in physical health. For example, by taking proactive measures to prevent injury at work, providing periodic breaks and encouraging employees to take extra precautions and undertake physical exercise (perhaps offered on site) to help them make their bodies last. Yet it is important to stress at this juncture that research, past and present, has shown that although physical health will eventually decline with age, the majority of older people are still capable of performing physical work. Problems arise only where the work is physically demanding or intensive. It tends therefore to be job specific and, as such, should not in any way result in generalisations about the physical capabilities of older people as a group.

Returning to the issue of gender, whilst age positive practice seemed to operate within some organisations, especially amongst those with mixed age and gender workforces, traditional views of what constituted 'women's work' were upheld by a significant minority of employers (p. 188). Gender disadvantage in terms of promotion and training are still key issues within employment and, are now seemingly compounded by one's age. In addition to women being viewed as older in employment at younger ages than men, there was evidence of gender and age stereotyping regarding the types of jobs deemed more or less suitable/appropriate for older women and also with regards to women's motivation to work. The image conveyed was that of the archetypical older, married woman supplementing her husband's income with pin money earned from low level, part time work. Older women were felt to be more suited to shop or clerical work whereas older men were felt to be more suited to light physical work, e.g., caretaker.

One may recall the wealth of empirical work on employers' attitudes towards older employees (e.g. Taylor and Walker, 1998) yet such work, whilst important, has failed to generate an appreciation of gender as a fundamental basis of stratification. In the present study, employers' attitudes towards older employees were assessed by the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of stereotypes associated with older people (pp. 187). Employers were asked to specify their response in respect to women and men. Surprisingly, bearing in mind employers' tendency to provide neutral responses in respect to more general employment matters (i.e. age), here, perceived differences between the sexes were evident. Analysis of the data revealed that older women were viewed rather

more positively than men of the same age despite the fact that, as mentioned earlier, employers tended to feel that women were too old to recruit at younger ages than men.

It would therefore appear that employer' attitudes and practices diverged where the treatment of older women was concerned. The extent to which this is related to the current gender difference in the state pension age and the associated payback period on employment is unclear. It may also be related to the difference between male and female employment chronology (mentioned earlier), specifically that women are considered to be *behind* in relation to the male model of career progression. If this is indeed so, a particular problem for older women may well be due to the fact that they are viewed as later or older in respect to the dominant male model of career progression. That is not, however, to discount or downplay the role played by age-sex stereotyping and the sexualising of women's value in youth. In terms of the nature of the differences observed, employers tended to feel that women were more flexible in their approach to work, more reliable, more willing to take direction and less difficult to get on with than men of the same age; factors that are related to perceived feminine attributes - caring, empathy, docility, or elements of 'women's work' which are traditionally more softer in nature.

The present study also identified and explored models of best practice. The Age Regulations (October 2006) are not (conceptually) complicated; they make it unlawful to base any employment decision on an individual's age as opposed to their competence, skills and experience. This study has shown that there is potential for change: in terms of age neutral recruitment processes that enable applicants to be considered on ability and merit and not be exposed to subjective assessments of age and age-related assumptions of competency. Yet reluctance was identified on the part of some employers to change their pre-conceived ideas and notions about older applicants. Potential areas of discrimination in terms of age were identified as emanating from subjective views about the suitability and capability of older applicants, rather than following strict policy line. Some employers did identify age, or more widely held assumptions about age, as a factor in selection and there was evidence that these were being played out in the recruitment process.

Yet examples of good practice were to be found within the study. Some innovative methods of recruitment were being used which placed less emphasis on the application form through the use of, for example, telephone interview, role play in a work situation as well as the development of age neutral application forms. Under the new legislation, adverts seeking 'young, dynamic people' will⁴ be discriminatory (Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006). Yet there was scepticism on the part of the over 50s themselves [see Strand A of the research] about the supposed neutrality of a form that removed one's date of birth from the application form. This, it was felt, paid lip service to the notion of equality. Rather, emphasis should be placed on the skills and competencies that are pertinent to the application and not to chronological based information, which is current practice and used heavily in short-listing procedures.

Those employers that had adopted a more flexible approach, not only in working hours but also in terms of retirement (i.e. offering partial and gradual retirement) were, it was found, able to draw benefits for both themselves and their employees. These employers reported fewer problems with regards to skill shortages and retention difficulties as opposed to other employers. In addition, the presence of a mixed age workforce was shown to have beneficial effects in terms of creating a more positive and pleasant working environment for all, thus going some way in challenging wider cultural stereotypes that permeate workplace culture. Results suggested that a move away from the restrictions of the traditional ways of working towards more creative and adaptable ways may be one way in which older employees can be attracted back to the labour market, if they so wish. It is important to recognise that personal choice is a factor in taking on new roles in paid employment and will most likely be based upon levels of income, autonomy and work satisfaction; these being important criterion for those seeking to re-enter the workforce or change employment in middle-to-later life.

Training was a major issue for older employees, yet employers were doing very little to help their older employees keep pace with technical change and other changes in the workplace. This created a paradox; it is unreasonable to expect older employees to learn and to cope effectively with change, if training is not provided. As Taylor and Walker (1994) first observed, a self-fulfilling prophecy emerges when no opportunities for

⁴ It was not unlawful at the time of the data collection.

training are present. Moreover, where older employees have internalised ageist stereotypes in the workplace, they can compound their own situation by not putting themselves forward for training, by deselecting themselves or shying away from it altogether. The research found that far too often older employees were either not considered for training or promotion, or did not consider it was worth their while even applying.

In addition, the argument put forward by some employers that the payback period on investment in training is reduced in respect to older workers is somewhat flawed. Previous research (Magd, 2003) has revealed a trend whereby younger employees tend to move from job to job to add experience to their career portfolio while, as was shown in the present study, older employees tend to remain with the same employer thereby negating the argument of the payback period. Considered in this way, training older employees may afford employers more return on their investment. Moreover, it is not simply a question of providing training for older employees, rather, goals have to be seen to be achievable, otherwise as it was found here, too many with talent and experience may just opt to tread water when they still feel, and still do, have a lot to offer.

Methods of observable good practice included allowing employees to identify skill shortages which they themselves would like to address, so rather than offer a blanket package of training they could perhaps put together a bespoke training package to suit their own and their organisations' needs. The need to access opportunities for lifelong learning by engaging in formal and informal education was also identified. An example of best practice in this area was provided by an employer in the study whose firm provided what can only be described as an, 'education block' on site to be accessed by employees at break times, lunch times and at weekends, if they so wished. The block provided courses of formal and informal content and was run independently of the employer which saved any embarrassment felt on the part of the employee in accessing courses of a basic level. Moreover, it was flexible enough to allow individuals to work at their own pace and to their own time frame. The block was part of the firm's provision of welfare services (i.e. canteens, bars and sports facilities) which had the effect of creating a town or community in its own right. Whilst it is acknowledged that the provision of such services is well in excess of most employers, certain elements of the model can be replicated, especially that to do with the freedom of employees to identify their own skill

shortages and negotiate with their employer a training/education package to suit their individual needs.

To sum up, if employers recognise diversity and its subsequent needs across other axes such as race, gender and disability, it would seem only right that they should do the same for age. There are considerable challenges ahead in tackling prejudice so deeply entrenched in our society and it is by no means easy to say how this might be achieved or how attitudes should change. Nevertheless, the subtleties of the research and the observation of best practice within different types of organisations and its subsequent impact has enabled the researcher to identify possible ways forward, which may be innovative and politically challenging. To begin with, it was noted that levels of employee satisfaction were highest when democratic forms of management and leadership were in place. Models of best practice included, for example, clear and open lines of communication and the impression that such dialogue was actually meaningful.

Put simply, that management listened and acted upon the concerns of its employees. This is, of course, the case for both women and men and for all age groups, yet in the context of new Age Regulations (October 2006), employers who are willing to offer such open communication structures would, for many of the reasons outlined above, be much better placed to achieve their objectives. It was also the case that where employers had mixed age workforces in place, there was greater interaction and exchange between employees and thus a more inclusive workplace environment. After all, one must bear in mind that ageism is, of course, an intergenerational phenomenon and as such can affect anyone of any age - though, certain groups have been identified as especially vulnerable (i.e. older and younger people). Yet we, as a society, continue to pit young against old, and fight stereotypes with stereotypes (Duncan, 2003). For example, where older people are assumed to have positive attributes (loyalty, maturity, commitment) these are often at the expense of younger people who are felt to be lacking and visa versa. In the words of Loretto and White (2006 p. 327) we need to "*get people to consider age without recourse to comparison*".

Within Strand B (the employers), there were, however, certain limitations relating to the usual methodological issues associated with self-reports in survey research and with collecting attitudinal data. Doubts over the value of attitudinal data are consistently raised by academics (see Duncan, 2003). For example, any methodological approach which assesses employers' attitudes towards older employees through the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of stereotypes associated with older people may, in fact, be searching for proof of ageism, rather than determining whether it is actually there. Moreover, one has to bear in mind that asking employers to make comparisons between younger and older people may tell us very little about employers' general attitudes towards either group: findings that show older employees to be less adaptable than younger ones can only be read and interpreted within that context; it may not mean that older employees are not adaptable. It may be argued therefore that any empirical work that treats older employees as a uniform group is itself contributing to the root cause of discrimination. In view of this, the research context was described as much as was possible in neutral terms (the same approach was taken by Loretto and White, 2006). For example, employers were asked: 'At what age might a person become an *older worker*', rather than the researcher predefining or categorising this status. Another potential limitation concerned the extent to which we are able to generalise from the findings based as they are, on a sample of 81 employers. However, every effort was made to ensure the equal representation of employers in terms of sector, region, industry and size of organisation. Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations, this study has thrown much needed light on the relationship between employers' attitudes and practices, and on the employment experiences of older employees and the differences between groups of employees (defined by gender, employment sector etc).

Significantly, the results of the study mirror much of what was found in the latest research report by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce (CROW), especially that to do with the concept of the 'known older employee' (where older employees are not known to the employer, the employer's main recourse is to stereotype), the issue of firm size in relation to EO policy (p. 160) and employers' response to a decline in the physical health of older workers (usually a 'wait and see' stance, see p. 183). The report (McNair et al, 2007), focused on employers' responses to an ageing workforce and was published just after the field work for the present study had been completed. The aim of the report was to pick up where earlier research by CROW (Metcalf and Meadows, 2006)

had left off (see p. 36 for detail of what Metcalf and Meadows found). As with the present study, McNair et al (2007) found that employers' attitudes towards 'older' workers were more positive than had previously been found.

This, together with evidence that employer awareness of the Age Regulations had improved since the Metcalf and Meadows (2006) study, confirms the point made earlier, namely, that employers are sensitive to issues of age discrimination at this particular point in time. Viewed optimistically, this may indicate a major change in the ways in which age is viewed in the workplace. However, as was found in the present study, a disturbing by-product of this shift in attitude is an increase in employers' prejudice towards younger workers – contrary to previous research most employers said they would prefer to employ an older person to a younger one. This, along with results from the present study, suggest that employers still associate age discrimination with older people rather than as an issue that can affect anyone of any age. Such misinterpretation will need to be addressed by policy makers if we are to promote a more inclusive workplace culture.

Charter

The main intention of this study has been to report through the eyes of older people, their experiences and perceptions of employment and the barriers they face in entering and progressing in the workplace. It is important now to place these experiences and perceptions into a policy context. It is no coincidence that New Labour's concern over age discrimination has come at a politically expedient time; a time when the effects of an ageing population are beginning to bite. It is also of interest that Government's legislative response to ageism is motivationally no different to previous voluntary responses in the sense that it too is driven by economic and welfare concerns. Regardless of the motivation however it is hoped that legislative action will prove more effective than previous action aimed at persuading employers to 'rediscover' the value of older workers. Moreover, that the legislation will effect a transformation in workplace culture, placing age on an equal footing with discrimination on such grounds as race and sex. Such intervention may also have the long term effect of supporting older age groups who have consistently been undervalued and often discarded by employers because of their age. Of

course, much will depend upon the way the legislation is framed and how it is interpreted by employers and wider society. At this point, it is too early to comment. Having said that, the most obvious explanation for the discrimination reported in the study, was the fact that when the data was collected, ageism was still not unlawful.

Nevertheless some important policy implications can be drawn from the results. First, there is a strong case to be made for the Government's favoured, all-inclusive approach to the Age Regulations (October 2006) with blanket coverage irrespective of age. This falls in line with the principle of equality and follows the same format as other discrimination legislation (i.e. sex, race). Such an approach will help to foster the notion that ageism is a phenomenon that can affect us all. It should also allow scope to cover the diverse patterns of ageism (e.g. the double jeopardy of age and gender) though, at present, the issue of multiple disadvantage is not covered by the legislation. The advantage, however, of affording legislative coverage to older employees only, is that it provides the most protection to those believed to be the most seriously affected. The disadvantage is that it may do so at the expense of other employees (i.e. younger age groups) and foster resentment; the view that older people have a 'better deal' (Loretto et al, 2004). Therefore, a compromise would be to afford special focus to older employees for example increase the representation of older people in areas where they are currently under-represented⁵.

Second, it is important that the legislation is sensitive enough to respond appropriately to the psychological consequences of ageism for the individual, and be committed to the notions of empowerment and voice. Further research is needed to see whether this has happened.

Third, community based support should be incorporated into policy attempts to increase the labour market participation of older people. It was not part of the remit of the ESF research to consider state-sponsored employment schemes (i.e. New Deal 50 plus). However, results do suggest that older unemployed people require more help than these

⁵ An example of where such 'positive action' has been incorporated into the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations is in the case of training – employers are allowed to run training programmes targeted at those who are under-represented in a particular activity. For example, IT training concentrating on the over 60s (TAEN, 2006).

schemes can provide and that a communitarian approach may represent an effective and alternative support mechanism. Meadows (2003 p. 95), in his research on lone parents argued, "*community based interventions are not the option for all lone parents but can be an effective staging post for those on the road to employment*". The same can be said in respect to unemployed older people. The over 50s in this study faced similar problems to the lone parents in Meadows' (2003) study in terms of accessing adequate employment. This was not only due to structural barriers but also to a lack of skills, relevant employment experience and issues of social exclusion. Results indicate that the majority of older unemployed people do want to return to work at some point but feel constrained by a lack of self confidence and an expectation that they are perhaps 'too old' for continued work. By providing community-based support that is flexible, sensitive and responsive to individual needs an appropriate framework may well be established which would allow older unemployed people to realise their economic potential. It is important, however, that such initiatives provide the kind of skills, training and support which are seen as relevant by those whom they wish to attract. Older people are not just prepared to accept inadequate, temporary and insecure employment, nor should they be expected to do so.

