"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.

Colin Brown
The University of Notre Dame Australia

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"NO SIR, IT’S NOT DISCRIMINATION, YOU’RE JUST TOO OLD". AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED AGE DISCRIMINATION AMONG OLDER AUSTRALIAN MALE PROFESSIONALS.

Colin Brown

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Business
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2018
I certify that:

a) Except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is mine alone;

b) The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award;

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the effects of perceived age discrimination in employment practices on Australian professional men. It commences by outlining the global setting of the age discrimination phenomenon, and then draws attention to the myths and stereotypes that have engendered this unsavoury, often hidden, form of discrimination by focusing on the attitudes of recruitment agencies, private and government employers and older workers themselves. The thesis examines the literature on the multiple negative effects of discrimination, and then presents the method used, the personal interviews, the analysis and findings, and finally, the conclusion.

There is limited ethnographic research into the psychological impact and effects of the phenomenon of age discrimination, specifically on professional men. This thesis is the outcome of a set of interviews with Australian men who elicit and promote their own voice as they perceive their circumstances. As the author, I have presented considerable evidence and have contributed my own history, resulting in a reflexive autoethnography.

The research reveals that actual or perceived age discrimination is a stressor which may induce negative effects on an array of issues linked to employment. Examples of these include health and well-being, power, prestige, and affective, normative, and continuance commitment. These, in turn, produce emotional consequences such as depression, shame, frustration, unhappiness, and self-esteem issues. However, these cannot be viewed in isolation as the effects of these also touch family, the workplace, and wider society.

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I wish to thank Dr Robert Muller for the provision of a very professional and highly polished editing service which assisted in bringing this thesis up to the standard it now is. He came highly recommended by an autoethnographic associate and I believe this recommendation has proven to be well warranted as a reading of this thesis will testify.

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I wish to thank my family; my father (God bless him), who told me to leave school at age 16 because there was only one brain in the family and it wasn’t me. I thank my

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mother (God bless her), who had faith in me and morally and vocally supported me through three other degrees “all acquired without a brain”, and I thank my brothers David and Ralph, who both helped instil in me ambition and a competitive nature.

Most importantly, I thank my ever-loving, highly intelligent, and amazingly supportive partner Patty. She not only very professionally undertook the preliminary editing of my thesis, and corrected all my apostrophes, but was a constant motivator in making sure that I remained focused on my study. She had faith in me throughout and supported me during difficult periods and lean financial times, but always maintained that life should not be just work, and took me on quite a few holiday excursions and cruises. She has been a true inspiration and, without Patty, I would most certainly have fallen by the wayside long ago.

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discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Prologue

Prologue - Social justice and my personal link to this study

Distinguished (prominent) American autoethnographers Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner suggested commencing an autoethnography with a short personal narrative designed to position the author and the thesis for the readers (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This I have undertaken as a thesis Prologue, with the intention of demonstrating why I have such an aversion to prejudice and such a strong sense of social justice. It will, in part, reveal why I am what I am today and will voice my inspiration in writing this thesis. This motivation is no doubt promoted by my strong sense of social justice, and this probably developed in part from the experiences described in the following pages; and more directly and recently, from a range of personal experiences where I too have experienced a variety of forms of workplace discrimination.

My early history

I was born two years after the Second World War and my early recollections of life as a young English lad was playing on the bomb sites of the City of Portsmouth ruins. Many English cities lay in total ruin, as did the English economy, with each agonisingly slow to rebuild and recover.

These early years of what was (particularly in England) quite a common world view of reality, had a profound influence on my life and possibly the other children’s later lives. My brothers and many young playmates all believed that this was the way life was supposed to be.

These early influences of the legacies of war were possibly instrumental in the development of what I perceived to be a deep camaraderie and a deeper concern for others, hand-in-hand with developing a strong and rich foundation in social justice. My early lack of understanding of the wider world was shaped by the war and its ravages, but as I continued to grow and develop, I attempted to make sense of an often unfair and unjust world with a growing realisation that we gain from this world

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what we put into it, but with resources so depleted (as they were in post-war Europe), many of us were taught to share all we had with those less fortunate. My philosophy in life has always been that we are put on this earth to assist those less capable of handling the trials and tribulations that life presents. This realisation of ownership, laws, greed, and power of the privileged few, evokes thoughts in later life of new realities pertaining to the workplaces of those who have succeeded and achieved, while leaving me wondering how many of these success stories have resulted from crushing others to achieve their station and status?

My early years in England were, to me, quite normal and/or unspectacular. My older family members had recently survived the bleakness of war-torn Europe, while my father (who married my mother in 1943) survived the direct confrontation on the warfront on a range of mid-to large-size English warships and on two occasions convalesced, once in Canada and the other in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), after being blown up in combat. My mother survived the war as a nurse living (mostly) at home, with the relative luxury of only the German blitzkrieg to contend with, including frequent and, on occasion, perilous nightly sojourns to the cellar air-raid shelter. Portsmouth endured 67 air-raids during the Battle of Britain in 1940-1. My mother told me of one such occasion when her grandmother’s three-storey Victorian house took a direct hit. She, her mother and grandmother survived, buried in the cellar for three days. Their greatest fear was not the bombs, but the fear of being gassed from a broken gas line. Such was life in the Southern English town of Portsmouth, home of one of England’s largest Royal Navy bases and, as a consequence, a direct object of Hitler’s attention and aspiration of world dominance and the destruction of the British navy and all its environmental surrounds and human inhabitants. My family incidentally, had been quite wealthy and lost five houses, grandmother’s included, in that one single German air-raid.

Quite possibly as a legacy of the war, and the homecoming of military men, discipline was rock solid in the English home. Many wives and children (such as us) were reared in near military command centre homes, obeying father’s snapped orders with no time for dalliance or ‘when-I’m-ready responses’, followed by the rapid quick-fire flat hand intrusions on our tiny behinds for being defiant in taking more than an instant to respond to the barked order. We did as we were told, ate when "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
the food was on the table, were quiet when told to be so, wasted not and wanted not. At least, as was common in the society I experienced with its traditional close-knit community, we had all been instilled with respect for authority figures and our elders. Older people had lived longer and obviously had more skills and considerably more life experience. We knew this was the correct order and had no delusions as to the concept of the older statesman and authority. We certainly had this well drilled into us, and this was the reality of a normal home life as we perceived it, but we also knew no different.

This rigid command indoctrination certainly had an impact on my early upbringing and was the catalyst that made both my brother David, and myself, determined and competitive to the point that success was paramount in our own lives (although we were also very fair minded). An interesting contrast to the notion of fair mindedness was that my brothers and I were raised (possibly unintentionally) to be racist. My father told us that “the Germans had square heads (whatever that meant) but they were good fighters; the French were a bunch of cowards who gave in far too easily and Italian tanks had one forward gear and seven reverse” (also supposedly exhibiting cowardice). Sadly and disturbingly in my view, my father also observed that “the biggest mistake Hitler made was in not killing all the Jews.” We were also informed that “Black people, Irish and the Africana had inferior mental capacity. Americans were loud mouthed, but not as loud as the Australians” and so forth. I do believe that we ourselves carried this legacy of intolerance until we became old enough to establish our own opinions and discard these heavy, unnecessary, and negative weights. A legacy of this hatred, however, is that I (and I am sure my older brother David) challenged all biases and prejudices as soon as we were subjected to them and old enough to do so. My father, as mentioned above, was blown up twice and was somewhat incapacitated as a result, and this no doubt played a part in the development of his personality. I can somewhat understand (but not accept) him holding certain prejudices. It is probably something that only a person who faces fear, demise, and death as a distinct daily possibility could possibly truly understand.

One of my earliest memories, which I believe had a lasting and compounding effect on my life, was my father’s other side. I remember distinctly on one occasion when he took me aside when I was a triumphant participant in a very one-sided soccer "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
game. He informed me that it was not in the best interests of all concerned to beat the living daylights out of the other team. “Win by all means” were his words, “but remember the boys on the other team have mothers and have feelings, and you must win gracefully and then be prepared to lose equally gracefully.” This stuck in my mind so deeply that afterwards, although remaining competitive to improve my own abilities, I had adjusted my mindset so that I really never cared whether I was on the winning or losing side; often it was more important to let the other child (or team) experience the jubilation of winning. At the age of ten, my father, probably as a consequence of himself being the son of an English boxing champion, ‘pushed’ me into the boxing ring. The earlier win-lose philosophy remained with me and the sport was the paramount focus, not my own ego (quite possibly, the main reason why I never became a world champion contender).