Much of the discrimination observed today is at least, in part, a by-product of the development of an advanced capitalist society which has weakened and undermined the principles of socialism and democracy once dominant in the world of work (Glover and Branine, 2006). The decline of industry, the rapid pace of technological development and the rise of a youth culture have led to the notion that "*new is good, old is bad*" (Herriot, 2006 p. 14). In this context, change, efficiency and competition have become popular maxims within the economy. The resultant socio-economic environment is one in which work has become a less certain affair, coupled with a more unequal, social division of labour. The employer's pursuit of profit in such circumstances is resolute and predatory and in accordance with crude economic laws (Glover and Branine, 2006) that value immediate results, observe hard and fast rules and take employee loyalty for granted. Against this background, is the employer's neglect of equality, especially concerning issues of age.

The suggestions for employment policy and practice that stem from the research are outlined below. It is acknowledged that these suggestions represent more of a 'wish list' than a framework for policy intervention. However, the luxury of being a researcher as opposed to a policy maker is that one is able to put forward a vision based upon one's research and leave it to others to deal with the practical detail of implementation.

1. There is an urgent need for a joined up policy approach to the problem of age discrimination. Results indicate that ageism does not stop at the office door but is a social phenomenon just as much as it is a problem in work and employment. Therefore, a case should be made for extending legislative power to other realms and spheres of society thereby presenting a united front and encouraging everyone to think more positively about age.
2. Whilst it should now be the case (post 2006 legislation) that age is incorporated into an employers' Equal Opportunity statement or policy, employers should nevertheless be doing more to instigate a major cultural change in the workplace. The ESF study showed that many employers were ill-prepared for the forthcoming (at the time) Age Regulations and there was little indication that they would move beyond the requirements of the Regulations.
3. Recruitment should seek out the best talent pool for the job. All decisions should be based upon the suitability of the applicant and upon an age neutral set of criteria. Applicants for employment should also receive feedback to identify at what stage of the recruitment process they reached and why they went no further. It is acknowledged that this would attract a cost and time element for Personnel Departments. However, methods for standardising feedback forms should be pursued and piloted. Feedback would help older unemployed people improve their performance and provide them with a constructive reason why they were not chosen, rather than leave them with a sense that they are perhaps 'too old' for work.
4. The double jeopardy of age and gender discrimination is frequently expressed in the form of ageist and sexist stereotypes that are often internalised by women, preventing them from reaching their full potential. Adopting a proactive approach to this problem would involve the implementation of regular age and gender audits to ensure that career

progression is age neutral and to increase the representation of older women in areas where they are currently under-represented.

5. There is an urgent need to dispel popular myths about the types of jobs that older people are more capable of and suited to. The recruitment of older people into all types of occupations and positions within a company should be actively pursued, not just to 'fill in' jobs in areas of skill shortages. Age restrictions on specific roles and tasks need to be removed, unless absolutely necessary, to ensure equality of opportunity and to overcome and counteract any preconceptions on the part of the employer that people of a '**certain age**' are incapable of performing particular roles/tasks.

6. There should be more opportunity for intergenerational relationships to develop in the workplace and to reduce the isolation and segregation of particular age groups, as this will have positive economic and social consequences (for example, challenging the notion that older workers should step aside for younger ones).

7. Employers should be compelled to provide work environments suited to maintaining the health and well being of their workforces. The decline in the physical health of older employees is an important issue on the horizon. As people are encouraged to work past traditional SPAs, employers will need policies in place to aid the transition. For those in manual labour sectors, this will involve creative and forward thinking approaches to tackling the ageing of the workforce.

8. Flexibility in work patterns has been identified as a benefit appreciated by all employees and should be provided regardless of the level, position or type of job undertaken. This is especially important in the male dominated workplace in which the traditional pattern of full and continuous employment continues to predominate. Flexible work arrangements must be monitored to ensure that they are available to all who need them and that they are not age or gender biased. Elder care is an increasingly important issue and male employees are very likely to be affected.

9. Equality of opportunity for career development and progression must be transparent and seen to be achievable by all, regardless of age. There should also be a negotiation of needs and goals for training between the employer and the employee. Employers should provide detailed information on training opportunities available and actively encourage their employees to take part, regardless of their age, background and perceived level of academic ability. In line with the above, age diversity should form part of a company's equal opportunities training and should be mandatory for every employee, not just for those involved with recruitment and selection. Given that employers are to be held liable for the actions of their employees (Age Regulations, October 2006) the development of good practice in this area will avoid stiff penalties to come as well as expand the pool of available talent.

10. An age diversity champion should be appointed from the workforce to advise staff on their rights and to ensure that company diversity and equality obligations are being met. Formal written policies on age should provide guidance for managers on good practice across the employment life-cycle, from entry to exit. Managers should be compelled to learn more about age discrimination and take part in diversity training both within and outside of the company.

11. For those still in the workplace the recent assertion by Government that older people will have to work well into their 60s to ensure a comfortable retirement may be a bitter pill to swallow. Flexible and negotiated retirement is valued by both employers and employees as a way of either easing into retirement or continuing to work in later life. The development of flexible retirement provision would also aid and support the passing on of skills and corporate memory from older employees as well as provide a buffer zone for employers when seeking to recruit new staff.

12. Under the terms of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (October 2006) employees can request to continue to work for longer than the usual retirement age. The legislation requires that employees approaching this age must be made aware of their rights on this issue in sufficient time to request to remain in employment, if they so wish. We would urge employers to go further than this - it is important that younger employees be educated and made aware of the policies that will affect them in the future (especially those to do with retirement) in order to prepare them for this time and, more importantly,

in the longer term, help to ensure that 'old age' is not an alien concept but is an issue that affects us all. In concurrence with results from the ESF study, much of the discrimination observed today is the result of confusion, ignorance and denial. Employers need to adopt a broader and holistic approach to the Age Management of their workforces.

13. In the case of redundancy, whilst some employers do help their employees to become job ready and inform them of their rights to seek work in the redundancy notice period, such practices are not widespread. Furthermore, due to economies of scale, it may be difficult for smaller companies to provide the necessary practical information and advice regarding such matters. There are however good examples within the local community of redundancy support groups where partnerships between employers and such groups can ease the redundancy process.

14. Overcoming the barriers facing unemployed older people requires an appreciation of the psychological hurdles of a lack of confidence and low self-esteem. Legislation may not be enough to help this vulnerable group; they require sensitive information, advice and guidance (IAG). Women, especially, face a myriad of barriers, including, a lack of currency in job specific skills and recent paid employment experience. It is important, therefore, that the value of skills that may be acquired through, for example, unpaid work in the home is recognised by employers and space made on the job application form to furnish such information.

There is a huge potential for change in the culture of work by examining and implementing systems that provide flexibility and incorporating areas such as job re-design, certainty of work and accessible return-to-work provision, thereby extending greater choices to workers of all ages. This would involve re-defining the notion of apprenticeship (i.e. the association of apprenticeship with youth), incorporating the prevention of workplace injury and working towards the creation of a more pleasant, cooperative and democratic workplace environment. In respect to the latter, the intention here is not to undermine or weaken the value of change, efficiency and competition but to allow these principles to develop inside a more supportive and equitable workplace culture. This would entail, as Walker (1997 p. 112) first suggested, a concerted effort to "*deconstruct age at the workplace*" and is not to be confused with the concept of

agelessness nor is it a quest for the end of old age. Rather it is about treating age as a flexible concept and one that is not inexorably tied to the latter part of the life course.

It would involve us thinking about age in relation to one's entire career. It would mean more research into how we (biologically and psychologically) age and how society views age. It would mean employers accepting that age can take a more circular than linear route. Whilst some people's employment chronology will undoubtedly follow a traditional pattern, others will be disrupted through choice or necessity or both at different times in the work history (Glover and Branine, 1997). As the ESF study demonstrated, it is not uncommon for people to start over or change career in their mid to later years. It would be wise, therefore, to develop a holistic human resource strategy on age that could be moulded and shaped in response to individual's particular needs. The key is to develop preventative (training employees at every age and at every stage in employment) and remedial (training older employees lacking specific skills) strategies (Walker, 1997). Greater focus, however, must be given to the development of a preventative strategy aimed at avoiding the occurrence of discrimination in the first place.

What is described here is very similar to the Finnish concept of Work Ability (see, Ilmarinen and Tuomi, 2004) whereby Age Management involves not only improving the culture of the workplace (i.e. making it age-friendly) but also the work itself (in terms of work demands, etc) so that there is a balance between the two (work and people). Work Ability recognises that there are a number of components or dimensions to one's well being at work. These include structural (legislation, infrastructure, policy) and personal or outside of work factors (family support). According to Ilmarinen and Tuomi, (2004) the key to longer, healthier and happier working lives is dependent upon the work ability of the individual – that is, the ability of the individual to undertake the demands of work in a healthy (both mentally and physically) and safe way. For this to occur, the employer must work with the employee to ensure and support work ability at all ages. Hence the contemporary problem of early exit; the inability of managers (particularly in manual labour sectors) to address workforce ageing; inhospitable workplace environments; unreasonable demands of work; and a lack of communication between employer and employee are counter to the principles of Work Ability. Instead, a range of measures must be in place in order to ensure and implement better work practices and allow

individuals to perform the job to their optimum ability at every stage of the working life (Ilmarinen and Tuomi, 2004).

Concluding Remarks

Ageism is an invisible barrier. It is invisible because it is tolerated or downplayed or viewed as a natural or normal experience. For instance the view that older people should step aside for younger people; older women are less interesting than younger women and the internalisation of stereotypical beliefs brought about by the subtle workings of ageism in interaction with sexism. This invisibility is undoubtedly the most dangerous aspect of the phenomenon. Indeed, it is only as employees reach a 'certain age' that the issue of ageism becomes just as important as racism and sexism. How can we change this position? By deconstructing age at the workplace, we can start to move away from the crude focus on 'old' age to start to think about age in respect to younger age groups and the entire life course. This would mark a significant sea-change in workplace culture and may even act as a precursor to tackling ageism in wider society.

It is too easy to end with the statement, attitudes must change. It is probably more appropriate to say that the answer lies not in... *"the power of the law to change social/personal attitudes but its power to limit the excesses of discriminatory behaviour and this in itself may be an important dimension of subsequent change in attitudes"* (Lyon and Pollard, 1997, p.34).

Employers need to take the lead here - if the structures of our society are not seen to have been changed, the danger is that ageism will continue to be swept aside by a younger generation for whom it fails to frighten, only becoming significant as that generation comes face to face with old age and find themselves no longer in a position to evoke change.

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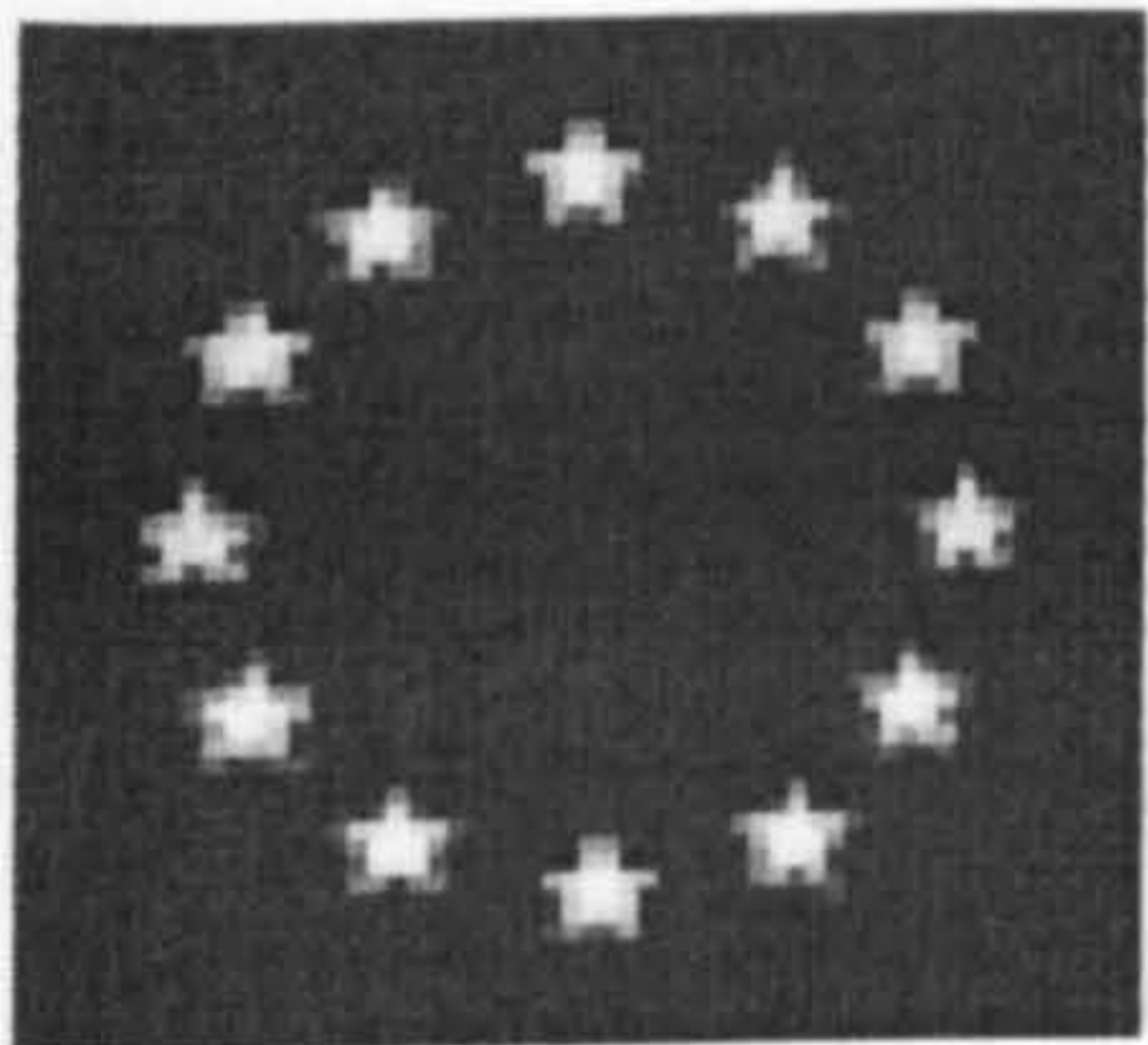
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EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

Gender Discrimination
and Ageist Perceptions

ESF Objective 3
Research Project



Dear Sir or Madam,

Gender Discrimination and Ageist Perceptions (GDAP) Research Project

I would like to inform you of a new and innovative research project by Liverpool John Moores University, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). The GDAP project will collect information from individuals over the age of 50 on their experiences either of work or following exit from work. To do this we are asking people of this age group to complete the enclosed questionnaire. The questionnaire should take no longer than ten minutes to complete and you will only need to answer those questions that are applicable to you. Once completed, the questionnaire should be returned to the university in the pre-paid envelope provided. It does not matter whether you are employed, unemployed or happily retired, or whether you have experienced age discrimination or not, the aim is to collect a wide spread of experiences. Your participation is therefore very important.

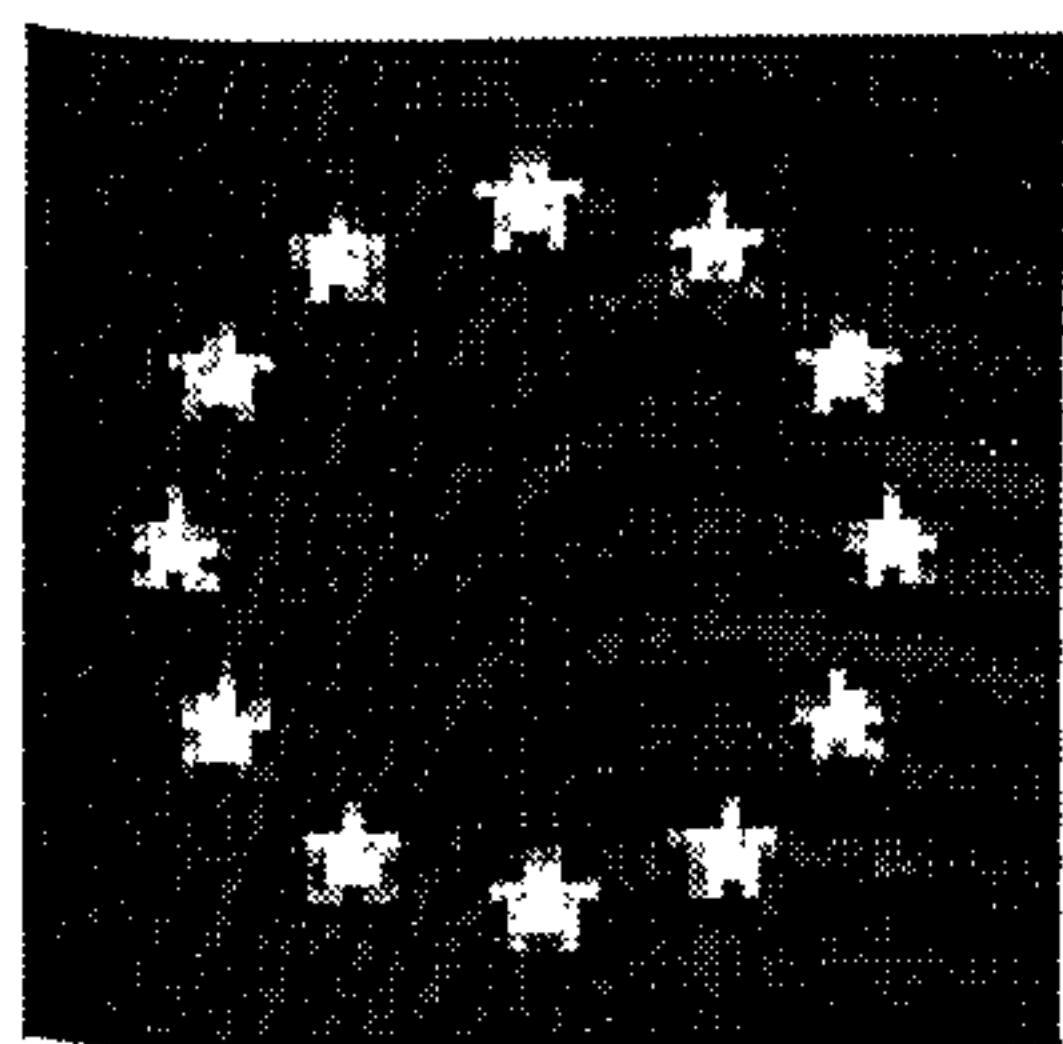
It is hoped that the findings of this research project will provide a greater understanding of the potential barriers facing people of this age group, and how practices of recruitment and engagement can be improved. By taking part in this research you will be able to inform the production of best practice to help combat discrimination on the grounds of age. **However, I must stress that any information you provide will not be identifiable as coming from you and will be used solely for the purpose of this research.**

If you require more information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address below. Regular up-dates on the progress of the research in the form of quarterly newsletters can also be requested from this address or via the project's website at <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/olg/gdap/>. Thank you in anticipation of your assistance in this important work.

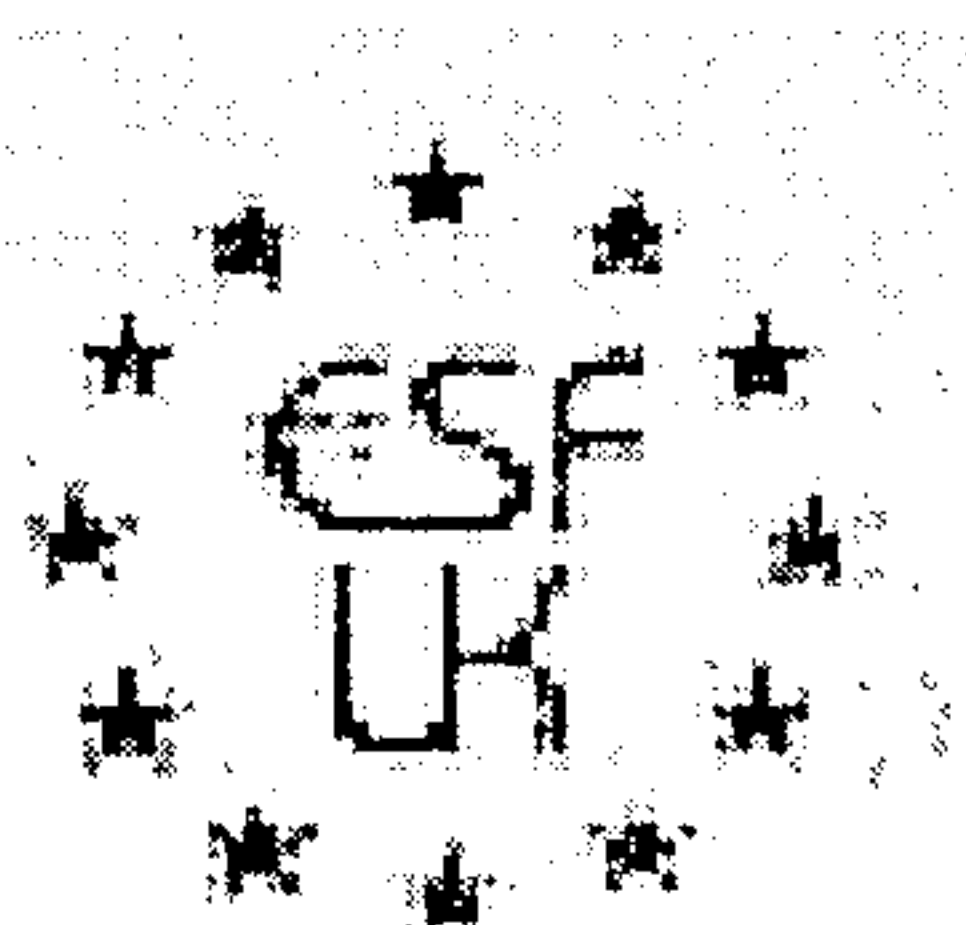
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EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund



Gender Discrimination
and Ageist Perceptions
ESF Objective 3
Research Project



Dear Sir or Madam,

Liverpool John Moores University is carrying out a study to investigate opportunities in employment and Higher Education for men and women aged 50 plus. To do this we are asking people of this age group to complete the enclosed questionnaire. The questionnaire should take no longer than ten minutes to complete and should be returned to the university in the envelope provided. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide a greater understanding of the barriers facing people of this age group when accessing and securing employment, and/or seeking new opportunities in the workplace or in Higher Education. Your participation is therefore very important.

The study is supported and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), and is directed by Dr Diane Grant of Liverpool John Moores University. The information provided will be used to compile a report for ESF that will inform employers and policy makers at all levels. It is hoped that the findings of this report will lead to a model of best practice that will encourage employers and H.E institutions to examine their policies and practices in an effort to widen participation for people of this age group. The findings may also be used in future academic papers. **However, I must stress that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence, and will be used solely for the purpose of this study.**

If you require more information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address below. Regular up-dates on the progress of the research in the form of quarterly newsletters can also be requested from this address or via our web-site at <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/olf/gdap/>. Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Helen Walker, Research Assistant

Liverpool John Moores University
I M Marsh Campus
Barkhill Road
Aigburth
Liverpool
L17 6BD

0151 231 5308

Please complete all the questions, either by ticking the boxes or writing an answer when required. All the information that you provide will be treated as confidential and will only be used by persons involved in this study.

SECTION ONE: Background

1. Are you male or female?

Male [] Female []

2. How old are you?

50-54 []
55-59 []
60-64 []
65+ []

3. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

White European []
White other (e.g. American) []
Black Caribbean []
Black African []
Black other []
Indian []
Pakistani []
Bangladeshi []
Chinese []
Other, please state _____

4. What best describes your current status?

Single []
Married/living with a partner []
Separated []
Divorced []
Widowed []

5. If you are married or living with a partner, is your spouse/partner (please tick one box only):

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Employed full-time | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Employed part-time | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Employed voluntary | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Self-employed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unemployed but looking for work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Looking after family or home | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Permanently sick/disabled | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Retired | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Do you have any children?

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Please answer question 7 |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Please skip to question 8 |

7. How old were you when you had your first child? Please answer this question whether you are male or female.

_____ Years

8. How do you support yourself? Please tick all that apply.

Earned income:

- | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Full-time | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Part-time | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Partner's earned income:

- | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Full-time | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Part-time | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Private/occupational pension | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Partner's private/occupational pension | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Financial savings | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Interest on assets | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Income support | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Unemployment benefit | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Redundancy payment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Partner's redundancy payment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Student loan | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Student grant | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SECTION TWO: EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Note: not including your current studies

9. What type of school did you attend?

- Grammar

[]
- Secondary Modern

[]
- Comprehensive

[]
- Private

[]
- Other

[] please state_____

10. At what age did you complete your initial period of full-time education (school, college university or other)? Please state.

_____Years

11. Thinking of your initial period of full-time education, what qualification(s) did you gain? Please tick all that apply.

- None

[]
- GCE/ GCSE

[]
- O' Level/ A' Level

[]
- RSA or equivalent

[]
- Professional

[]
- Trade

[]
- Further Education (e.g. BTEC, Access, HND, other)

[]
- Degree or higher

[]
- Other

[] please state_____

12. Since your initial period of full-time education, have you returned to study? (not including any current studies)

- Yes :
- No

[] please go to Section Three
- Full-time

[]
- Part-time

[]
- Both full-time and part-time

[]

13. At what age did you return?

_____Years

14. What was your main motivation for study? Please tick one box only.
- To acquire qualifications needed for progression/re-establishment in existing career []
 - To acquire qualifications for a change of career []
 - To study in a non-job related area []

15. What qualification(s) did you gain on your return? Please tick all that apply.
- None []
 - GCE/ GCSE []
 - O' Level/ A' Level []
 - RSA or equivalent []
 - Professional []
 - Trade []
 - Further education (e.g. BTEC, Access, HND, other) []
 - Degree or higher []
 - Other []please state_____

SECTION THREE: EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Note: not including your current employment

16. At what age did you first start work?
- _____Years
17. What main area of work have you been involved in since leaving school? Please tick one box that best describes your previous employment.
- Professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers) []
 - Managerial and lower professional (e.g. managers, teachers) []
 - Non-manual skilled (e.g. office workers) []
 - Manual skilled (e.g. bricklayers and coal miners) []
 - Semi-skilled (e.g. postal workers) []
 - Unskilled (e.g. porters and refuse collectors) []
 - Long term unemployed []
 - Never worked []

18. Looking back at your employment history, have you worked:
- Full-time only []
 - Part-time only []
 - More full-time than part-time hours []
 - More part-time than full time hours []

19. Thinking of your last job, (not your current job) to what extent do you agree that it was:
Please tick inside box

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Stressful | | | | | |
| Competitive | | | | | |
| Demanding | | | | | |

20. Looking back at your employment history, have you ever experienced (please tick all that apply):

- Age discrimination because you were too young []
- Age discrimination because you were too old []
- Gender discrimination []
- Sexual harassment []
- Bullying at work []
- Other negative treatment []

21. If you have experienced one or more of the above, did your experience(s) take place before or after the Equal Opportunities Commission was launched (1975)?

- | | Before | After |
|---|--------|-------|
| Age discrimination because you were too young | [] | [] |
| Age discrimination because you were too old | [] | [] |
| Gender discrimination | [] | [] |
| Sexual harassment | [] | [] |
| Bullying at work | [] | [] |
| Other negative treatment | [] | [] |

22. Have there been periods in your life when you have been without paid employment?

- Yes []
- No [] please go to Section Four

23. For what reason(s) were you without paid employment? Please tick all that apply.

- Unemployment []
- Redundancy [] please answer question 24
- Sickness/disability []
- Looking after family/caring for a relative []
- Child rearing []
- Maternity leave []
- Full-time education []
- Part-time education []
- Other, please state _____

24. Have you experienced redundancy between the ages of 50-65?

- Yes: No []
- Voluntary []
- Compulsory []
- Prefer not to say []

SECTION FOUR: YOUR PRESENT SITUATION

25. Are you currently, (please one box only)

- Self-employed []
- Employed full-time []
- Employed part-time [] please answer question 26
- Employed voluntary []
- Unemployed []
- Looking after family/home []
- Caring for children /grandchildren []
- Caring for parents []
- Permanently sick/disabled []
- Retired []
- Full-time education []
- Part-time education []

26. For what reason do you work part-time hours? Please state. If this does not apply to you, please go to question 27.

27. If not already in paid employment, would you welcome the opportunity to return to work?
If this does not apply to you, please go to question 29.

Yes ☐ No ☐ please go to question 29

28. What factor(s) are holding you back? Please tick all that apply.

- Lack of self-confidence ☐
- Lack of qualification ☐
- Depression ☐
- Ill health ☐
- Not being able to find work ☐
- Family commitments ☐
- Competition from younger people ☐
- Adjustment to new job ☐
- 'Age' as discrimination ☐
- 'Age' as a feeling of being 'too old' to start work ☐
- Other ☐ please state _____

29. If not already enrolled in some form of H.E. course, would you welcome the opportunity to study at Higher Education level? If this does not apply to you, please go to section five.

Yes ☐ No ☐ please go to section five

30. What factor(s) are holding you back? Please tick all that apply.

- Lack of self-confidence ☐
- Financial costs incurred ☐
- Depression ☐
- Ill health ☐
- Lack of formal qualifications ☐
- Adjustment to study ☐
- Family commitments ☐
- Lack of choice ☐
- Competition from younger people ☐
- 'Age' as discrimination ☐
- 'Age' as a feeling of being 'too old' for study ☐
- Other ☐ please state _____

SECTION FIVE: CURRENT EDUCATION

Note: if not currently studying, please go to section six

31. If you have experienced redundancy between the ages of 50-65, how long after redundancy did you consider study? If this does not apply to you, please go to question 32.