With the benefits of a loving father and mother, this story will relate how my father’s own habits, prejudices, and stereotypes were imposed and transposed onto his three children, and these habits and prejudices became, at least for a while, our own. This story will also reveal the culture shock we three children experienced, facing ethnocentrism and open racism when we ventured from our safe and secure English homeland to our new far-off Australian environment. This new positioning also brought out, in all three boys, a heightened level of social and cultural awareness and justice, and the absolute realisation of the damage caused by ethnocentrism and racism. So strong was the deep feeling of justice, that self-reflection on this issue made all three boys very accepting of other cultures and all people’s idiosyncrasies and differences. So, once the initial shock of a different world diminished and a new life venture took place, our Australian accents rapidly developed (very much as a survival tactic) and life went on. Life in Australia became very much the same as life in England, the one notable difference being the non-existence of bombsites, no ration cards, a booming economy in contrast to England’s, and many more post-school employment opportunities.

**My early school days in Australia**

On my first day at my new Australian high school (March 1960), at the age of 12 years and 9 months, I was asked to take an intelligence test (I assume a standard IQ

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test). I cannot recall the test itself, but I do remember that the outcome resulted in me being placed in a class with giants (14 and 15 year-olds). In the early stages, my school life was made a misery by these giants. A number of boys in this class would push and shove and trip me over and, of course, call me the obligatory “Pommie Bastard”. The clichés were constant. “All Pommies are Bastards” … “the only good Pom’s a dead Pom.” Occasionally, these clichés were more subtle and, on one occasion, a boy informed me that he would give me £10 to go back to England and would give me another £20 to take two of my “f******” mates. Of course, this was so funny that everyone in the class laughed at my expense. The derision, threats, and unpleasantness were probably made worse because I challenged these taunts head-on. As a young boxer (albeit quite small in comparison to others in the class), I had an extremely accurate and effective straight left and used it frequently to regain some of the lost esteem that I felt was being forced upon me. As a result, I found solace and companionship in the company of other Poms, Greeks, Italians, and one or two Aboriginals. All these friends were experiencing similar prejudice from this band of sheep (albeit a minority) who could be described as ethnocentric, racist, bigoted bully boys. As a result, I was intensely miserable and inadvertently became quite ashamed and embarrassed of my heritage, believing that there was indeed something quite inferior about English people (I am not sure if my intense need to be competitive, strong, and the best came from this experience. I can definitely assume that it certainly played a part).

I now sincerely regret that as a means of what I now realise was a survival tactic, I very rapidly lost my English accent. I took on lazy clipped Aussie expressions and exclamations (all with an ocker drawl) such as ‘youse’, ‘yeh’, ‘wanna’, ‘obstropolous’, and ‘barrack’ (barrack in England, and in the English Concise Dictionary, actually meaning the complete reverse of the Aussie usage), even though I knew these to be incorrect, but the end result was paramount and did make me part of the in-crowd. As an English child surrounded by the ever-presence of authority and military, I was conditioned to respect greater authority and would never consider questioning or violating any form of this higher authority. This was, of course, until I quite unconsciously discovered that this is what would gain the most respect from the giants. It was June 1960 and I had now been at this high school for three months. I was sitting near the rear of the class during the weekly music lesson. I casually “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
screwed up a piece of paper into a pellet and propelled it (from my ruler) straight onto the nose of the music teacher as she raised her head above the piano in the middle of Mozart’s ‘Eine Kleine Nachtmusik’. She ran down the stairs crying and across the school playground to the Vice-Principal's office. As she ran below the classroom window, the ‘giants’ lit and rained exploding tuppenny bungers (two-penny fireworks) down on her. I had arrived. I was a hero (for two minutes). It was so funny that many in the class swarmed to encourage me, until the Vice-Principal appeared in the classroom doorway and demanded to know who had hit the music teacher with the pellet? I put my hand up and said bravely and instantly (as honesty had been instilled as an English virtue), “I did sir.” I was caned and then expelled from school immediately with the Vice-Principal’s words, that I still distinctly remember, “Brown, I think you should find another school to go to. In any case, there is no-one left here that you haven’t beaten up.” And so came to an abrupt end my transition from a respectable, shy, honest English boy, to a sneaky, bigoted, bully, pseudo-Aussie giant.

It is interesting to note that in the 1990s, at a school reunion planning session (from another school) at my then girlfriend’s place, I and ten of my ‘Aussie’ school mates were otherwise distracted by the England versus Australia Rugby Union game on television. Needless to say, a few beers and a good football game took precedence over a planning session. I was the only England supporter in the room. At the end of the game, while I was rubbing in the English victory to the rather subdued bunch of poor Aussie losers, six of the ten then admitted that they were in fact also English immigrants and could just as easily have supported England. Further questioning revealed that they had (as had I previously) in fact been hiding and denying their heritage because of school ethnocentrism and discrimination.

**The undeniable impact of sport**

In the early days of my arrival in Australia, I maintained my interest in sport. I went to football (different codes), soccer, and boxing matches, and was shocked at what I perceived as the Australians’ very different attitude to sport. Quite contrary to the words of my English father, here in Australia, it appeared to be a disgrace to lose in any sport, and it was imperative to win by the largest conceivable margin and by any

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means possible. Spectators booing the opposition was not only common-place, but was (I believe) by some, considered compulsory. There were elements in some of these people that did not make them nice people at all! But how does one survive (without counselling) unless one adopts a similar mentality? What does one do with their values when confronted with those that directly oppose them? I must admit that in the early days of my arrival in Australia, I was experiencing culture shock and was very homesick.

I believe, in particular, that the above childhood realities were the basis, grounding, and original source of my very strong sense of social justice! England, and my father’s earlier words, certainly had an impact, but those early days of life in Australia where I was viewed as, and felt like, an inferior underling, discriminated against through no fault of my own, was in my estimation the real genuine source. I knew in my heart what was right and wrong and I certainly had a very strong aversion to any form of prejudice and discrimination. I believe to this day in the rights of the discriminated and the underdog, and I will fight any cause with total conviction until justice prevails. Such is my feeling in writing this thesis that it is not just for my own personal satisfaction and development, but also for those who have been discriminated against and who have been thwarted by a discriminating society.

As a twenty-one year old, I returned to England and Europe (via Africa) for a three year working holiday. I enjoyed the warmth of social life in other cultures and other countries and determined then, and to the present, that I would never ever allow myself to be intimidated by bullies, or allow myself to be ashamed or embarrassed of my heritage. To this day, when people criticise other countries and cultures, I ask them “have you ever been there”? Usually the conversation ends there. I find any form of discrimination abhorrent and this is why I am doing this study.

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis examines the effects of perceived workplace age discrimination on a small group of professional Australian men. The thesis reveals that, in this group, age discrimination is a potential stressor which negatively affects job and life satisfaction, power and prestige, affective, normative, and continuance commitment, and increases the occurrence of withdrawal cognitions (Redman & Snape, 2005). These conditions cannot be viewed in isolation as the events relating to the trauma also touch family, the workplace, and wider society (Daniell 1985; Redman & Snape, 2005). Perceived workplace age discrimination can be directly responsible for emotional consequences such as depression, shame, frustration, unhappiness, loss of self-esteem, and deteriorated health conditions such as increased cardiovascular and psychological reactivity (Redman & Snape, 2005). The literature in this field reveals research which highlights conclusive evidence associated with the benefits of retaining older workers with positive outcomes, including increased intellectual advancement acquired through experience, workplace stability coefficients, and increased intrinsic values and norms related to job design (Gringart, Helmes, & Speelman, 2004).

While the prime focus of this thesis is on the effects of mature age professional Australians, a report into the barriers to mature age employment (Temple & Adair, August 2012, produced on behalf of the Consultative Forum on Mature Age Participation by National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre), facilitates a contextual understanding into the dilemma that Australia is facing in regard to older Australian workplace participation. The report noted the challenges faced by the Australian economy with the current and oncoming baby boomer exodus into retirement. It noted the loss of skills and experience in the labour market and the decrease in the Government’s revenue base as a result of the cost of pensions, healthcare, and the reduction in tax revenue as a consequence of retirement. The report suggested that older people should remain in the workforce to better fund their own retirement and therefore put less stress on government expenditure. It also noted that the issue of increasing mature age employment participation has already gained attention as a

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This thesis provides a background to age discrimination by citing literature that demonstrates a global problem (Gringart et al, 2004). This is followed with recent Australian demographics and statistics which demonstrate that Australia is an ageing nation (Encel, 1999).