- Straight away []
- Less than six months []
- More than six months but less than a year []
- More than a year but less than two years []
- If more than two years, please state the approximate number of years [] _____

32. What is the title of your course (e.g. BA Honours Consumer Studies)? Please state.

33. Your course, is it ?:

- Full-time []
- Part-time []

34. What type of educational institution do you attend? Please tick one box

- Community based programmes (libraries, community centres, church halls) []
- College of Further Education []
- College of Higher Education []
- University []
- Open University []
- Other, please state _____ []

35. How is your course funded?

- Student loan []
- Student grant []
- Scholarship []
- Hardship fund []
- Personal savings []
- Other [] please state _____

36. What factor(s) prompted you to consider study? Please tick all that apply

- Redundancy

[]
- Retirement

[]
- Unemployment

[]
- Divorce

[]
- Bereavement

[]
- Ill health/disability

[]
- Persuasion from family/friends

[]

37. What was your external motivation for study? Please tick the one box that best describes your main motivation.

- To acquire qualifications needed for progression/re-establishment in existing career

[]
- To acquire qualifications for a change of career

[]
- To study in a non-job related area

[]

38. How important are the following as motivations for your decision to study? Please indicate your agreement by placing a tick inside the appropriate box at the end of each item.
Please be open and honest in your response.

| | Very important | Important | Neither important or unimportant | Unimportant | Very unimportant |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Interest in the subject area | | | | | |
| Social contact | | | | | |
| Enjoyment of learning | | | | | |
| Status from qualification | | | | | |
| Time for myself | | | | | |
| Take on new challenges | | | | | |
| Contribution to society | | | | | |

39. Have there been constraints which impact on your studies? Please tick all that apply

- Financial costs incurred

[]
- Lack of self-confidence

[]
- Demands of study

[]
- Combing study with other commitments

[]
- Lack of choice

[]
- Lack of support from family/friends

[]
- 'Age' as discrimination

[]
- 'Age' as a feeling of being 'too old' for study

[]
- Other

[]Please state_____

40. Please indicate your agreement to the following statements by placing a tick inside the appropriate box : Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither agree not disagree (N), Disagree (D), Strongly disagree (SD). Please be open and honest in your response.

| | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| I believe I receive less support from tutors because of my age | | | | | |
| I believe I receive less support from fellow students because of my age | | | | | |
| I find adjustment to study more difficult because of my age | | | | | |
| I have less confidence in my ability to learn because of my age | | | | | |
| I find combining study with other commitments more difficult because of my age | | | | | |

41. In your opinion, are qualifications more important for career development now, than when you left school?

Yes [] No [] About the same []

42. In your opinion, what are the advantages to study after middle age? Please state

43. In your opinion what are the disadvantages to study after middle age? Please state

44. After completing your course, would you like to continue with your studies?

Yes [] No [] Unsure []

Section Six: Current Employment

If not in paid employment, please go to section seven

45. If you have experienced redundancy between the ages of 50-65, how long after redundancy did you consider work? If this does not apply to you, please go to question 46.

- Straight away []
- Less than six months []
- More than six months but less than a year []
- More than a year but less than two years []
- If more than two years, please state the approximate number of years_____

46. What best describes your current area of employment?

- Professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers) []
- Managerial and lower professional (e.g. managers, teachers) []
- Non-manual skilled (e.g. office workers) []
- Manual skilled (e.g. bricklayers and coal miners) []
- Semi-skilled (e.g. postal workers) []
- Unskilled (e.g. porters and refuse collectors) []

47. What hours do you work?

- Full-time []
- Part-time []
- Other, please state_____ []

48. How important are the following as motivations for your decision to work? Please indicate your agreement by ticking the appropriate box at the end of each item. Please be open and honest in your response.

| | Very important | Important | Neither important or unimportant | Unimportant | Very unimportant |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Really need the money | | | | | |
| Afford extra things | | | | | |
| Enjoyment of work | | | | | |
| Status from employment | | | | | |
| Time for myself | | | | | |
| Social contact | | | | | |
| Take on new challenges | | | | | |
| Contribution to society | | | | | |

49. Would you say you earn less now than in your previous employment?
Note: previous employment refers to your last job only.

- Yes []
- No []
- About the same []

50. If yes, please tick the box that best describes your previous and current income:

| Previous | | Current | |
|------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| 30,000 and over | [] | 30,000 and over | [] |
| 25,000 to 29,999 | [] | 25,000 to 29,999 | [] |
| 20,000 to 24,999 | [] | 20,000 to 24,999 | [] |
| 15,000 to 19,999 | [] | 15,000 to 19,999 | [] |
| 10,000 to 14,999 | [] | 10,000 to 14,999 | [] |
| Under 10,000 | [] | Under 10,000 | [] |

51. To what extent do you agree that your current employment is:

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Stressful | | | | | |
| Competitive | | | | | |
| Demanding | | | | | |

52. In your current employment, are there more:

(a) Women than men [] or Men than women []

(b) Older than younger workers [] or Younger than older workers []

53. In your opinion, are older women under-represented in senior positions?

Yes [] No []

54. Are you a member of a trade union?

Yes [] No []

55. Do you know how much your co-workers earn?

Yes [] No []

56. About training at work, have you:

- Received training in the past thirteen weeks []
- Been offered training, but have not trained in the past thirteen weeks []
- Never been offered training []

57. Please indicate your agreement to the following statements by placing a tick inside the appropriate box : Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither agree not disagree (N), Disagree (D), Strongly disagree (SD). Please be open and honest in your response.

| | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| I believe I receive less favourable treatment from co-workers because of my age | | | | | |
| I believe I receive less say in decision-making because of my age | | | | | |
| I believe I receive less pay because of my age | | | | | |
| I believe I receive fewer opportunities for training because of my age | | | | | |
| I believe I receive fewer opportunities for promotion because of my age | | | | | |

58. Thinking of your current employment have you ever experienced the following (please tick all that apply):

- Age discrimination because you were too young []
- Age discrimination because you were too old []
- Gender discrimination []
- Sexual harassment []
- Bullying at work []
- Other negative treatment []

59. Do you feel able to take on new challenges at work?

- Yes [] No [] Unsure []

60. Would you like to take on new challenges at work?

- Yes [] No [] Unsure []

61. Would you like more responsibility at work?

- Yes [] No [] Unsure []

SECTION SEVEN: About You

The following section is to be completed by all participants.
It is designed to measure your own judgement of your life as a whole.

62. Please indicate your agreement to the following statements by placing a tick inside the appropriate box. You may relate these questions to situations that you may encounter at work, in the home, everyday life or across all three areas.
Please be open and honest in your response.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough | | | | | |
| If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want. | | | | | |
| It is easy for me to accomplish my goals | | | | | |
| I am confident that I could deal effectively with unexpected events. | | | | | |
| Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations. | | | | | |
| I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort. | | | | | |
| I can remain calm in the face of difficulty because of my coping abilities. | | | | | |
| When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions. | | | | | |
| If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution. | | | | | |
| I can usually handle whatever comes my way | | | | | |

63. Please indicate your agreement to the following statements by placing a tick inside the appropriate box. The following statements are designed to measure your satisfaction with your life as a whole. Please be open and honest in your response.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| In most ways my life is close to my ideal | | | | | |
| I am satisfied with my life | | | | | |
| I feel more in control of my life | | | | | |
| The conditions of my life are excellent | | | | | |
| Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations. | | | | | |
| I am just as happy now as I was when I was younger | | | | | |
| I look forward to the future | | | | | |

64. Please indicate which area you live/work in by placing a tick inside the appropriate box.

- Coventry and Surrounding Area

[]
- Merseyside Area

[]
- Other Area

[]

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire.

Questionnaires provide some valuable information about your experiences and concerns. However, it would be extremely beneficial to this research if you would be willing to take part in an interview to discuss the issues raised. Up until this point very little research has been carried out in this area, and it is hoped that the results of this research will provide a better understanding of the barriers facing people aged 50 plus when applying for employment and/or Higher Education.

If you are able to take part in an interview please write your name and contact details below, and I will contact you to arrange a suitable date and time for the interview.

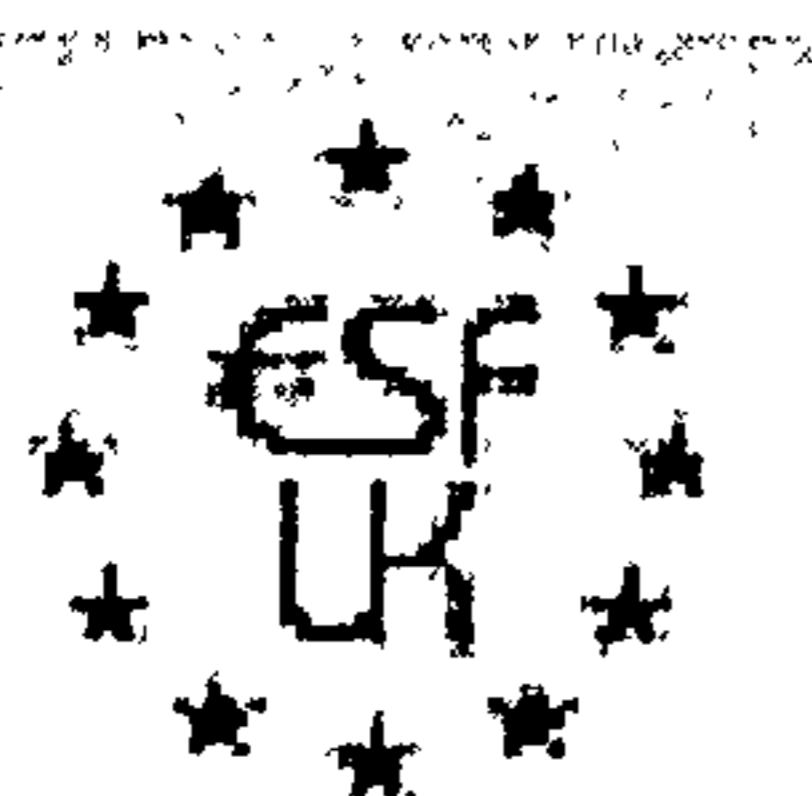
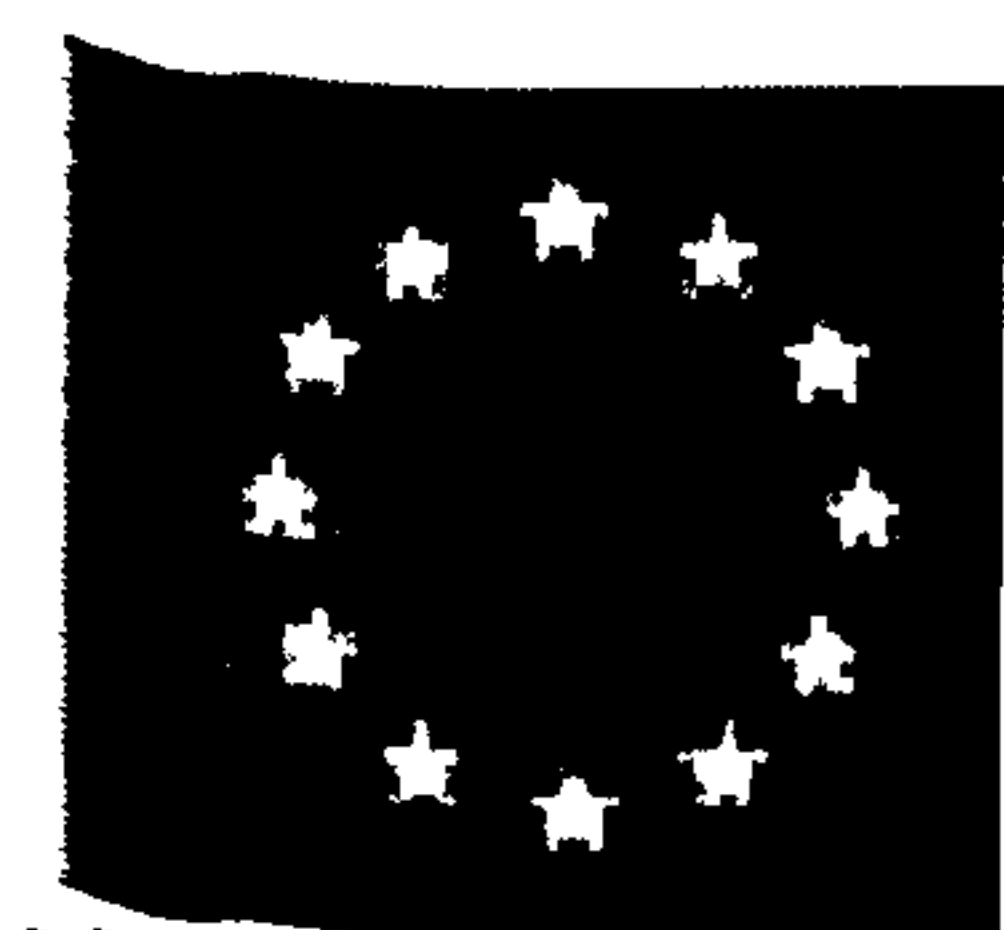
Contact Details:

Name

Address

And/or telephone

E-mail



Gender Discrimination and
Ageist Perceptions
ESF Objective 3 Research
Project



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to inform you of a research project that we are currently undertaking at Liverpool John Moores University on Age and Gender Discrimination. The research is timed to coincide with the fast approaching Age Discrimination Legislation (2006). To do this we are asking employers across the UK to complete the enclosed questionnaire. The questionnaire should take no longer than ten minutes to complete and should be returned to the university in the pre-paid envelope provided. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide a better understanding of the potential barriers facing people of this age group when accessing and securing employment, and/or seeking new opportunities in the workplace. Your participation is therefore very important.

The study is supported and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and is directed by Dr Diane Grant of Liverpool John Moores University. The information provided will be used to compile a report for ESF that will inform policy makers at all levels and, further, will provide a model of best practice to improve access into employment for traditionally disadvantaged groups. The findings of this report may also be used in future academic papers. However, I must stress that all information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence, and will be used solely for the purpose of this study. In addition to this, no mention of your name or the company's name will be made available or passed to a third party.

If you require more information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address below. Regular up-dates on the progress of the research in the form of quarterly newsletters can also be requested from this address or via our web site at <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/olf/gdap>.

Thank you in anticipation of your support in this important work.

Helen Walker, Research Assistant
Liverpool John Moores University
I.M. Marsh Campus
Barkhill Road
Aigburth
Liverpool
L17 6BD

0151 231 5308

Please complete all the questions, either by ticking the boxes or writing an answer when required. All information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be used by persons involved in this research.