In putting the terms age and ageing into perspective, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA and HelpAge International, 2012) classified demographic ageing as occurring in developed countries such as Japan, Singapore, Australia, Sweden, Denmark, and England (in addition to other countries) where older people feature as a larger proportion of the total population. The UNFPA (2012) further defined there to be no exact definition of ‘old’, as it has different meanings in different societies. However, they also claimed the progression towards ageing as multidimensional and involving individual physical, psychological, and social changes. The UNFPA (2012) further claimed that in many developed countries, 65 years of age is used as a reference point and is often when social security age benefits become available. However, the UNFPA (2012) also identified the increase in longevity today, and claimed that around the year 1900, the average developed country life expectancy was between 45 and 50 years, while today, it is greater than 80 years.

This thesis initially acknowledges that age discrimination is a prominent, although hidden, form of discrimination (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) 2010, 2016; Shacklock, 2005). Bennington (2001) claimed that it is subtle, difficult to detect, and the least open to observation of any other Human Resource management practice. While age discrimination is the most susceptible to unlawful discrimination, it has been argued that individuals are often completely unaware that they are even being subjected to its various forms (Bennington, 2001).

The thesis is then drawn to myths and stereotypes that have engendered this disturbing impact on people’s human rights (UNFPA and HelpAge International,
2012), focusing on the attitudes and behaviours of employers, agencies\(^1\), and older workers themselves. A commentary proceeds on the range of psychological effects upon the displaced, unemployed, and under-employed, and progresses onto an examination of the known impact and effects on the lives of those who perceive that they have suffered age discrimination. The thesis then provides an overview of the research method which underpins this thesis, before revealing the findings, the analysis, and the conclusions.

Job loss, in itself, is a major consequence of age discrimination. Rotter (2009) stated:

*Job loss is a negative life event which ranks in the upper quartile of unpleasant events that generate life stress … In terms of lost ‘utility’ units, it is worse than separation and divorce … Unemployed persons have, in general, poorer health than employed persons … and suffer, in particular, from more psychological distress or mental illnesses* (p. 32).

The thesis method is autoethnography which falls under the qualitative ethnographic umbrella. This form of research specifically includes, and embeds, the self-reflections of the researcher together with those of a small number of interview participants (Spry, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Autoethnography studies a cultural phenomenon - in this case, the perceived effects of age discrimination on professional Australian men - by relating a small group’s personal experiences as embedded members of the study (Ellis, 2004).

To provide support and depth to my own story, I have followed the ethnographic conventions espoused by Ellis and Bochner (2000) and supported by many other ethnographic researchers (Atkinson et al., 2003; Chang, 2008; Delamont, 2009; Ellis 2004). I have interviewed four other similarly positioned professional men who added their own stories of significant life-changing events to mine. The inclusion of these stories, in addition to adding depth to my story and to the phenomenon under

\(^1\) I have used, quite selectively, the general term agency (or agencies) throughout this thesis to encompass Government Departments and recruitment programs and/or Private Recruitment Agencies.

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investigation, also ensures that any accusations of self-absorption or narcissism on my part are overcome by balancing the overall impact of the phenomenon presented.

Ellis and Bochner (2000, 2004) suggested commencing an autoethnography with a personal tale relating to the phenomena under study. This I did in the thesis ‘Prologue’ by retelling the foundations of the establishment of my early developmental years and my strong sense of social justice - an added feature of autoethnography (Spry, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). An essential convention of autoethnography is to use first person speech (Ellis & Bochner 2000, 2004).

**Scope of the research**

This thesis investigates the effects of workplace age discrimination on the lives of five Australian professional men (including myself). It is a qualitative study using the reflexive autoethnographic method. In recognising the parameters of the study, I will clarify that the investigation of the age discrimination phenomenon is broadened with insightful reflections from the presented experiences of both myself and the four other participants. The study describes the personal life-changing circumstances and resultant consequences of actions that have affected our lives and the lives of others closely associated with us. The study relates the stories of how Australian employers and recruitment agencies have affected our ability to earn a fair living and to maintain a just and equitable opportunity to obtain and sustain our place in society. This study is original research which aims to contribute a substantial body of knowledge to the problem of age discrimination, most notably focusing on the widely felt, and personally debilitating, effects imposed upon the individuals herein.

This study is intended to add to current and further investigation on this important topic and to bring heightened awareness to the depth of this phenomenon, so as to increase and establish societal, government, recruiter, agency, and older person attitudes to this crisis. While issues of age discrimination are apparent all around us, there must be a demand for action, and a demand for greater understanding of the

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damage and appalling legacy that this malady has inflicted, and is inflicting, on
innocent people.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) stated that an autoethnography “…makes the researcher’s
own experience a topic of investigation in its own right” (p. 733). This experience
enables the researcher to become involved, and to empathise, with the experience
of others. This unique research method therefore immerses the writer in the thick of
the unfolding drama and, in combination with the unravelling of interviews with
Australian men, it focuses on and promotes the use of voice, including bias,
options, empathy, emotions, and all variants and idiosyncrasies of persona and
personal behaviour. Through this means, it extracts a range of phenomena,
incidents, and events, including the personal damage on the victims, through the
phenomenological approach and fully enables the extraction of data in a rich form.

Breaking down the term autoethnography into its component parts adds meaning to
this methodological labelling. Auto = Self; Ethno = Culture (in this instance, age
discrimination); and Graphy = Study of. In broadening this label of autoethnography,
Anderson (2006) identified five key features of analytic autoethnography that have
shaped my approach to this research. These are (Anderson, 2006):

(1) Complete member researcher (CMR) status;
(2) Analytic reflexivity;
(3) Narrative visibility of the researcher’s self;
(4) Dialogue with informants beyond the self; and
(5) Commitment to theoretical analysis (p. 378).

Based on material from the interview participants, and a review of the literature in the
field, this study provides extensive commentary on the harm that age discrimination
is causing (and has caused) to Australian society and older members of the
community. The commentary extends to the urgent need for agencies and
employers to act with resolve and commitment to overcome inappropriate
discrimination, particularly in light of the demographic changes facing Australian
society in relation to an ageing population and the evolving retirement dilemma. The
citing and recognition of changing demographics and statistics is an important
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component of the main focus of the study to demonstrate the folly of the damage that age discrimination inflicts on older men and women and, indeed, broader society.

This thesis focuses on two main issues. Firstly, it comments on the damage, hurt, and pain inflicted on men (and their families and others), based on the interviews and recordings with the participants who have experienced its consequences, as well as comparing and contrasting this with the literature in the field. Secondly, this study provides a significant array of additional research to provide new knowledge in this important field of investigation, bringing heightened attention and scrutiny to what is happening in the Australian workplace. This research conveys lived experiences, alongside information from other forms of research that shows the damaging impact of discrimination and the need to stifle the harm it causes in the workplace and wider society.

It is important to acknowledge that both older men and older women experience age discrimination (UNFPA and HelpAge International, 2012). This study could have incorporated a female focus, as a section of the literature has claimed a higher prevalence of discrimination against women. UNFPA and HelpAge International (2012) stated:

\[
given \ that \ women \ may \ also \ face \ the \ cumulative \ effect \ of \ gender \ discrimination, \ including \ historically \ less \ access \ to \ education, \ lower \ earning \ capacity \ and \ limited \ access \ to \ rights \ to \ land \ ownership, \ therefore \ contributing \ to \ their \ vulnerability \ in \ older \ age \ (p. \ 28).\]

The rhetoric regarding the Australian older workers’ struggle has in recent times significantly broadened with the general public now being virtually bombarded with daily newspaper articles, forums, magazines, books, journal articles, electronic media and more. One example comes from (The) Guardian journalist Bianca Nogrady (20 April, 2017), who opened the door to public comment and feedback by claiming that “Older workers face unique hardships. Hampered by unfair stereotypes about their abilities, their role in society and their responsibilities ….” She furthers that in particular, older women are regularly overlooked for interviews, jobs, promotions and recognition and are more likely viewed as having outdated skills, “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
being slow to learn, or do an unsatisfactory job. She claims that Australian companies are not addressing the challenges or countering the stereotypes.

The UNFPA and HelpAge International (2012) also claim the toxic combination of gender and age discrimination also places “older women at increased risk of violence and abuse” (p. 28). However, as stated, my thesis describes professional male age discrimination, broadened by necessity through the richness of the participants’ stories.

**The background context of the research**

In describing the contemporary Australian workplace, Thornton and Luker (2010) argued that:

> … in a postmodern environment, where the culture of ‘youthism’ predominates, the workplace is undergoing significant changes. In the new knowledge economy, characterised by technical know-how, flexibility and choice, traditional values such as maturity, experience and loyalty have become passé … as part of the culture of youthism, work is now being gauged by its capacity to create an aesthetic of pleasure (p. 141).

Age discrimination is a worldwide phenomenon (Amos, 2005) which has been historically embedded within workplaces across the globe, with a major consequence being job loss and under-employment. The personal and societal impacts and effects which result from discrimination, in addition to being well documented (over many years), are in fact also quite significant (American Family Physician, 2006; Armstrong, 2010; Garstka, Hummert, & Branscombe, 2005). Peretti et al. (1986, quoting Baskin, 1975) and Bennington (2004) claimed that people who suffer job loss and cannot relocate to suitable work, feel useless and inadequate and suffer from increased physiological and psychological stress leading to increased psycho-physiological disorders.

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Peretti et al. (1986) features prominently in this thesis and, although dated, is far too significant and relevant to this topic not to include and value. Peretti et al. (1986) researched the self-perceived psychological effects of chronic unemployment on men, the findings of which add much depth and relevance to this similar study. They added that hopes, desires, dreams, and personal ambitions are often destroyed by unemployment, and the loss of affiliation with the workgroup damages the individual’s personality displayed through the collective judgments of colleagues and associates. The effects of job loss, according to Shelton (2011, citing Amundson & Borgen, 1987), can be compared with the grieving process and may result in depression, withdrawal, retreat, suicide, and homicide. Zawada (1980, in Shelton, 1985) and Guindon and Smith (2002) claimed that the stress reactions associated with job loss, and the consequent emotional and psychological influences, may directly impede the subsequent job search and inhibit one’s ability to search and secure suitable future employment.

**Why this study is necessary**

The following pages initially relate a range of demographics and statistics which in addition to highlighting the impact that discrimination has on both older people and society, assists in placing the age discrimination phenomenon within a tangible framework, thereby enabling a fuller appreciation of this personal narrative.

This study is also necessary for personal reasons. It involves me – the author – and relates some disturbing aspects of my life that I am motivated to put on paper. Secondly, this study highlights and uncovers considerable research relating to the damage and debilitating blow that age discrimination has on workers and professional men, and the potential impact for society in general. Therefore, it is essential and timely to bring home and signpost to employers, governments, organisations, and employment agencies that this phenomenon needs to be addressed immediately. Of paramount importance, this thesis is an opportunity for the discriminated man to have his own say; to broadcast what discrimination has done to him and, in so doing, enable his cathartic empowerment.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

From its broadest context, the UNFPA and HelpAge International (2012) stated:

*Age-related discrimination is one of the most frequent challenges faced by older persons in the exercise of their human rights, in developed and developing countries alike. Even though certain cases of reasonable and proportionate differences in treatment on the grounds of age are permitted, there are circumstances in which old age is the basis for denial of services, limitation on accessing benefits, performing activities or exercising rights. Many older people are acutely aware of discrimination due to age, while others are unaware of their rights and wrongly accept this treatment as part of being old* (p. 33).

This study also highlights other issues which impact significantly on the older Australian worker. In 1998, the Australian Bureau of Statistics predicted that by 2016, persons aged 45 and above would account for more than 80% of the growth in Australia’s labour force, while the teenage labour force was the only age group predicted to fall (Australian Bureau Statistics, 1998). These predictions were partially supported by Encel (1999, 2004) who claimed that chronic unemployment since the 1970s has prompted many government agencies to reduce pressure by encouraging young people to focus on education and older people to retire early, therefore resulting in a period of reduced labour force participation (LFP) for older men.

Bringing these figures into the modern context, Colebatch and Butt (2013) quoted recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) figures which validated these earlier predictions. However, Colebatch and Butt (2013) claimed that other factors have impacted on the Australian work environment, and since the global financial crisis, Australia has undergone considerable change, with the five years prior to 2013 witnessing a considerable increase in older workforce participation (both men and women in their late 60s) from 172,000 to 278,000. The figures also indicate that less than half of eligible 15 to 19 year olds have work (having shed 93,000 jobs in those five years), with education numbers soaring commensurately. There is evidence that these older person workforce changes relate significantly to casual, part-time, and contract employment which Palan (June 12, 2013) claimed boosts and distorts the

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unemployment statistics while, at the same time, introducing new implications, threats, and challenges to the older worker (Palan, 2013).

In a speech for the launch of the “Willing to Work Report”, Senator George Brandis QC (May 2016), Attorney-General and Leader of the Government in the Australian Senate, claimed that people aged 55 and over make up only 16 per cent of the workforce while actually accounting for a quarter of the population. Former Senator and then (in 2016) Age Discrimination Commissioner, Susan Ryan, released her published speaking notes for the launch, and stated that “This age cohort is the fastest growing in Australia and will remain so for the foreseeable future” (Ryan, 2016). She continued that by 2055 the number of Australians over 65 will have doubled and that with life expectancy (for both men and women) anticipated to be well over 90, drastic change is essential, with people who lose their jobs at 50 are viewing 40 years of potentially unsupported unemployment. Ryan (2016) also claimed that modelling indicated that a 7 percent increase in the mature-age workforce would raise the GDP by approximately $25 billion by 2022; this is repeated in the COTA media release (2016), who also claim that organisations which have taken advantage of diversity and older participation have reported tangible benefits in productivity, performance and innovation. Ryan (2016) continues that in an economy with serious skill shortage, the exclusion of older workers makes no sense. Ryan (2016) adds another dimension by claiming that those denied the opportunity to work are also denied the “personal and social benefit - of dignity, independence, a sense of purpose and … social connectedness”.

**Research aim**

This thesis will document the effects of workplace disadvantage upon older men in Australia, based on interviews, the literature, and expert commentary in the field. This analysis will explore a range of physical, psychological, and social effects (Bonney, 2004; Brand, Levy, & Gallo, 2008; Creed & Macintyre, 2001; Creed & Muller, 2006; Creed, Muller, & Machin, 1999; Dragano et al., 2008).

This thesis will primarily investigate the following research question:

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• What are the effects of age discrimination on Australian professional men?

Secondary questions that relate to the main question, but warrant separate investigation are:

• How do older professional men perceive and react to decisions potential employers have made?
• How does the experience of age-related employment discrimination affect other family members?
• How does the perceived view of a level (or lack) of support from government (and protective legislation), society, and family impact on professional men who have experienced employment age discrimination?

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Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Chapter outline

This literature review addresses the research questions and attempts to fill the identified gaps in the research. It establishes links between Australian workplace behaviour and recent research evidence (some from around the world), and will demonstrate that many professional men are being deprived of their rightful place in the Australian workplace and, as a consequence, are suffering significant effects to their physical and psychological health (Armstrong, 2010; AHRC, 2010; Commonwealth of Australia Intergenerational Report, April 2007, hereafter referred to as Intergenerational Report; Kelly, 2012; Raine, 2012; Ryan, 2013).

Selection of relevant materials

In addition to the latest up-to-date research and literature, this thesis has also cited older research, which projects well-laid foundations relating to both proximity and relevance to the specific study focus. Authors such as Jahoda (1981, 1984), who initiated the theory on the manifest and latent functions of job loss; Peretti et al. (1986), whose research on the comparison of similarly positioned men in the 1980s adds depth and context to the modern setting; and Daniell (1985), who indicated that discrimination has far deeper implications than merely those which affect the individual. Her (Daniell) early research supported Komarovsky’s (1973) study of family dislocation and power balance (imbalance) during the Great Depression of the 1930s, and detailed how other family members and friends are also inextricably embedded within the web of effects. This usage of older material is therefore deliberate as it is moderated by, and compared with, the modern literature which significantly demonstrates that discrimination is not a modern concept, and expressively displays that the effects on the victim are similar (if not identical) over time.

The literature review provides extensive background information and statistics in relation to age discrimination in the workplace, and examines the decline in status and prestige of professional men once they have experienced the personal "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
complexities that lie between former work security and an unknown future. Both Peretti et al. (1986) and Shacklock (2005) claimed that a professional man’s fall is greater than that of other workers, and links this with issues relating to their psychological capital and personal identity and ego. This section continues to cover information relating to the professional man’s fall, such as loss of the manifest and latent functions of employment (Creed, Muller, & Machin 1999; Jahoda, 1981, 1984; Paul & Batanic 2010) the associated depression, aggression, stress and despair, loss of self-esteem, and the guilt and shame of his new lower position and employment status. Finally, the section looks at the residual factors that may have an effect on mental health and which may impede the future job search.

The literature review is extensive and provides a foundation upon which to develop the discussion chapter by isolating circumstances where the prime and original data gels or does not gel with the data obtained from the participants. The literature review contains summaries of the key issues related to the research, but also goes well beyond merely summarising a range of studies. It focuses on specific research and includes an analysis of the relationship among the different studies. It is written to provide a theoretical framework and rationale for this research study and draws particular themes that provide a structure to analyse and align what the participants have related. Where it was found that the participants may have stated issues that do not relate to the cited literature, this is noted and discussed.