SECTION ONE: Introduction

1. Are you male or female?

Male [] Female []

2. How old are you?

18-29 []

30-39 []

40-49 []

50-59 []

60 and over []

3. What is your business title (i.e. General Manager)? Please state.

4. What best describes the industry to which your organisation belongs?

Manufacturing []

Construction []

Production []

Retail []

Service, hotel and catering []

Banking, finance, business []

Administration []

Public sector, Local Authority []

Other ☐ please state _____

5. Is your organisation:

- Public Limited Company

[]
- Private Limited Company

[]
- Franchise

[]
- Partnership

[]
- Family firm

[]
- Other

[] please state _____

6. Thinking of the most common job role in your organisation, to what extent do you agree that it is (please place a tick inside the appropriate box):

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-------------|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Stressful | | | | | |
| Competitive | | | | | |
| Demanding | | | | | |
| Skilful | | | | | |

7. Does your organisation provide the following (please tick all that apply):

- Flexible working hours

[]
- Part-time hours

[]
- Job sharing

[]
- Short-term contracts

[]
- Career breaks

[]
- Opportunity to work from home

[]
- Special leave for people with sick dependents

[]

8. Is your organisation currently experiencing (please tick all that apply):

- Labour shortages

[]
- Skill shortages

[]
- Recruitment difficulties

[]
- Retention difficulties

[]

9. In your opinion, at what age is a person classified as an 'older worker'? Please state for male and female.

Male _____ Years

Female _____ Years

10. In your organisation are there more:

Women than men [] or Men than women []

SECTION TWO: Workforce Profile

11. Approximately, how many people are employed by your organisation? Please state.

12. Approximately, what is the average age of your employees? Please state.

_____ Years

13. What reason might be used to explain this age profile? Please state.

14. In your opinion, is the average age of your new employees increasing over time?

Yes [] No [] About the same []

15. Approximately, what percentage of your non-management (staff) are aged 50 and above? If your organisation does not employ a person in this age group, please tick 'none' as the answer.

Male ---- % or if less than 10 employees, please state the exact number -----

Female ---- % or if less than 10 employees, please state the exact number -----

None []

16. Approximately, what percentage of your management are aged 50 and above?
If your organisation does not employ a person in this age group, please tick 'none' as the answer.
- Male ----- % or if less than 10 employees, please state the exact number -----
- Female ----- % or if less than 10 employees, please state the exact number -----
- None []

SECTION THREE: Recruitment

17. How important are the following when making a recruitment decision? Please indicate your agreement by ticking inside the appropriate box at the end of each tem:

| | Very Important | Important | Neither Important or Unimportant | Unimportant | Very Unimportant |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Formal Qualifications | | | | | |
| Vocational Qualifications | | | | | |
| Job Specific Skills | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| Personality | | | | | |
| Physical Attractiveness | | | | | |
| References | | | | | |
| Employment History | | | | | |
| Transferable Skills | | | | | |
| Skills Learned in the Home | | | | | |
| Experiential Learning | | | | | |

18. Thinking of the most common job role in your organisation, at what age would you consider a person to, perhaps, be 'too old' for selection process? Please state for male and female.
- Male _____ Years
- Female _____ Years

19. Thinking of a management position, at what age would you consider a person to, perhaps, be 'too old' for selection process? Please state for male and female.
- Male _____ Years
- Female _____ Years
20. At what age are Chief Executives/top management usually appointed? Please state.
- _____ Years
21. Are there certain job roles that carry maximum age requirements?
- Yes ☐ please answer question 22 No ☐ please go to section four
22. Please provide an example of the job role and the reason for which an age limit is attached:
- _____
- _____
- _____

SECTION FOUR: Employment Policy

23. When was the last time that your organisation conducted an equal pay audit?
- Five years and under ☐ Five years and over ☐ Never ☐
24. Does your organisation have (Please tick all that apply):
- Performance related pay ☐
- Bonus schemes ☐
- Long service awards ☐
- Pay schemes and ranges ☐

25. Is your organisation trade-unionised?

Yes []

No []

SECTION FIVE: Training and Promotion

26. Does your organisation provide training opportunities for employees aged 50 and above? If this does not apply to your organisation, please go to question 27.

Yes []

No []

27. Is there an age at which you would consider an employee to, perhaps, be 'too old' to train? Please state for male and female.

Male _____ Years

Female _____ Years

28. Is there an age at which you would consider an employee to, perhaps, be 'too old' for promotion? Please state for male and female.

Male _____ Years

Female _____ Years

SECTION SIX: Retirement

29. Does your organisation have a mandatory retirement age?

Yes [] please answer question 30

No [] please go to question 31

30. What is mandatory retirement age for employees in your organisation? Please state for male and female.

Male _____ Years

Female _____ Years

31. Does your organisation offer (please tick all that apply):

- Later retirement ☐ What is the maximum retirement age _____ Years
- Partial retirement ☐
- Voluntary early retirement ☐ What is the minimum retirement age _____ Years

32. Approximately, what is the average age that employees usually retire?
Please state for male and female.

- Male _____ Years
- Female _____ Years

33. In your opinion, at what age should the state pension age be set? Please state for male and female.

- Male _____ Years
- Female _____ Years

SECTION SEVEN: Equal Opportunities

34. Is age incorporated into your equal opportunities policy?

- Yes ☐
- No ☐

35. Have you heard of the Government Voluntary Anti-Ageism Code?

- Yes ☐
- No ☐

36. Do you favour a legislative approach to age discrimination in employment?

- Yes ☐
- No ☐
- Unsure ☐

SECTION SEVEN: ‘Older’ Workers

37. What factor(s) might discourage your organisation from recruiting older workers?

- Pay back period on training

[]
- Employment policy of occupational pension arrangements

[]
- Pay back period of time spent in employment

[]
- Other, please state

[]

38. Can you think of a particular job role to which an older worker might find difficulty in adapting? Please state for male and female.

Male

Female

39. Please indicate your agreement to the following statements by placing a tick inside the appropriate box.

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Given a choice I would prefer to employ a younger person rather than an older person | | | | | |
| Older worker have less to offer than younger workers | | | | | |
| It is a better investment to train younger workers rather than older workers | | | | | |
| Older workers should step aside to give more opportunities to younger workers | | | | | |
| I would prefer to work with younger rather than older workers | | | | | |
| Older workers should be the first ones to be made redundant | | | | | |

40 (a) Drawing upon your experiences, past and present, please indicate your agreement to the following statements by circling the appropriate number at the end of each item.

- 1. Much less so than younger employees
- 2. Less so than younger employees
- 3. Neutral
- 4. More than younger employees
- 5. Much more than younger employees

| I believe that FEMALE 'older' workers... | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| Are hard to train | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Have no interest in being trained | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are resistant to change | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unreliable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are not effective at their job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unproductive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Have poor communication skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unwilling to take direction | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are difficult to get on with | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unable to learn quickly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unable to accept new technology | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Have a poor sickness record | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

40 (b) Drawing upon your experiences, past and present, please indicate your agreement to the following statements by circling the appropriate number at the end of each item.

- 1. Much less so than younger employees
- 2. Less so than younger employees
- 3. Neutral
- 4. More than younger employees
- 5. Much more than younger employees

| I believe that MALE 'older' workers... | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| Are hard to train | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Have no interest in being trained | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are resistant to change | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unreliable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are not effective at their job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unproductive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Have poor communication skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unwilling to take direction | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are difficult to get on with | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unable to learn quickly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Are unable to accept new technology | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Have a poor sickness record | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Questionnaires provide some valuable information about your employment policy and practice. However, it would be extremely beneficial to this research if you would be willing to take part in an interview to discuss the issues raised. Up until this point very little research has been carried out in this area, and it is hoped that the results of this research will contribute towards a better understanding of employment opportunities for people aged 50 plus.

If you are able to take part in an interview please write your name and contact details below, and I will contact you soon.

Contact Details:

Name -----

Address -----

And/or telephone -----

E-mail -----

Transcript [Strand A]

Male Participant (29)

55-60 years old

Employed full time, experienced redundancy (voluntary) at age 50

Interviewed at university

What does the term older mean to you?

Older people, this sounds absolutely daft, but older people are younger now, you know? I look at myself and I look at my father when he was my age and people of his generation reached a certain age and assumed a certain role that went with that. Now I don't see myself doing that. I still see myself doing things that my parents would never have done. I mean my wife and I went out on Saturday, didn't know where we were going but we actually wound up in Betws-y-Coed and we found a little back track and a Roman Baths err went to Llandudno and sat on the beach for half an hour. No plan that we were going to do that. But my parents wouldn't have done that, they'd have a plan or you know... "You don't do that when you get to 45 or 50 just get in the car and go out". But then again its life style change, perceptions change err people change with it. So as I say my father when he was my age was a much older man than I am by virtue of the society that was in place, routines that were in place, and you're following fixed roles. I was a child of the 60s and I do remember it and I think that it was part of the big change.

I understand what you mean. Do you think younger people appreciate or understand the dynamics of all of that? What I mean is that older and younger people don't tend to mix outside the family perhaps as much as they should?

If there were more older people in an intermix at work for example then yes the younger people would pick up and again perhaps the older people would also pick up because err you know the mix of a younger environment and an older environment, the two have got to benefit. The knowledge would be passed to the younger people and the older people would perhaps not be so quite stagnated by the fact that those younger people are there.

Speaking about the period in which you grew up...the 60s can we revisit part of that, can you tell me about your school experiences? What type of school did you attend? Did the school have any particular expectations about the type of job you may have entered, the role you'd play in the family?

Yes. I went to a sort of old style traditional grammar school and by virtue of that, pupils were generally expected to go into the professions err because at the time we had the grammar school stream and the secondary modern which the secondary modern was far more...pulled you into tradesman work, engineering, building that sort of thing whereas the grammar schools were geared towards the professions so yes that was...I think that was a trait perhaps of the education system at the time.

Is that a criticism?

Personally? No. I think perhaps the selection was at fault, was flawed. But I think that there is definitely space for specific educational systems err geared more towards abilities. Personally, I think I would have preferred to have learnt a practical trade rather than a theoretical one. But because of what I scored in the 11 Plus...that decided the way I went in the future. So I do believe there is a good case for specific forms of education, but I think the individuals should, perhaps, have move of an involvement in the selection.

So you entered a professional occupation after school?

Well actually no [laughing]. Well sort of. I had a string of jobs really until I was 25 but mostly in retail err sales. I worked for X [name of electrical company] as a store manager, I've worked for Breweries as a stock taker, and other bits and pieces along the way. When I was 25 or 26 that's when I joined the army and I stayed in the army for over 20 years. I came out on voluntary redundancy. Then I should of...I wallowed as a house-husband for a couple of years after that, then I decided to make some serious life changes. I got divorced, remarried. I went to university, did a bit of literature and cultural history, and from there I went into support work because my wife was working there. I was supporting people for just over a year and then last September I was offered the finance officers job within the company and that's where I am now.

Was the transition, returning to education difficult?

No. I think that comes with part of the fact that with the military, it's a constant learning curve because there's promotion and as you get one promotion, you then start preparing for the next one. There are always things to learn, there's courses to do. So you never stop learning err as I say one way or another, you know, you're always moving on. So going back to university err [pause] no it wasn't a difficult transition. It was very exciting. I mean I loved it. Where those three years went, I've no idea. It flew. I mean at the end of it I was...I remember the graduation in the Anglican Cathedral and I'm stood there in my cap and gown thinking is this it? This the end of it? I loved it. I had a really wonderful tome. But no the transition wasn't difficult for me.

Was there enough support for mature students?

Well I can't really speak for anyone else, but U would say from my own experience that the support was excellent. I was surprised actually...the number of mature students there were err whether that's to do with current unemployment situations, but there were a lot of mature students and doing very well. I mean at graduation I think 30 or 40 percent of the graduates were mature students. The support that I received was fine. The people were very approachable. The lecturers were very kind, again, very approachable. I had no problems at all.

How did you hear about the course?

Down to my wife...she when I met her was doing an access course because she wanted to go [to university] and I became interested in that and then she started and I approached the university. I actually went to a lecture with her in her first year and after the lecture I went and spoke to the lecturer and I went to the office to pick up some forms and filled them in and I got a letter back two weeks later and they were offering me an unconditional place so I was well pleased because they were happy enough to take me without any formal qualifications. I came way from grammar school with one O'Level so it's hardly a shining career [laughing].

So you really did make some important choices after the army.

Right. That was err a very difficult time. I was living in Germany on my final posting err my first wife and I where going to buy this apartment because I'd had a posting in Scotland a few years earlier and we'd lived there and then sort of ten days before we were due to up sticks and move to Scotland my father became very ill and I came back to England on compassionate leave and one thing led to another, my father died and my mother was ill and err the situation dictated that we stayed in Liverpool. So we had a handful of furniture in Scotland and we were in Liverpool with my mother. Then my wife's aunt dies who lived in Hale and she left her [wife] her bungalow so we moved in to Hale and that was really how we came to settle.

My mother was my responsibility and my wife was working and earning to keep us and I had the redundancy payment, I had a pension [private pension] and the situation dictated that my wife worked and I didn't. I looked after my mother, looked after the children and looked after the house.

Job wise did you have any idea about what you wanted to do at that point?

No. When I left the military, I wanted to go into some form of Personnel or something along those lines. I was a senior in the army so consequently I had experience of people management and I'd done a lot of management training and I'd done a lot of work in accountancy so I thought something along those lines. But it didn't happen, and then as I say I did my three years at university and came out...I was actually working at the time, well I was working while I was at university. I was working three nights in a petrol station which was just awful. I did that for just over a year. If nothing else I learned something about the culture that crawls out of the ground at three o'clock in the morning. That, I suppose, is always part of the learning curve, you're learning about situations that you've never been in before. Then as I say X [wife's name] got this supporting role and err it was a case of desperation more than anything else, we had to have an income. I applied for a supporting job and surprised myself: (a) that I got the job, and (b) that I actually enjoyed it and again learning about people, supporting people, learning about the difficulties and the situations that people experience. But as I say, I'm office based now. I have a sort of middle management job and it's all ticking along quite nicely.

So before you applied for this job, how did you find the job seeking experience?

I suppose nobody ever turned round and said "No Mr X you're too old" err because I was careful not to apply for jobs that specified err well they didn't actually specify age groups, but you could tell really by reading the advertisement what kind of person they were looking for. So because of that I didn't perhaps put myself in a position where I might have been discriminated against. However, when you apply for jobs the people who are interviewing you are normally a lot younger and that puts you in a position whereby you're sort of saying...well you're coming into this [job] as juniors to these people and I'm a good deal older than them and the other applicants are more their age. Experience doesn't always count for a great deal because you can have too much experience. So the undertone was sometimes there rather more than it had been previously.

Did you worry about how you might be perceived by these younger employers?

Did I worry [self questioning]?

Did you think it could be an issue?

Yes. Again having a military background I think tends to intimidate people err especially younger people, they're not quite sure what they're going to be taking on and also a lot of experience, courses, training that you receive in the military...it's not public as such so yes I did manage to acquire a City and Guild's qualification, but the qualifications, the experiences are not sort of [pause] exchangeable is not quite the right word, but they didn't fit...sort of transferable skills err transferable qualifications so that can give you a...people don't know quite what you mean by such a such qualification err which can be a barrier.