**Gap in the literature**

Hassell and Perrewe (Spring 1993), claimed that there was only limited research into the psychological impact and effects of the phenomenon of age discrimination, particularly on men. This early study stated that there was an absence of research investigating the age discrimination perceptions of individuals within organisations, and what the consequences of these perceptions may have been for older workers’ psychological health. This dearth of attention has mostly continued to the present day (AHRC, 2016, 2017; Ryan, in Raine, 2012), although recent research by Gabriel, Gray and Goregaokar (2010, 2013) makes an essential contribution to the professional’s job-loss narrative as they investigate the aftermath where victims try to

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make sense of their new lives. Of particular relevance to this research study is the contribution of Herrmann (2012), who views academic discourse and the narrative of academic success after an initial period of academic limbo and job search failure. This focus only currently skims the surface and highlights the essential need for positive action and more and wider research into this field.

Ozdowski (2002) claimed that there is little doubt that age discrimination is rampant within our society. In more contemporary times, there also appears to be very little research specifically on the impact and effects of perceived age discrimination (Redman & Snape, 2005). Redman and Snape (2005) claimed the existence of many studies relating to coping behaviours for those who have suffered race discrimination, but the research on the relationship between perceived age discrimination and psychological outcomes was limited (Redman & Snape, 2005). In citing Utsey (1998) and Brown (2001), Redman and Snape (2005) stated that much of the literature has been in the form of single-item indicators, and in citing Dietch et al. (2003), they noted that few of the previous studies focused on discrimination in the workplace. They (Redman & Snape 2005) commented on the inadequacy of using general population surveys, student surveys, and laboratory experiments with students to provide data relating to workplace discrimination. Finally, Redman and Snape (2005) claimed that almost all of these studies have been conducted in North America, therefore leaving a void in the research into this phenomenon in the Australian setting.

Sightler, Tudor, Brush, and Roebuck (1996) explored adjustment to unemployment in the professional ranks by means of administering Kaufman's 1982 'Scale of Adjustment', which rated anomie (the breakdown of social norms and values), self-esteem, anxiety, irritation, resentment, depression, aggression, social support, burden, and life satisfaction. Sightler et al. (1996) claimed that while the psychological effects of unemployment on blue collar workers was well-established, relatively little was known about the psychological effects on recently unemployed middle managers and professionals, with involuntary unemployment being a relatively new phenomenon for these professionals and managers. Additionally, these managers may differ from non-professionals and many non-managers in

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relation to education and training at the organisational level; therefore it is claimed (Sightler et al, 1996) that their psychological reactions may be different as well.

**The Australian Government’s awareness of the need to act**

The Australian Human Rights Commission (2017 Webpage) indicates that the new and current Human Rights Commissioner (appointed July 2016), the honourable Dr Kay Patterson AO, considers an essential focus of her role to be older worker rights, elder person abuse, and the need to evaluate the risk of, and encourage innovative solutions to, the homelessness of older Australians.

An earlier AHRC (2010) paper quoted figures from November 2009 which indicated that 156,300 workers aged 45–54, and 101,500 over 55, were underemployed. The paper also claimed that Australian productivity and economic growth are affected by unlawful age discrimination, where mature age workers are forced out of the workforce or are significantly under-employed (AHRC, 2010). The Commission further stated that the older worker participation rate in Australia was lower than in other OECD countries including New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Canada. This top end weighting of the aged unemployed has serious connotations for Australian society as a whole. To highlight this trend, more recent demographics indicate that the labour force participation of older Australians (AHRC, 2016) has increased - for women - from 28.9% in 1995 to 58.6% in 2015; and - for men – from 62% to 72.9% for the same period. However, the AHRC (2016) adds that despite these increases, labour force participation continues to decline with age with only 56.5% of 60-64 year olds and only 12.7% of those 65 and over, actively engaged in the workforce.

Evidence from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (May 2013) indicated that the 2013 unemployment figures of 5.5 per cent were masked because of the above stated under-employment levels, and this is of particular concern for the older worker. More recent figures of 5.7 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) also indicate a slight deterioration in these unemployment statistics. ABC News broadcaster Simon Palan (2013) claimed that we are being warned by economists that an

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increase in Australia’s casual and part-time employment actually means that the unemployment rate is higher than we think, and while it is estimated that 35 per cent of Australia’s workforce is now either working on a casual or contract basis, official figures demonstrate that an additional 7 per cent of casual and/or part-time workers are willing and able to work more hours (Palan, 2013). Palan (2013) also stated that “to be locked into part-time work for a long period can be debilitating” (ABC Broadcast).

Aquino, Russell, Cutrona, and Altmaier (1996, in Gringart et al., 2004) and Bennington and Wein (2003, 2006) stated that hiring discrimination is counter-productive as firstly, it presents younger people with a pessimistic view of their future; secondly, it invariably results in the best person for the job not being selected, thus creating a dilemma of potential financial compromise to the company; and thirdly, older adult job-seekers become increasingly frustrated and depressed, potentially leading to mental health problems. Gringart et al. (2004) also stated that as the baby-boom generation is so large, this situation has the potential to greatly compound.

There is an added financial factor to the above realisation that also needs urgent consideration. The Australian Government Department of Treasury Report (hereafter Treasury Report) (2010) claimed that with an ageing population, “the proportion of working age people supporting people aged over 65 years reduces” (p. vii). The report also predicted that the rate of improvement in Australia’s living standards is projected to fall placing pressure on our capacity to fund the spending of an ageing population, particularly in health terms (Treasury Report, 2010). The report further claimed that Australia’s population will continue to grow - although at lower rates than over the past 40 years. This phenomenon will place added pressure on the environment, infrastructure, and services, but it is acknowledged that the growth will assist the management of the pressures of an ageing population by providing innovation and skills necessary to support continued growth in the economy (Treasury Report, 2010).

The above dilemma needs to be addressed immediately as it indicates that the messages are not being accepted at the recruitment level, and these need to be “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
emphatically conveyed to employers and recruitment agencies who must act on this research now. This above trend (with supporting statistics) indicates a significant level of folly in terms of economics, health, and demographics. Simply stated, the Treasury Report (2010) supports the above statistics which show a significant fall in young people entering the labour market and the ageing population re-entering the workforce, or being retained, albeit in a reduced capacity (Colebatch & Butt, 2013). These trends indicate that the rate of aged persons withdrawing from the labour market is significantly less than youth entry, and this is indeed disturbing and has substantial connotations for older Australians (Treasury Report, 2010; Colebatch & Butt, 2013).

The Australian government has a growing awareness of employment anomalies (Ozdowski, 2002) and an increasing consciousness of the need to address the demographic shortage of human resources caused by the double effect of both decreasing birth rates and people living longer (Ryan in Kelly, 2012; Raine, 2012). With the intention of addressing these anomalies, the Australian government introduced age discrimination legislation in 2004. Since this time, Australian government agencies have made a number of attempts to comply with, and implement, a range of relevant aspects of the legislation in order to bring about a change in workplace and social attitudes.

The year 2010 witnessed the appointment of Elizabeth Broderick as Age Discrimination Commissioner (Armstrong, 2010), followed two years later by Susan Ryan (Kelly, 2012; Raine, 2012). Further support for legislative enforcement and societal enlightenment came from a number of government papers which focused on age discrimination from both an environmental and fiscal viewpoint, claiming that with declining birth rates and lower youth employment, there is a desperate need to retain and recruit older workers (Treasury Report, 2010; AHRC, 2010; Temple & Adair, August 2012).

More recent literature (Colebatch & Butt, 2013; Ryan, 2013) has claimed that since the global economic crisis, there has been a greater number of older Australians remaining in, or being recruited into, the workforce. Indeed, research by Billett, Dymock, Johson, and Martin (2011) also stands out as it has controversially "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
contended that very little workplace discrimination was apparent within their own specific research group study. However, it is the contention from the many sources within this thesis, and the indications presented by the interview participants, that this is certainly not the case. There is also contention that older workers are under-employed, therefore taking on more casual or part-time work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013), or being employed at a level not commensurate with their skills and experience, or at lower levels than previously held and maintained (Palan, 2013). It is also predominant throughout the many other sources cited in this thesis that stereotyping (Treasury Report, 2010; AHRC, 2013; Billett et al, 2011; Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2001; Lewis, 2010; Linden, Schippan, Baumann, & Spielberg, 2009; Ozdowski, 2002, 2009), the push for youthism (Thornton & Luker, 2010), and a range of other forms of discrimination, still restrict older workers’ employability and employment options.

Demographics, statistics and employment consequences for the older Australian

Professor Mary Beard from Newnham College, Cambridge, in an interview with Amelia Hill for her nine part series on age retirement for the Guardian (UK), posed the following question: “What caused one of the worst military disasters ever faced by the Roman Empire?” Answer “Retirement” (Hill, Feb 2016, p. 1). Beard continued that in AD14, the imperial power increased the retirement age and decreased the pensions of its legionnaires, causing mutiny in Pannonia and Germany.

Professor Christopher Phillipson, co-director of the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on ageing, related (Hill, Feb 2016) that pensioner poverty only began to improve in the UK in the 1970s. He stated that in 1946, the UK introduced the National Insurance Act for those without an occupational pension, which was basically the majority of the working class. He stated that “The reality is that the 1950s and 1960s were a time of great poverty for the majority of older people” (p. 2). He continued that the 1970s and 80s saw a dramatic fall in employment rates for men aged 60-64 from 81% in 1970 to 49.7% by 1985.

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Phillipson called this the emergence of the “third age”, the period of retirement following the trajectory of education – work – retirement. Phillipson continued, stating that “Many groups of workers will not benefit from a period of retirement because they will die before the state retirement age or will have insufficient income to be able to leave what may be precarious work in their 60s and early 70s” (p. 3).

Taylor, Loretto, Marshall, Earl, and Phillipson (2016) related that early retirement is increasingly viewed as being “at odds with increased life expectancy, labour shortages and the drive to contain pension costs” (p. 2). They (Taylor et al., 2016) related how labour market policies towards older people in industrialized societies, with the support of employer organizations and trade unions, have in the past been focused on encouraging or facilitating early retirement. However, demographic changes have resulted in a shift in policies and attitudes towards older workers.

Ozdowski (2002) and Gringart, Helmes, and Speelman (2004) claimed that men in their 50s form a disproportionately high percentage of the long-term unemployed. Ozdowski (2002) added that since 1978, the average unemployment period for over 55 males has increased steadily to about two years, this being double the national average. According to official OECD figures, Australia has the highest rate of unemployment of 55-59 year old men in any OECD country. Ryan supported this claim and added that the reason is age discrimination (Malcolm, Aug 2011).

Ozdowski, in quoting the Department of Family and Community Services Submission to the House of Representative Inquiry into Issues Specific to Workers Over 45 Years – 1999 (Commonwealth of Australia. Standing Committee on Employment. Education and Workplace Relations, 2000), claimed that 46 per cent of people in the 50-64 age group do not have paid employment, while 33 per cent rely on some form of social security payment.

In presenting a case for attitudinal change, Ryan (2013) claimed that, at the time of writing, 14 per cent of the Australian population was over 65, and this was expected to rise to 25 per cent by 2050 (Ryan, in Raine, 2012), thus highlighting the need for Australia to prepare for the social and economic effects of a major demographic shift. Encouraging people to delay retirement and work longer is a way to reduce the strain on the public purse, but this will certainly require a change in the employer mindset “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
(Ryan, in Raine, 2012). Further to this point, and although not the focus of this study, research by Deloitte Access Economics (cited by Ryan, in Raine, 2012) highlighted the potential economic damage caused by the exclusion of older workers. Ryan claimed that if the employment rate for over 55s was lifted by only 5 per cent, this would result in a 2.4 per cent rise in GDP, and an increase in national income which would equate to $48 billion. It is clear from these statistics and observations that there is an urgent need to stamp out the folly of age discrimination for multiple economic, health, and social reasons.

Ryan (in Raine, 2012) added a further dimension by claiming that with a declining birth rate, Australia will be unable to fill the skills gap (also see Commonwealth of Australia Intergenerational Report, April 2007). It has also been claimed that older workers are discarded through the process of age discrimination because of stereotypes relating to older people’s ability to use new technology. Ryan (in Raine, 2012) also stated that employers, HR professionals, and recruiters have not taken the legislation on board, and that some employers are still very uninformed and remain unaware of what is actually legal and permissible. Furthermore, they ignore the reality that older people (contrary to stereotyping) are quite capable of working beyond their retirement age (Ryan, in Raine, 2012). Older workers generally take fewer sick days and have a proven capability of learning new technology; thus, refuting false and inaccurate stereotyping (Ryan, in Raine, 2012).

Broderick, in an ABC Radio National Breakfast interview (Armstrong, 2010), stated that “from age 45, workers are still perceived” to be a poor return on investment. She further stated that age discrimination appeared to be acceptable in our society where older people were made to make room for younger people. Ryan (2013), quoting Urbis Australia statistics (2013 survey), claimed that “seventy-one percent of people in Australia already think age discrimination is common” (p. 33). Earlier support for the above negative perspectives comes from the former Human Rights Commissioner, Dr Sev Ozdowski OAM (2002), who in 2002 (two years before Australia implemented Federal age discrimination legislation), stated that:

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Age discrimination occurs where an opportunity is denied to a person solely because of his or her chronological age where age is irrelevant to the person’s ability to take advantage of that opportunity … Stereotypes and negative attitudes towards mature workers often consciously and subconsciously affect decision-making choices in employment (p. xviii).

In 2010, eight years after Ozdowski’s statement, and some six years after the implementation of Federal Age Discrimination Law in 2004, the AHRC (2010) released a paper which stated that workplace age discrimination still exists and “appears to sit quietly … go unnoticed and be largely accepted” (p. vii). This government paper described ageism as:

... a process of systematic stereotyping of, and discrimination against, people’ simply because they are older. Our ageist culture appears to be largely invisible, accepted and unacknowledged. Attitudes that employers and recruiters may hold are reflected in, and reinforced by, negative attitudes to older age found in our community (p. vii).

Evidence from both Federal Age Discrimination Law (Commonwealth of Australia Attorney General’s Dept, 2004) and the AHRC (2010), in addition to the ABC Age Discrimination Commissioner interviews (Ryan, in Kelly, 2012), indicated that employers, organisations, and agencies still marginalise, stereotype, and categorise older workers into a range of boxes of unemployability. Given the proximity of the contents of the two above statements, it would appear that very little has altered since the legislation was enacted. It would also appear reasonable to conclude that the major problem, and quite possibly the largest challenge to be overcome, with the phenomena of age discrimination, is that it unfortunately appears to be an accepted and institutionalised part of social and workplace behaviour (Armstrong 2010; Ozdowski 2002; Raine, Sept 2012). With the employer focus being firmly on youth and beauty (Armstrong, 2010; Human Rights Commission, 2010; Thornton & Luker, 2010), it will be a mammoth task to turn around this discrimination and demonstrate the workplace benefits that older people can, and do, offer.

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The above statistics paint a bleak picture for the older worker, and the desire to speak out against injustice has certainly increased in intensity. In an interview on ABC Radio National, Ryan (in Malcolm, Aug 2011) claimed a 44 per cent increase in age discrimination complaints since her appointment, indicating not only a growing awareness of this problem, but a change in social attitudes which are encouraging people to speak out. Interestingly, Ryan also underlined the difficulties surrounding the exposure of this topic, as she highlighted in the interview (Malcolm, Aug 2011) that there has not been a single successful case brought under the age discrimination legislation.

**The intrapersonal (individual) effects of age discrimination**

This first section, ‘the intrapersonal,’ examines the impact of discrimination on individual professional men who perceive that they are victims of this phenomenon. It covers the effects on persona that have emanated from their perception of a changed relationship with the labour market and its impact on status, wealth, confidence, relationships, and a range of other factors. Impediments to current work positions and subsequent efforts to obtain and procure a commensurate level of employment aligned to experience and qualifications are also covered.

This section begins by viewing the decline in status and prestige of professional men once they have experienced the personal complexities that lie between former security and an unknown future. Peretti et al. (1986) claimed that a professional man’s fall is greater than that of other workers and links this with issues relating to their psychological capital and personal identity and ego. The section continues to cover information relating to the professional man’s fall, such as loss of the manifest and latent functions of employment (Jahoda, 1981, 1984), the associated depression, aggression, stress and despair, loss of self-esteem, and the guilt and shame of a new lower position and employment status. Finally, this section will look at the residual factors that may have an effect on mental and physical health and which may impede the future job search.

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**Unemployment, underemployment and decline in status and prestige**

The major consequences to professional men who have suffered, or are suffering, from age discrimination are unemployment, under-employment, and employment below one’s actual abilities (Bennington, 2001; Ozdowski, 2002, 2010; Peretti et al., 1986; Redman & Snape, 2005). The above researchers claimed that these conditions are directly responsible for emotional consequences such as depression, shame, frustration, unhappiness, and lowered self-esteem and self-worth (Bennington, 2001; Ozdowski, 2002; Redman & Snape, 2005). Redman and Snape, in quoting other studies (Anderson, Myers, Pickren, & Jackson, 1989; Jones, Harrell, Morris-Prather, Thomas, & Omowale, 1996) claimed that discrimination affects physical and psychological health conditions such as increased cardiovascular and psychological reactivity.