But again younger people with somebody older you know sometimes well you [they] might think of you as their dad, you know. The person who is doing the interviewing is, perhaps, a little bit unnerved by the older person err which makes them feel uncomfortable which can put a little bit of a black mark against you're application. Also, employers are perhaps now looking for a longer-term employment contract err and if you have somebody who is 25 then you can mould them and keep them whereas somebody round about the 50 mark, you know: "I'll have them for ten years or so and maybe he's a bit too set in his ways, inflexible". So I think that's there. Whether it's conscious discrimination or not its there anyway and I think employers need to make an effort to avoid what can be almost inevitable.

Thinking of your current job role, I noticed from the questionnaire you completed that there may be an issue in respect to training and promotion?

Yes. Personally there isn't a problem err with the company I'm with now. But again if you know you're looking to train people with a view to gaining from that training as a company then somebody who is in their 50s maybe isn't going to want to be that flexible, maybe isn't going to want to take on that long term view that the company wants and so by virtue of that I feel that training can be a problem.

What about men and women at work? Is there a gender disadvantage?

I think it's a fairly recent development that women are finding themselves in more senior positions and I think it's a resource that's been badly missed. There are more women now I think in senior roles and I think it's a benefit. I've got two women bosses over me and we get on very very well. There isn't a gender issue there. Again it's a move away from my parent's lifestyle when women didn't work so much and I don't think you can suddenly turn round over a period of ten or fifteen years and say right women can be bosses. When I was a child and was growing up you know mothers and women were housewives and then they were managers and it only takes a few generations for integration to take place. I think we're in that [transition]. I don't think it's happened yet to its full potential, but I think it's on its way.

So it will be easier for the younger generation to come through that and reach those targets...break the glass ceiling?

Yes. I do. I think the opportunities are more available now. The positions are there much more than they used to be because it's been proven that women are equally capable. I mean this is not my own...I'm not being sexist, but it was once seen that women can't do this because they're women. But now it is more and more evident that women are just as good, if not better in certain ways.

I don't know if you watched that programme last night - Jason and the Argonauts - my wife and I were talking about it last night and the whole issue there is men against women. There were you know the sirens, the amazons and what was the other one...well all of those issues with Jason and the way mythology was to overcome women, the women being err able to do things that men can not do so therefore the men have more to prove their superiority and if they can overcome the women then the man is more superior and it's the right of passage that Jason went through so yes there was in place a sort of belief that, you know, women can't do this. But in actual fact women can and of course, they were a threat. I suppose men always knew that women could do it. But they're a threat so we need to sort of keep them down err keep them sort of segregated. But of course now we're a little more enlightened and if you like err us men are allowing women to do things [laughing].

Thank you very much [laughing]

But yes err no there are far more I think opportunities now and more mature women certainly my wife X [name] is a manager within the company and she is doing exceptionally well with it. As I say we have a lot of by virtue of the work anyway we employ a lot of women, well we employ a lot of men as well, and the women do exceptionally well and I don't have any issues at all.

I suppose the flip side of what we're talking about – men holding women back, I suppose the flip side is the expectation that men are, or should be, 'good workers', successful businessmen, breadwinners and the rest.

What the peer pressure, the social pressure? Certainly: "I must go out there to earn a crust. It's my job to put bread on the table". The man would feel sort of inferior as a man if he isn't doing the sort of perceived role of a man and if you're dependent upon a woman as a breadwinner it [pause] emasculated that's the work, it emasculates the man. Again I don't think that's as much of an issue now. It possibly is if you are my age, there is still that sort of trait there, but err it is going and I reckon it's a good thing. A man and a woman in a partnership, it's a joint venture and does it really matter who earns the most. As long as you can get outside the fragile male ego err than you'll be ok. But it is taking that step and younger people now aren't brought up with the same sort of fixed roles that perhaps I was brought up with and people my age were brought up with. Younger people of your age...your parents are my age and so they're far more equal I guess and consequently yourself and people of your age are, you know, well where is the issue? You haven't seen it so much and therefore it is diminishing.

So gender roles are becoming more flexible and yes I feel that ...they're malleable to a point, but then do we get into the muddle of seeing everything from the perspective of what we have witnessed and experienced? Should we then expect the older generation to be...

...the same as yourselves? I think it is still transitional. It hasn't happened fully. So yes I think you need to be, younger people need to be aware that people of our age are still err in that transition and whilst for you it is perfectly normal, acceptable whatever yes we're if you like on the cusp of it, just coming in and you're already there so it is a transition. But the gender issues I think are fading issues. I don't thin that...I don't want all women to be men you know anymore than I want all men to be women. But I think that the two gender roles if you like can fulfil mutually exclusive roles without loosing their identity.

I could discuss this with you all day [laughing] but moving on if we could, to the issue of age for a moment I wanted to hear your views on retirement. What do you think about the retirement age as it stands now?

My own point of view at the moment is that I really don't want to think about retirement. I would like to think that you know retire at 65 I would like to have the option because [pause] I quite enjoy what I'm doing. I don't know what I would do with myself to be perfectly honest with you. Plus the fact that financially I really couldn't afford to live err on an old age pension [date pension] I have an army pension but...and when my wife comes o that age, hells teeth, you know. I don't want to think about retirement. I'd like to thin that any prejudice about – right you've come to a certain age and you've got to go, I would have hoped that that would have largely disappeared by the time my turn comes because I don't want to sort of reach a certain age – again it's a form of discrimination, isn't it, you're 65 and you can't work anymore. But you would hope that at 65, hopefully I'm going to be as fit as I am now. I'm able to do an awful lot of things now and when I was out supporting I was taking guys you know mountain climbing and abseiling down stuff and walking and tracking and all that which was only a year ago. I sincerely hope that in the next 10 or 15 years or whatever that I'm still able to do things like that.

Again though I think the retirement age as a number, you know, 65 or 60 if you're a women, these figures were set a couple of generations ago and people now are far more active, far more able and I think its also a different mind set: "I'm 65, I don't want to collect my buss pass. I don't want to think about retirement". I'm not there yet and I don't think I will be. When I'm 65 I'm going to say, "well what else can I do?"

There are people younger than me who would dearly love to retire and people a good deal older than men who can't bear the thought. We employ err a couple of our support workers are well past retirement and keep on going, keep on doing it and the people they support love them, you know, and they work very, very well. We wouldn't change them for the world. The whole issue there is that this person is doing an excellent job. He has or she has abilities, capabilities, uniqueness about them which works exceptionally well with certain people that we support. The fact that one guy is just gone 70 is irrelevant, you know, he is an excellent support worker. It doesn't matter what age he is and I think that is the way people should be looking at it...that age isn't an issue, its what the person does and I think that is far more important.

The best person for the job?

Sure. I mean I'm talking about the job that we do. Of course as you get older, you become less physically able. For example, working on a building site as a labourer, you're abilities are going to diminish so therefore maybe you're not going to be able to do the sort of carrying a load up and down the ladder all day. But there should be something else that that person can still do. I think that job needs to be more flexible and more tailored...people are employed to do a job and any sort of short comings that they have need to be accommodated and I think that this should apply to older people as well that you shouldn't be able to discriminate.

You know if somebody comes to work with you whose got an artificial leg err ok certain things are going to be prohibitive, that they're not able to do. But that doesn't mean that they can't be an excellent computer worker or a fantastic teacher. So you can't discriminate against them for that and the same should apply ...shall we say I'm 75 but I might be a wiz on that [points to computer] I am actually [laughing] marvellous at spreadsheets but because I'm a certain age, I'm discriminated against. Now there's another argument that the more people you keep in employment for longer, the less opportunities there are for younger people so again there is another issue here, you've got to vacate the jobs so there is room for input as well as output.

Where do you stand on that?

It's political this one. I do believe that there are far more opportunities available. I don't believe that all those opportunities are taken up. But then again society is such that we are becoming less labour intensive err automation you know we've lost the mass production line of the 1940s, 1950s less people are needed to do fewer jobs and do we then start expanding and looking at different forms of employment? But I suppose there's only so much work, there's only so much that can be done, so I don't know the answer to that one.

I understand. What you said before really interested me, the scenario with the construction worker who found that he is no longer able, physically, to manage a heavy workload. Should there be other possibilities for him? How do we reconcile that tension?

You see the perfect position would be training. I do believe that there is no substitute for experience and somebody who is older has done it. So as long as they can keep abreast with changing methods, modern methods and so on then I think that's excellent.

So we're looking at it from a generational perspective, in which case might it be easier for a younger person to approach an older person for advice?

I think that works several ways. I work with younger people and I don't have a problem with saying the personnel office who works with me, X [name] she's a lot younger than me and quite often I'll say X can you help me with this? But I don't feel I'm letting myself down asking a woman and a younger woman at that. You've got three issues here: an older person asking a younger person, an older person asking a younger person or people of a similar age asking each other. No I don't think there's a real problem because the difficulty I think would be is the older person asking the older person for help. The younger person doesn't have any problem asking the older person because it's the pupil-teacher model. Similar age, I think it's more of a colleague sort of situation so I don't think there is an issue there either. I think the only problem is the older person asking the younger person. But from my own point of view that isn't a problem. I can't speak for everybody. I suppose there are people for whom it would be an issue.

Again going back to the military there's a whole spectrum of age. You're compelled to leave the military at 55 unless you're a senior officer...then you can stay until you're 70 [laughing]. But 55 unless you're a senior officer...then you can stay until you're 70 [laughing]. But 55 is your retirement age. So at one end of the scale there are 50 year old sergeants, majors, officers and such. The other end of the scale you have 17 and 18 year old recruits. Now in that family or that battalion, the regiment or whatever there's a whole mixture of age, rank, experience and trade. You grow you mature you age within that family unit so no age isn't if you like...I think it is false in the sense that it is something that is created.

Transcript [Strand B]

Employer (2)

Female

50-59

Human Resource Manager

PLC

Tell me about your organisation and your role within it.

Okay we're a business start-up organisation which is a franchise really and we're funded by the Government and what we do is provide business support for small to medium sized enterprises of under 250 staff. So that's expert advice for new business starts. So you could come along and say, 'I want to start a business' and we'd help you, we'd put a business plan together, we'd tell you where to go for funding and things like that erm...so we really try to boost the economy on Merseyside.

My role within X organisation here on Greater Merseyside is that I am the H.R. and my role really is to make sure we've got the right people in the right job with the right skills. The Government have certain targets that we need to...err... that they have come up with so, for example, getting ethnic minorities to open up their own businesses, so we go out and target the ethnic community and try and get them interested in setting up their own businesses and things like that so it's about social inclusion as well [pause] every body on Merseyside being included and having the opportunities if you like to develop in their own business really.

So do your staff reflect that diversity...to relate with those clients?

I don't think we've actually planned it like that, if I'm being honest with you [laughing]. I don't think that's been planned because the way that we do recruit is that [pause] we recruit on the best skill set for the job in question so age, race, gender...that doesn't come into it at all. But what you find is that sometimes the older members of our staff have previously ran their own businesses...they know all about that or they've been in some large corporate organisations in the private sector and they've been in certain positions where they would definitely be able to go out and help people to expand, that type of thing [pause] so we're looking for the skill set really, rather than an actual group or type of person.

I see.

...what we are doing at the moment though is we have a great deal to do with the Muslim community, but we haven't actually got any Muslims working for us so what we're probably going to start to do is target the Muslim community because they would [pause]...erm there's a better fit if you like. So there is some positive discrimination around within X erm but we have not gone out and thought, right [pause] we need over 50s because they have the experience, its just when they've come for interview you know?

Yes. So might there be a point where say an older client wants to set up a business, that you'd chose an older member of staff to relate to him or her?

If I'm being honest it would depend again you see on the type of business they were starting up because we're also in the creative industry, we've got people in the music industry and things like that and so a younger person is probably more clued up, probably, on things like that. We've probably got people there [pause] ICT, computer stuff and things like that, if somebody wanted to do their own web-page, it tends to the younger person who's in to that whereas if you're looking at maybe, err getting finance and expanding the business an older person who's got more knowledge of that might be better to advise on that so it really does depend upon who comes through the door and what business they're in.

Does that mean that older and workers are classified; that there is a notable difference between them?

Well I think it is wrong to classify people in that way. Yes only because I'm old myself [laughing] yes. I do. I do honestly because I do think it should go on the skill set yes.

So you'd have no problem recruiting someone over 50?

Definitely not. It would be the same with training and promotion. It's [pause] it has to be the person who has the right skills for the job, if you've got a promotion...are they the right candidate and their age shouldn't really come into it. I mean if X [referring to a member of staff] bless her she's nearly nineteen...I mean if it was considered that there was a managerial post coming up and X had proven herself then X should go for it, just the same as a 55 year old should really. I mean that's my belief anyway.

Thinking of promotion and management then, I noticed from the questionnaire you completed that there are more women than men in the organisation, but more men than women in managerial positions?

I think seriously and I'm coming from my generation now if you like err I think it's going to take the next generation maybe you're generation [directed at interviewer] to break through that barrier because when I was younger you were not [emphasis on *not*] given the opportunities that you are [directed at interviewer] now to have a career. For example, I was brought up to get married and have children, and I think that the next generation have just got the whole world open to them. So I think in our age group, round about 50ish plus the bias is still there [pause]...men went out to work and they got the career. I just stayed at home and looked after the children and I've just been lucky in a way that I got in somewhere, but a lot of women of my age...I think that a lot of it is about the background they've come from.

Do you think people of your age group may have [pause] internalised that barrier...not put themselves forward for promotion?

I think and I don't know why it's probably different for your generation, but my other colleague is about ten years younger than me and she still has this lack of confidence in her ability to be a manager if you like. I think we're gradually getting rid of that by the way that we're treating people in schools and universities especially women in

universities because when I went to school there was just no question of me going to university at all [emphasis]. I was going to get a job in a shop or a factory or in an office and if I got one in office than that was better than being in a factory [pause] until I got married. That was what you were there for...to get married and to have children, and to look after hubby and the home [pause] horrible [emphasis] But I'm glad to say that when I look at my own daughter now I mean the world is a totally different place now.

You're past can influence where you are today?

Yes. I think you've got the hang-ups because you've been programmed from an early age that you really shouldn't be there and trying to un-programme yourself and believe that yes, I have got the ability...[pause] erm I probably didn't get into management until I was round about 38, 39 years old and that was just by pure chance. I got into sort of an accounts manager position there now again accounts is seen as female and so that was seen as ok at the time. Then when we [company] went into Europe, I started to do all the Directives coming out, I just got an interest in it, and I just started to go like that [hands out] to the partners in the firm, 'we need to be looking at this' and that's how I got into HR. It was by pure chance. It wasn't a planned career move or anything like that.

From you're experience, it sounds like women were stereotyped a lot of the time, encouraged to perform certain roles?

I'm sorry but I still think they are. I think it's wrong but [pause] you're secretaries tend to be female, accounts staff, although we're different here, we've got two male accounts clerks, but sort of accounts clerks are really err female. I know call centre staff used to be female, but I'm finding now that when you get through to a call centre, there are a lot of male staff in there now which never used to be the case so that's obviously changing as well, but yes...nurses, you've got more male nurses now, but there are still more female nurses than male nurses...there is a stereotype. We [women] tend to take the lower, more menial jobs so it is still there really, that the man is the breadwinner...