Redman and Snape (2005) stated that while the impact of age discrimination is not necessarily the same as race and gender discrimination, these other forms provide useful insights into age discrimination with comparable results, as individuals may be less satisfied in their unchallenging job and may be less committed to their workplace contribution. They further claimed that people in such circumstances are likely to possess reduced levels of life satisfaction and may resign.

Redman and Snape (2005) added that personally perceived age discrimination has a negative effect on job satisfaction, life satisfaction, power, and prestige, and is a stressor which has an impact on withdrawal cognitions and affective, normative, and continuance workplace commitment. This affects both workplace and social behaviour and may carry with it a legacy effect for future employment. While discrimination may emanate from many areas and may be so covert that the actual causes of the discrimination may not be obvious, the effects upon the individual are very real and create innumerable problems and side-effects (Bennington 2001; Peretti et al., 1986). Consequences such as greater financial strain, for example, create a significant negative flow-on to other issues (Rantakeisu, Starrin, & Hagquist, 1999; Creed & Muller, 2006), which may include less structured and purposeful time use and present added strain and stress (Wanberg, Griffiths, & Gavin, 1997). Additionally, one’s reduced involvement in fewer social activities may

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be impediments which have a negative impact on health and well-being (Underlid, 1996). Creed and Muller (2003, 2006) claimed that if one has less involvement in a collective purpose, and a lowered sense of status, there is an increased likelihood that he/she will hold a heightened need for belonging, and a commensurately lower ability to be independent. Wanberg (2012) further linked job loss with discrimination and posed the question of whether the lower level of well-being of unemployed persons was a “causal outcome of unemployment or whether it is instead due to a tendency of individuals with poor psychological and physical health to lose their jobs (i.e. a selection effect)” (p. 371).

Evidence has shown that mature age workers may come to believe, or accept, negative age-based stereotypes, the consequence of which is the undermining of their own attitudes towards future job-seeking and trainability (AHRC, 2010). A mature age person may experience debilitation by inappropriately concluding that they are no longer ‘innovative and dynamic’, or are just ‘past it’, and may not bother applying for certain jobs, with re-entry into the workforce being viewed as improbable, the future as one of potential poverty, and all of this being detrimental to overall mental health (AHRC, 2010).

Peretti et al. (1986) explored the comparative level of a person’s previous position to their current role. They studied self-image, insecurity, attrition, withdrawal, and inferiority on four categories of unemployed men, ranging from professional managerial executives (PME) to unskilled manual workers (Peretti et al., 1986). This significant research discovered severe effects of unemployment in all the groups; however, the most severely affected were those who had previously been held in the highest esteem because of their professional standing (Peretti et al., 1986). The findings within their research determined that the self-blaming resulted in depression, self-doubt, self-pity, guilt, and a sense of failure towards family and friends, or anyone dependent on them for support. One noteworthy finding was that the sense of failure and depression was in contrast to the experiences of unskilled manual workers who suffered chronic unemployment. These researchers perceived minimal negative psychological effects due to the fact that many of these unskilled workers had expectations of becoming unemployed at some stage. This was because many lacked skills, abilities, potential, and opportunities, and had been unemployed for "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
long periods and, in some cases, a large proportion of their lives (Peretti et al., 1986). It was suggested that they had little understanding of the quality of life experienced by the other higher level groups, and that loss of income - with very little significant psychological effect - was the most notable stated effect on this group (Peretti et al., 1986). These findings clearly indicate that the social status and level of social acceptance within society has a significant impact on the effects of chronic unemployment on displaced workers, thereby demonstrating that the further one falls, the harder is the impact (Peretti et al., 1986).

Job loss is complex, with deleterious ramifications, but job loss coupled with age discrimination, albeit perceived, may exacerbate the problem. Guindon and Smith (2002) and McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, and Kinicki (Jan 2005) undertook research which indicated that isolation, rejection, and shame are common feelings associated with job loss, and when a person has a strong connection to their job, the loss is even more painful because the person measures their sense of self by what they do/did for a living. Guindon and Smith (2002) claimed that if one’s career is in crisis, then stress is high, self-esteem plummets, and this may often lead to depression. They (Guindon & Smith, 2002) contended that a person who has become depressed due to a career crisis, may move further into stagnation, frustration, and eventually, into apathy and burnout. With involuntary job loss, a person’s perceived stress may exceed their ability to cope with the demands of the environment and they may be unable to muster the internal strength and personal resources necessary to undertake and escalate an effective job search campaign (Guindon & Smith, 2002).

Liem and Liem (1988) studied efficacy and resilience in the employment context. They argued that workers do not simply experience the hardship imposed by unemployment, but actively contest their displacement and the conditions forced upon them. They argued that an important correlation to the level of unemployment depression is the link to the level of reward one placed on their previous employment, indicating that depression was greater if their job had been intrinsically rewarding as opposed to being boring and monotonous (Liem & Liem, 1988).

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Masculinity, personal identity and ego relating to the male employment role

As an historical base, and as a template for the modern interpretation and understanding of masculinity, it appears prudent to look at the period during, and subsequent to, the Great Depression of the 1930s. This period witnessed a crisis of masculinity, as the expression of manhood related to work, breadwinning, and patriarchy were wiped away by constant joblessness (Wood, 2008). Komarovsky (1973, in Wood, 2008) claimed that men experienced a sense of deep frustration because of their failure to fulfil the essential duty of their lives, the very acid test of ‘manhood’, that of the family provider obligation and role.

The fear of joblessness and the consequent loss of masculinity were described by Wood (2008) in his study of masculinity. Wood related the formation of ‘Forty Plus Clubs’ which were created to make it possible for unemployed executives to find work and to protect the male-dominated culture from loss of masculinity synonymous with unemployment. Wood (2008) continued by reiterating the findings of sociologist Komarovsky (1973) who, in her study of men and families during the Great Depression, related how unemployment had shattered the meanings of manhood and installed a fear, bewilderment, and humiliation “as if the ground had gone out from under his feet” (p. 21). Extensive patterns of gender inversion were evident in American households where many wives lost respect for their troubled spouses and assumed control of family financial matters. Children began ignoring their fathers and men became isolated and depressed as their traditional authority wilted within the home (Wood 2008).

In the modern context, a leading authority on research into masculinity - Raewyn Connell (and others) - (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995, 2000, 2005a, 2005b; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell et al., 1999), claimed that the phenomenon and terminology of ‘masculinities’ is not the same as ‘men’. Connell claimed that to speak of masculinities is to speak about gender relations, which deals with the position of men in a gender order and the ways in which they engage with people through that position. Keen (1992) also raised the issue of holding on to masculine values, and this is related in further detail later in this thesis.

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Brod and Kaufman (1994) stated that masculinity “is equated with power - power over women, over other men … Every-where we look, we see the institutional expression of that power …” (p. 136). Brod and Kaufman (1994) continued that “Feminist women have theorized that masculinity is about the drive for domination, the drive for power, for conquest” (p. 136). However, Brod and Kaufman (1994) claimed that “men’s feelings are not the feelings of the powerful, but of those who see themselves as powerless!” (p. 136). They further claimed that this comes from a discontinuity between the psychological and the social; between the collective analyses that reveal how men may be in power as a group, but suffer the psychological dilemma of not feeling powerful as individuals.

Foucault (1990) intimated that power has a direct and intricate correlation with one’s position in life, and this has direct relevance to the position of the discriminated or unemployed in this thesis. Foucault (1990) claimed that where there is power, there is also resistance, but this resistance is not positioned as being exterior to power. He explained:

… power relations are both intentional and subjective. If in fact they are intelligible, this is not because they are the effect of another instance that “explains” them, but rather because they are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives (pp. 94-95).

With this discontinuity between groups and individuals, and with the single man already displaying powerlessness, how does an individual man feel when his job security is threatened? What is the potential level of the disturbance on a man’s mental balance as a result of the consequence of job loss or promotion denial? The Mayo Clinic (2013) related the story of Winston Churchill who was chased by his ‘black dog’ (his metaphor for his personal depression), which he attempted to control with hard work and alcohol. The Mayo Clinic (2013) stated that one’s depression may not necessarily be exacerbated by alcohol and drugs. However, it is a serious medical disorder which darkens cognitive functioning, undermines one’s personal and professional life, and places the depressed at an increased risk of contracting other illnesses. They further stated that the risk of suicide is four times greater for "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
depressed men than for depressed women. They stated that even though depressed women are twice as likely to attempt suicide, they are far less likely to accomplish this, as the timeframe from initial contemplation until attempt is 12 months for men and 42 months for women, leaving women a far greater timeframe to contemplate alternatives and seek medical intervention. Men are also recognised as being more inclined to use a terminal intervention such as a gun, while women use more subtle means such as tablets etc.