Are women affected by these stereotypes, you know, maybe think, 'this is the proper place for me'

I think they do and I think there is a lot of peer pressure on them as well. I can only go on my own experiences of when I was younger...because I did go back to work, all be it part-time, I was actually frowned upon by people [women] of my own age who had children, who were staying at home they thought it was terrible that a woman went back to work...I should be there looking after the children, you know. I really sort of struggled with a lot of guilt you know. That was women doing it to other women, and whether, this sounds...but whether there was [pause] a jealousy factor there, I don't know. I couldn't honestly say, but I did come up against a lot of peer pressure, that I should be home looking after the children. You do feel guilty.

I see what you mean. Older and younger workers may have different experiences of employment because of where they have come from, the type of society in which they have grown up, but what about in terms of their attitude to work, their motivation?

I think it depend on the person and I would always try and look at the individual because you can get a really hard working, very conscientious young person, but you can get a lazy young person as well... 'I want to come in at 9 and go at 5 and take my money and I don't want to do much for it' but equally I think that older people can be the same I genuinely believe that. The only thing I think that we're [older workers] slightly disadvantaged with and it's our own fault is that we don't sort of embrace new technology very quickly [laughing]. I go to X [name of younger colleague] 'Help!' with the mobile phone. I think younger people pick things up like that much more quickly.

My daughter has got one of these new video phones and I'm like the same but that is my fault because I know I could master it, but its a bit like...I think we do that to ourselves because I can remember...well I'm probably a pen and quill type person, you know but we used to write in ledges in the accounts department and once the computer came in I really honestly had got to a stage where I was the manager of the accounts department but I shied away from them [computers] and I had X [name of colleague] in the office and she was younger and I used to say 'will you type this, will you do that'. It was only when I changed jobs and this sounds awful...it was only probably only ten years ago and I went to another company and they put a computer in front of me and I thought, oh my...I didn't even know how to switch it on, but now I'm fine with them and I've realised that if you're frightened, you've just got to take the plunge and tackle it.

So training's might be daunting at first, but very beneficial?

Absolutely, yes. I worked in a manufacturing company and you find that it's not just women of our age group it can be men as well. Men can become a bit of a dinosaur, and what we did there [at company] because we were bringing computers onto the factory floor, we tended to have men over the age of 40 and [pause] what we did there is we brought people in, and it was literally...now I had used a type writer before so at least I could use the keyboard, but guys of that age in a factory...so we started with the basics of just the keyboard with the mouse and we just let them twiddle with it, we gave them a lot of time to familiarise themselves with it, and eventually it worked. It just takes time and a sensitive approach.

[We talk for a while about computer technology]

In your opinion, do women still face discrimination at work?

Yes, definitely. I mean I can [pause] I came from an insurance broker background, and the insurance world is extremely male chauvinistic and I did make it to Associate Partner but there was no way I was going to be a Partner because I was female and you knew that and then I got divorced and that was me finished because I wasn't the norm, and I actually got told that...I was called into an office and told, you either get married again or basically you are not going to go any further because you are not [pause]

'Mrs'?

Yes. That was probably about ten fifteen years ago and that company is still in existence and that culture is still there and I think that a lot of insurance, it tends to be male orientated. I can only go on that one really. The manufacturing company that I worked with, there was no prejudice there against age, male or female because when I applied there I thought, you know, you have this...you used to see it in the paper, you don't so much now, but 18-35 and 35 was the cut off line, now when I went there I was over 40 and I thought, you know, I'm not going to get the job because of my age, and I was quite surprised when I did get the job.

Has the discrimination you've faced in the past made you more or less ambitious?

I think it depend on the circumstances...when my ex-husband and I split up, I literally...I had to keep the standard of living going that we had, and in some ways, I needed to try and better what I was doing as well so that was my driving force really, it was the financial aspect because I had two children. I know someone else who has just recently got divorced, before then she was quite content with what she was doing, but she realised that she has to try and better her life for herself and her children.

Has equal opportunity legislation made a difference?

I think, again, it's that bringing up attitude of when we were younger because again, when I was in the insurance industry the top hierarchy if you like was all male, they were all in their 50s so to them, the women shouldn't have been working she should have been at the kitchen sink looking after the children. I think what we'll see now is that generation retires and your [directed at interviewer] generation starts to come through, I think that's when the attitude will change, but I think that until you get people of my generation out of that top band, I don't think it will change hun no. I think it will be a gradual process.

What form does your own Equal Opportunities Policy take?

We just say, in a way, there is no sex discrimination, you know, the usual...no sex, no race, no sexual orientation...discrimination, gender discrimination, age discrimination so we just say everything, you know, religion. It has to be the best person for the job.

Finally, can you tell me a bit about your retirement practice; do women retire earlier than men?

Well we've only been in existence for three years and we have the same retirement age which is 65, right, so women can work to 65. Now when you speak to women, they actually want to retire earlier than that, but having spoken to some of the men, they want to retire earlier as well so I don't know whether a female thing or individual preference, I'm not sure. Some men they just want to keep working. I think some guys want [pause] no let me get this right...I think some guys want to keep working because [pause] that's there role, they've still got that role of the breadwinner whereas I don't think its as hard for women to retire earlier especially if they've got a partner who is still at work because they can do it. I mean I would want to retire earlier than 65, but

that's from a life choice. I don't want to be getting up at 6 in the morning and getting in at 7 five days a week

End of interview

Women's Experiences and Perceptions of Age Discrimination in Employment: Implications for Research and Policy

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This paper reports on pilot study research for an ESF funded project. It examines the experiences and perceptions of 12 women in relation to the concept of ageism in paid employment. The women were all aged 50 or over at the time. The results show that whilst most of the women had faced (to differing degrees) or observed gender and age based discrimination, the experiences and interpretations revealed were not static, nor isolated from the wider historical, cultural and social contexts in which these women had grown up and grown older. It is therefore argued that policy attempts to combat age discrimination will need to take account of the gender dimension of ageism as well as the different ways in which it impacts on older women. For this to occur, more research and debate are needed on the issues raised in this paper.

Introduction

The decline in economic activity among older men during the last 20–30 years has been described as 'one of the most remarkable labour market transformations in modern times' (Duncan, 2003: 101). While there is some evidence that this trend may have levelled off recently and even reversed (Hotopp, 2005) economic activity rates among older people, and older men especially are still below that of the workforce as a whole (Loretto *et al.*, 2005). Recent Labour Force Survey data have shown that between 1995 and 2004, the employment rate of men aged 50 and over increased from around 65 per cent to 72 per cent and an increase for women from around 60 per cent to 67 per cent over the same period (DWP, 2005), yet these figures mask the subsequent decline in the employment of men and women in their late 50s and early 60s (Loretto *et al.*, 2005).

The early withdrawal of older people from the labour market is the result of a number of factors, namely: redundancy, recession, personal motivation, additional income and ill health retirement. There is also evidence of age discrimination in employers' attitudes and practices towards older workers (Platman and Tinker, 1998). Until recently though, little attention was paid to the problems faced by displaced older workers. In fact, in the recessions of the 1970s and 1980s, public policy was explicitly aimed at creating jobs for the young unemployed, through measures that encouraged the withdrawal or 'early exit' of older men (e.g. Redundancy Payment Act, 1965; Job Release Scheme, 1977).

Recent concern over population ageing and its projected impact on the pensions industry has prompted government to introduce campaigns aimed at 'active ageing' and encouraging older people to remain in, or return to, the labour market (Mann, 2006). There is now increased awareness of the potential importance of older people to society and the

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economy (Walker and Maltby, 1997; Curran and Blackburn, 2001). The consumer market has been quick to respond to the potential influence of this group and has attempted to adapt to the interests of the 'grey' market. The same can be said of certain social and welfare groups that have moved away from traditional and polarised views of older people to build upon the diversity of a larger older population (Bernard and Phillips, 2000). However, there is reluctance on the part of some employers to do the same for their older employees and job searchers (Taylor and Walker, 1994; McVittie et al., 2003).

Age discrimination has been given high priority by New Labour (e.g. the Code of Practice on Age Diversity, 1999). Most notably, government published the final draft consultation on age discrimination in the workplace – part of its commitment to the EC Employment Equality Directive (see DTI, 2005 for details) with legislation coming into force in October 2006. Of special relevance to this paper is the possible impact on older women. Until relatively recently, studies on the employment of older men have outnumbered those on older women. In part this reflects the fact that much of the work in the field has emerged out of concern over the sharp decline in the employment of older men, while the employment of older women is thought to have remained reasonably stable. Yet whilst there has been an overall increase in female employment, economic activity is markedly lower for older women as compared with younger ones (Van Imhoff et al., 1999; Collis et al., 2000). There is also evidence of a notable drop in the employment of women in their 50s. This is of particular concern, given that age discrimination is cited as a main reason for the subsequent decline in activity (Ginn and Arber, 1996).

The impact of age discrimination on older women is an emergent area of research. There is evidence, for example, that stereotypical beliefs about gender and age combine to form a 'double jeopardy' for women in organisations (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995; Bronstein, 2001; Duncan and Loretto, 2004). Most of the existing work in the area represents initial attempts to define and conceptualise this 'gendered ageism' and have provided some important information about the employment of older women. Yet there is still relatively little research, certainly from a British context, which has moved beyond these initial definitions and descriptions to ask new questions or to develop new models and theories.

Age, gender and employment

The nature and extent of gender inequality in the UK labour market has been well researched (Cockburn, 1991; Hakim, 1996; Halford and Leonard, 2001). The consensus is that, despite the gradual and persistent increase in female employment, women as a group remain at a disadvantage to men as a group in respect to equal treatment at work. This is partly the result of differences in economic activity. The *typical* male pattern of employment is fluid, uninterrupted and clearly defined, whilst the *typical* female pattern of employment is broken and reduced on account of childcare and domestic work (Warren et al., 2001). The picture revealed is one of polarisation between male and female experiences of, and participation in, employment.

The pattern of difference is much starker for older men and older women. As MaGuire (1995) observed, where women once left work upon marriage, the present situation is one where women tend to leave work upon the birth of a child and return to work after basic maternity leave. Hence there are some elderly women who left work as soon as they got married or had children and there are some women, typically in their 50s, who left work

upon the birth of a child, returned to work and worked (mostly part time) between the births of other children. The point here is that, 'the younger the woman, the more paid work she is likely to have done and the better qualified in formal terms she is likely to be' (Groves, 1993: 43). As a result, older women are more likely to be working part time than older men. They are also more likely than men to be engaged in poorly paid and sex-segregated work (Bernard *et al.*, 1995).

It is possible therefore that men and women experience age discrimination in different ways and to different degrees according to their gender. This point is echoed by Itzin and Phillipson (1995) who conceptualised 'gendered ageism' to describe the combination of, or intersection and interaction between ageism and sexism so that: 'it would appear that age and ageism is in fact significantly gendered and that sexism operates always with a dimension of ageism' (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995: 88). In their case study research, women were said by their employers to 'hit their peak' at a younger age than their male counterparts. It was also found that employer perceptions of women often contained a sexual element linked to the sex stereotyping of women at particular points in the life course. As one manager in the study put it 'she is a flighty young piece', or 'hearing wedding bells', or 'raising a family and not really committed to her work', or 'it's that age – the change' (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995: 88). These often-quoted examples are used to describe the unique and complex nature of the discrimination experienced by women in the workplace.

That women are 'never the right age' has secured support from a study of that name by Duncan and Loretto (2004) who found self-reported evidence by women generally of gendered ageism, specifically by the older and younger cohorts. Yet despite the evidence that gendered ageism can impact on women whatever their age, the accumulation of negative treatment and/or missed opportunities may result in greater inequality with increased age (Barnum *et al.*, 1995; Bernard *et al.*, 1995; Browne, 1998). In addition, the notion that women are valued in accordance to the conditions ascribed to their youth (sexual appeal, reproductive capacity) has meant that older women have tended to be those more harshly affected. However, researchers have yet to consider the differences as well as the shared aspects of women's experiences of gendered ageism or how these may relate to broader social and economic factors (job type, motivation etc.). This research gap formed the basis of our pilot study.

Method

Twelve women aged 50–65 were interviewed over the period March–May 2004. Contact was initiated soon after flyers were placed in local community groups and information and advice centers. These flyers outlined the purpose of the study and addressed issues of confidentiality. Over 20 women came forward to be interviewed. To select the 12 women, a stratified sampling procedure was used to include variation in socio-demographic profile. Another stratified criterion was employment status used to compare data from those who were economically active at the time against those who were not. The variation in the sample allowed the researcher to obtain a broad range of information in a relatively short time frame (see Table 1 for information about the respondents). The research was briefly explained to each respondent who then signed a written consent form. Anonymity was guaranteed. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour.

Table 1 Profile of respondents (based on women's self definitions)

| Participant | Age | Marital status | Ethnicity | Highest educational level | Previous employment status | Current employment status |
|-------------|-----|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| A | 57 | Divorced | White British | Further Ed | Lab technician | Professional (ft) |
| B | 55 | Married | White British | None | Shop/bar work | Retired (early) |
| C | 55 | Single | White British | Further Ed | Professional | Professional (ft) |
| D | 53 | Married | White British | None | Clerical/cleaner (pt) | Clerical (pt)/care of family |
| E | 50 | Married | White British | None | Factory/shop work | Factory/shop worker (ft) |
| F | 62 | Married | White British | None | Factory work (pt) | Care of grandchildren (ft) |
| G | 64 | Married | White British | None | Office work | Care of grandchildren (ft) |
| H | 57 | Divorced | White British | Further Ed | Professional | Professional (ft) |
| I | 54 | Married | White British | None | Shop/office | Administration (ft) |
| J | 50 | Married | Mixed race British | None | Administration | Administration (ft) |
| K | 58 | Married | Chinese/White British | Further ed | Nurse | Looking after home/family (ft) |
| L | 59 | Married | White British | Higher ed | Teacher | Teacher |

Notes: (ft) = full time.

(pt) = part time.

(lt) late returner.

The women were invited to express their views concerning age-related matters in employment. Those who were economically active at the time were asked a series of open-ended questions about their conditions of employment and their personal orientations and attitudes towards work. While those who were economically inactive at the time were asked about their past employment and transition into retirement or unpaid work (i.e., care of grandchildren). The idea was not to encourage the respondents to comment directly upon the information contained in the academic literature but, rather, to offer ways to extrapolate data from their own interpretations of the subject (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997). We wanted to know if the women had encountered ageism (past and present) and if so, did their experience(s) impact on their conditions of employment? We did not provide an official definition or measurement of 'ageism' since this would have defeated the overall aim which was to explore the respondents' understandings and experiences of ageism in the world of paid employment.

Thematic and inductive approaches were used in the analysis of the data (see Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The quotes cited from the interviews are indicative rather than representative. Our aim in presenting the data is to offer a more grounded exploration of the relationship between gender and age discrimination and to add to the empirical material which focuses on older women and paid work.

Issues from the fieldwork

Continuity, choice and circumstance

The women talked about the types of jobs they had done in the past and the role these jobs had played in their experiences of work (paid and unpaid) in later life. The women were filtered into two groups: those who were economically active at the time and those who were economically inactive (early retired, carers of grandchildren). The majority of women had continued to select the type of work that was familiar to them, and which fulfilled certain personal, social and economic goals:

'I left work to have the children. I looked after the children until the youngest turned fifteen. Then I got a part-time job. As soon as my daughter had her first child, I left work to look after the grandchild.' (Age 62, carer of grandchildren)

It was clear that continuity is threatened when the balance is disturbed:

'Work gets you out the house. It gives you an interest. I like my life now, don't get me wrong, but I'd love to go back part-time.' (Age 58, economically inactive)

Another woman, who had taken early retirement to coincide with her husband's retirement, had found it difficult to adapt to the retirement experience. Her strong social attachment to work had meant that she was not positively orientated towards retirement. She indicated that she might like to return to employment, but expected to face downward mobility into lower paid and lower status work. It was also apparent to her that her expertise might not be as desirable as it had been in the past:

'I had experience of being a manager. But I learned my skills a long time ago. How I learned might not suit an employer. I would not expect to be able to pick up and run with it.' (Age 55, early retired)

Other women identified the role of circumstance in their participation and non-participation in employment. Three women had carved out professional careers in middle adulthood, some often through necessity rather than choice. One such woman had experienced a painful divorce after the birth of her second child, which had altered her orientation towards work: 'circumstances changed, and I had to find a full-time job sooner than I'd hoped'. She recalled how she felt insecure and apprehensive about finding work. But driven by the need to 'put the children first', she learned to draw strength from her personal resolve and eventually found a job she enjoyed.

Discrimination in work history

Seven of the 12 women reported discrimination earlier in their career based on their age, their gender or a combination of the two. Of these, four had confronted a classic gendered discourse about motherhood, the care of the family and their role within it. It was felt that employers at that time (1960s, 1970s) thought women were only interested in work until they got married or had children:

'I went for an internal promotion. It looked like me on paper. But at the interview, the employer said to me, "You've just been married?" I said, "Yes." "So you'll be having children in a few years time?" I said, "No, I don't intend to have children for a long while yet." He said, "But you

will be having children." It was an assumption he made without me saying anything.' (Age 57, professional)

Time taken out of the labour market to have and raise children had a profound impact on the availability of opportunity and choice once women returned to work. Although most of them returned to their previous employer, they had fewer years (compared with men and to single women) in which to progress and move up the career ladder. For those women who entered the job market at the time it was not only their gender and family status that conspired to discriminate, but age in itself was also a factor:

'I had this thirty-plus barrier in my face. I can remember saying, "I'm thirty six and I'm written off already." There were loads of jobs that I was disqualified for that they [employment services] wouldn't even phone up about. When it says 18-30 on the card there's no point is there?' (Age 57, professional)

The majority of women felt that what they had seen and experienced in their past had a profound long-term impact:

'I'm more determined for it (age prejudice) not to bother me, and so I make an extra effort, and it's the same effort I made in the 1970s when I came up against prejudice because I'm a woman. It's the same prejudice now except they're [employers] looking at me now thinking, "aged 50 - will be slow to learn".' (Age 57, professional)

But for other women, there seemed a good deal of truth in the observation that the psychological effects of perceived discrimination increase over time and are compounded or exacerbated by ageism itself:

'When you're 50 you've had a few people say "no" to you and so that draws you back. I don't know if it is because of my age or the way I've been treated in the past that I don't have the confidence... I feel as if I've had the stuffing knocked out of me.' (Age 55, professional)

It was also noted that the first wave of 'career women' who had (each in their own way) made an important contribution to the feminist movement *now* felt a sense of resentment towards the younger generation of women for whom opportunity appeared open ended and who continued to enter occupations which were previously closed off to them. To clarify, this resentment was not directed at younger women themselves but, rather, the unfairness of the situation:

'I applied and was told that it was a male-only job. I re-applied when the Bill [Gender Discrimination Legislation] came in and attached a copy of it to my application. I had to push it, and I've been pushing ever since. Other women have come along and it's been easy for them.' (Age 55, professional)

Self-reported evidence of gender and age discrimination

Generalised beliefs and perceptions about older women were thought to operate on two dimensions related to an older appearance or an age-related decline in performance. In relation to older appearance three of the 12 women interviewed identified at least one confrontation with a gender or sexual stereotype related to their age (i.e., mother hen): 'The young men in the office tell me... confide in me you know' (Age 54, administration). Although none of the women interviewed took offence to this kind of generational

interaction, some found it difficult to cope with ageism related to an older appearance and experienced inner conflict between 'success' as identified by a youthful face, appearance, lifestyle and the rational need to avoid such superficial concern with image. Two of these women had been reluctant to mention this appearance-related barrier through fear that it might be explained away as a mythical construct born out of female neurosis. But when viewed in the subtext, it was clear that far from being a trivial or superficial concern, the focus on youth and in particular a youthful appearance had a severe impact on their self-esteem. One woman recalled a sense of social isolation:

'The reason why they (co-workers) treat you differently – it's a visual thing. I'm not saying I was drop dead gorgeous when I was younger because I wasn't, but they're [co-workers] far more likely to spend time with someone who appeals to them.' (Age 55, professional)

To look feminine and youthful, to remain unchanged and unblemished and to combat physical wear and tear became a strong predictor of whether some of the women interviewed sought or felt that they might be expected to obtain occupational advancement:

'Two women go for a job. They're both smart, they're both the same age, but one is more physically attractive than the other. Now in my opinion, the only way that the women with the less attractive face, figure, whatever, is able to get ahead is by being smarter and playing the game a little bit more.' (Age 54, administration)

Yet some of the women were critical of other women in their attempt to hold back or reverse the ageing process and employed a strategy of distance and detachment from their cohort:

'I think the general feeling is that I look younger than X (co-worker) so X takes up the mantle of oldest person in the office, not me and she gets treated differently because of it. I think half of it's because she's got grey hair.' (Age 57, professional)

Concern over physical appearance was generally higher amongst women in professional, male managed and hierarchal organisations. These were also the women who referred to a double standard in respect to male and female ageing in employment: 'It's still a male dominated world. Very few women in their 50s are as successful as men in their 50s – only the odd one' (Age 55, professional).

By contrast, the majority of women in manual or lower paid work indicated that their *older* appearance did not represent a major problem or impediment for them. Instead, women from this occupational group were more likely to report prejudice related to the job itself (e.g. cleaner) rather than their position as an older employee:

'If you're a cleaner people tend to look down on you a little bit. You're sort of stereotyped... rollers in the scarf and smoking [laughing].' (Age 53, now a clerical worker)

Aside from issues associated to physical appearance, most of the women in professional or highly skilled work had confronted age-related perceptions about their mental competence and intellectual capacity, some of which contained, or were felt to have contained a gendered or sexual element (i.e. the impact of menopause). Many indicated that their age had often been an issue in the way their employer or fellow employees

perceived them. Other women were aware of ageism of this kind, but had not experienced or observed it in relation to their own workplace.

Ageism when it did occur was often based around, or reinforced by the introduction of new technology:

'We've got a new computer and everybody's having difficulty with it. It's a bit awkward. X [co-worker] said to me, "Have you had your test yet?" I said "No I haven't had it." She said, "Well you've got to remember that as you get older it takes longer for your brain to absorb all that information." I felt like screaming, "No, no it doesn't it's just your perception of it."' (Age 57, professional)

Many of these women were concerned that such age-related thinking might result in their work being discounted or undervalued by their employer. This was felt to be particularly unjust, as respondents believed that their abilities to work effectively had remained unchanged over time:

'Because I'm older, the assumption is that I'm a little bit dodderly in the brain department, but that's just not true.' (Age 57, professional)

Other women felt that they might be denied promotion on account of their (older) age. Another woman added:

'If we (department) were seconded to America there was always a reason why I was never chosen, or it was always just names out of a hat. I often wondered whether my name was ever in the hat.' (Age 55, professional)

This contributed to a greater sense of exclusion.

However, it was observable that not every women experienced ageism in the same way or to the same degree. For example, women in lower-skilled employment tended generally to feel that age was perhaps less significant to a perceived decline in job performance. Most of the women in manual and repetitive work (i.e. factory work) felt that experience was valued by their employer to such an extent that they were often given the most difficult jobs to perform. The belief that older age might result in lower pay or reduce opportunity for promotion was acknowledged by some of these women, but it was perceived to be only a slight problem.

Discussion

At a conceptual level, this paper has demonstrated the ways in which stereotypical beliefs about gender and age combine to create a distinct form of prejudice with unique characteristics and discriminatory processes. This 'gendered ageism' (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995) differs from other forms of isms (i.e., racism, sexism) in that it categorises individuals on the basis of two social categories – (1) their gender and (2) their age. Although parallels are drawn between it and other forms of oppression, the social stigma attached to the process of ageing (and to female ageing in particular) has led to a process of self-denial and self-separation that attachment to a particular race or sex does not normally entail. As Andrews (1999: 309) explained, 'While difference is celebrated in axes such as race, gender, religion and nationality, the same is not true for [older] age.' Indeed in contrast to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), self-separation and self-disassociation from other women was a theme in the data.

Most of these women were acutely aware of the physical and physiological state of other women and were critical at times of their attempts (consciously or otherwise) to fight, hold back or reverse the ageing process. Some women employed a strategy of distance and detachment from their cohort, to the extent of imposing ageist stereotypes on other women (e.g. grey hair). The women experienced internal conflict between on the one hand, the physical appearance of the face and body and, on the other hand, the mental and spiritual sense that they had remained unchanged over time. This cognitive split between the mind, body and spirit has become a popular theme in the study of older people: 'How old am I?' versus 'How old do I feel inside?' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991; Andrews, 1999). To look feminine and youthful, to remain unchanged and unblemished, and to combat physical wear and tear became a strong predictor of whether some of the women felt secure and confident in their position in work. However, none of the women interviewed said they had experienced inappropriate reference to or demeaning remarks about their appearance.

The female need to remain, or be seen to remain, youthful has been regarded in the academic literature as of concern to every woman however, the older women in this study have further revealed a double burden of societal ageism and sexism that is under-emphasised in past empirical work.

The evidence presented in this paper also illustrates the extent to which ageism and sexism impact on the availability of opportunity and choice for women in the workplace. Two of the women felt that they might be denied promotion on account of their (older) age. In addition, a number of women in jobs that demanded considerable adaptability or technical knowledge reported confrontation with age-based stereotypes about mental competence and intellectual decline, some of which contained or were felt to have contained a gendered element. This served to perpetuate and work-up the conceptual mode by which some of these women felt they were, or had previously been, rendered invisible and undervalued in comparison to younger women and to men generally. A salient feature of such confrontation was the apparent internalisation of stereotypical beliefs about their social group. There is a clear parallel here between what Itzin and Philipson (1995) found in their research – in that, some of the women began to question and critically reflect on their situation in work, which then caused them to be self-limiting or self-deselecting in respect to promotion.

Our findings are in accordance with much related past theory and research. So what unique contribution has this paper made? In contrast to previous work, consideration has been given to the part played by individual difference and to broader societal and psychological influences. Such an approach indicates that older women's experiences of employment are more complex than previously assumed. Whilst some of the women interviewed had faced (to differing degrees) or observed gender and age discrimination, the experiences and interpretations revealed in the research were not static, nor isolated from wider historical, cultural and social contexts in which these women had grown up and grown older. For example, women's attitudes towards work as well as their understanding of others' attitudes towards them were strongly influenced by what they had seen and experienced in early adulthood.

It was also apparent that women in professional or 'career jobs' had a greater awareness of the concept of double jeopardy (i.e. the interaction of age and gender discrimination), and were more likely to have experienced or observed discrimination in their most recent employment. A possible explanation for the typological difference

observed is that the women in lower-paid and lower-skilled employment received social approval from a job deemed appropriate for their gender and which may be considered an extension of their domestic role or that they were more inclined to the familial aspect of their life. Discrimination, when it did occur was based more on the job itself. Another explanation is that women in non-career or part-time employment were exempt (in most cases) from the pressure of occupational ambition or the fear of competition and replacement, or that gender inequality was simply more visible to women in male managed or bureaucratic workplaces with complex wage hierarchies.

Conclusion

In the data presented here, it is possible to see how gender and age discrimination combine to the detriment of women in organisations. In terms of the women's current employment, there was little evidence of overt discrimination but, rather, discrimination, when it did occur, was more implicit than explicit, expressed through double standards and judgments made on account of women's real or perceived age. Yet nearly all of the women enjoyed most aspects of their work and felt able to continue working for the foreseeable future. It is wrong, therefore, that ageist and sexist stereotypes continue to pervade workplace culture, preventing women from reaching their full potential. Employers need to be aware of the gender dimension of ageism, especially in its more implicit and subtle forms. For this to occur, more research and debate are needed on the issues raised in this paper.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that by highlighting new themes worthy of debate, we have started to think in broader terms about the ways in which ageism in interaction with sexism impacts on different women (defined by job type etc).

Longitudinal research is also needed to determine the experiences of different cohorts of older women. This paper has followed the format of previous work, in that the fixed category of 'older' has been used to account for the very broad period of middle to later life. However, such a universal approach has failed to take account of wider social, cultural and contextual factors across the lifespan (Arber *et al.*, 2003). That the younger generation of older women have grown-up in a period marked by social and economic change (i.e., the second wave of feminism) is ignored or downplayed by the research to date. Indeed, it is because of the generalised manner in which we speak of older people that cohort difference is muted and uncertain.

A number of other issues relevant to gender and age discrimination remain unexplored. For example, little is known about the possibility of a 'triple jeopardy' related to race, class, sexuality or disability.

Research to date has also failed to consider the possibility that older men may face similar problems related to the combined effects of ageism and sexism. Susan Sontag (1978: 73) for example, in her double standard thesis argued, 'Getting older is profoundly less wounding for men.' Our own research has shown that women are subject to pressures and constraints specific to their gender. However, that is not to say that older men are without similar problems related to the construction (and deconstruction) of masculinity and manhood (Arber *et al.*, 2003). Linda McDowell (2001) has debated the impact of the 'feminization of work' on men in traditional rough and tumble industrial work (i.e., iron and steel production). It is important to determine the effect if any this has on those men who have spent the majority of their working life in work that is construed as masculine and which is now subject to de-industrialisation.

The above research agenda will have important implications for policy and practice given the original gender-neutral design of anti-age discrimination legislation (DTI, 2005). Based on the evidence in this paper, it is argued that an unwillingness to acknowledge the gender dimension of ageism may, at best, leave unravelled the specific problems faced by older women and, at worst, may disproportionately disadvantage this group even further.

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