The Mayo Clinic (2013) stated that men, during childhood, overvalue independence and self-control, and are taught that it is unmanly to express pain, uncertainty, weakness, helplessness, and sadness. They view the emotional as a threat to their masculinity, thus denying or hiding their problems until a catastrophic event, such as job loss or law enforcement arrest, forces them to address their problem and seek attention. Furthermore, the male focus on achievement and success exacerbates this failure and manifests itself in a range of depressive disorders. When a man does attend a medical clinic, the Mayo Clinic (2013) claimed that he focuses on physical ailments such as headaches rather than emotional illness, which carries with it a stigma that men wish to avoid.

The syndrome which the webpage All About Life Challenges (2002-2008, no page) described as the “cascade of negative life events” (Price, Choi & Vinokur, 2002 also repeats this syndrome below), can be triggered by a series of mounting failures that may have been triggered by job loss. Subsequent events, such as financial strain, may result in a trigger mechanism for other losses, such as car or house repossession, effectively exacerbating the initial job loss.

The long-term effect of job loss is also a serious impediment to men's ability to function in a normal mode. The Healthy Place Depression Community website (2002) stated that the negative consequences of unemployment can last up to two years after a man has found re-employment. In a study of 758 job seekers, Price, Choi, and Vinokur (2002), in a Michigan University study, further identified the above stated ‘cascade of negative life events’, claiming that the resultant depression was responsible for poor health and high-level personal, social, and family

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consequences. Loss of personal control resulted in depression, strain on relationships, and loss of job security (even when re-employed).

The above discussion has identified issues relating to loss of morale and manhood, and lack of self-esteem and self-worth. It relates a battered pride, emptiness, anger, and subsequent health issues such as depression and need for psychological and psychiatric intervention. The aftermath of the discrimination phenomenon is viewed later in this thesis, as inappropriate survival actions of drinking and gambling are presented as buffering techniques. The thesis also later projects into the future of the discouraged job seeker with issues perceived as limited job prospects and fear of future employment failure.

As a mediating effect, the above has identified the buffering mechanism (softening effect) of moral and financial support to help one through difficult times; therefore, indicating (as in two participants' - John and Harry's - cases viewed later in this thesis) that the sharing of a burden is often significant in reducing the load. This is certainly highlighted when financial need is a non-issue.

Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes (2010), cited Randall (2007), who claimed that with age, we become increasingly unique and distinctive. Recognising this uniqueness and distinctiveness is an ongoing battle in a world which promotes youth and beauty in the workplace and is significantly detrimental to the older worker (Armstrong, 2010; AHRC, 2010; Ozdowski, 2002; Sluss & Ashforth, 2010; Thornton & Luker, 2010).

Peretti et al's (1986) early research on the self-perceived psychological effects of chronic unemployment on men is highly relevant to this section, and indeed, to this research. They (Peretti et al., 1986) stated, in their gender-specific language, that meaningful and valued employment is important to the very being of a man and reflects his position in life, his manhood, brotherhood, and worldly status, and incorporates his values, psyche, and self-esteem. Based on their research, they concluded that personal identity, self-image, and integrity are inextricably associated with a man's occupational role (Peretti et al., 1986). In citing Berg (1979), Peretti et al (1986) asserted that by virtue of performing these roles, people adopt the norms, "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
values, means, and ends of such roles and, through work, develop a work personality relating to cognitions, motivations, affect, and behaviours, and that within the framework of one's workgroup, the individual is constantly being judged on occupational, promotional, and social skills. This judgement is important to a person's self-regard and self-evaluation (Peretti et al., 1986, citing Berg, 1979).

The findings by Peretti et al. (1986) are supported by Sluss et al. (2007) whose paper on relational identity and the work relationship examined insights into the impact of relationships on one's own development, performance, and well-being. Brickson, in Sluss et al. (2007), Brickson and Brewer (2001), Lord, Brown, and Freiberg (1999), and Sedikides and Brewer (2001) claimed that self-interest is a basic motivation and that the individual focus is on oneself as a unique being. Self-esteem then derives from interpersonal comparisons of goals, abilities, traits, and performance, and therefore, on role relationships such as those with a supervisor, subordinate, or co-worker. Sluss et al (2007) further claimed that self-esteem is actually derived from inter-group comparisons predominantly in the workplace.

Woodward (2005, quoting Remly, 1991) also claimed that people derive self-esteem from employment, and that a person’s locus of control has a direct bearing on the prospect of regaining employment. Ozdowski (2002) stated that in circumstances where age discrimination is encountered, it creates and reinforces an older worker/job-seeker’s perceptions that employers find them too old, their skills outdated, and that they are unwanted in the workforce. This has emotional consequences and discourages older people from attempting to remain in, or to re-enter, the workforce (Ozdowski, 2002).

**The manifest and latent functions of employment**

Jahoda (1981, 1984), in developing the ‘Latent Deprivation Model’ of unemployment, argued that paid work provides both manifest - financial income - and latent - psychological needs - purposes. As a prominent and well-regarded tool, this model has received considerable attention and drawn a wealth of support and a proportionate wealth of research. It has been largely supported and replicated (in

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Jahoda (1981, 1984) maintained that people engage primarily in paid work to attain and address primary needs, but employment also has added benefits which includes five latent functions: time structure, social contact, common goal status, identity, and enforced activity (Jahoda, 1981, 1984). She claimed that the denial of employment leads to deprivation in both manifest and latent functions, but it is the loss of the latent functions that Jahoda claimed has a greater negative impact on psychological well-being. Jahoda (1981) argued that individuals have deep-seated needs for structuring their time use, social horizons, and participation in collective enterprises where they can feel useful in the knowledge that they have a recognised place in society and for being an active worthwhile participant. She continued that people use the social institutions of family to meet their psychological needs (this is covered in the next section which deals with the interpersonal aspects of age discrimination). However, while other social institutions (sport, religious groups, interest groups in general) may allow a level of latent personal needs to be met, none do so quite as compellingly as earning one's living (Jahoda 1981, 1984).

Creed, Muller, and Machin (1999) conducted a critical discussion of Jahoda's (1981) explanation of the effects of unemployment to determine psychological distress. They cited Miles (1983) who supported Jahoda by stating that the five latent functions indicated that unemployed adults varied in their levels of access to the latent functions, and those with greater level access reported better psychological health. This research supported the observation by Peretti et al. (1986) regarding the lesser impact on the unskilled male’s psychological health, as opposed to professional males.

The most recent researchers to test Jahoda’s findings were Paul and Batinic (2010) who, while only partially endorsing the function of identity/status, conclusively confirmed the model for the remaining four latent functions of employment, and reported high levels of time structure, social contact, collective purpose, and activity "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
for the employed – all key building blocks of self-worth – when compared to unemployed people.

Creed et al. (1999) embraced an alternative perspective, referred to as ‘The Agency Restriction Model’ - as proposed by Fryer (1985, 1998). This model purports that the main negative consequences of unemployment are not the loss of latent functions, thus contradicting Jahoda’s (1981, 1984) perspective, but instead claiming that it is the loss of the manifest functions (income) that impacts negatively on the latent functions (social/psychological). Creed et al. (1999) claimed that it is this loss that inhibits personal agency and makes it difficult, or impossible, to plan and organise a personally satisfying lifestyle necessary for the development of well-being. Fryer (1985), in earlier relevant research, claimed that “unemployment generally results in psychologically corrosive experience of poverty” (p. 270). It is this experience of poverty that severs the individual from a meaningful future and leads to a reduction in psychological health (Fryer, 1992).

**Psychological effects on the unemployed professional - (and why is the professional man different)?**

To add some definition to the term ‘professional man’, each participant in this thesis held an elevated organisational position, thus confirming the concept and assumption of professional capacity and the regard in which they were held within their organisation. Secondly, each possessed an advanced knowledge-base represented by multiple university degrees. These straightforward definitions, for the purposes of this research, are based on these two parameters incorporating position and qualification. Nevertheless, definitions do vary; for example, Von Nordenflycht (2010) stated that “professions are presumed to operate according to principles antithetical to the nature of commercially oriented hierarchical bureaucracies” (p. 158). Von Nordenflycht (2010) attributed expertise and trustworthiness as being implicit in the standards prescribed by the ethical codes and control an organisation has over its members and as ‘hallmarks of the professions.’ To be specific, the professional in this research is defined as a person holding an elevated organisational position, thus reflecting an orthodox view of the link between

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professional capacity and status. They would generally possess bachelor qualifications or higher, plus advanced knowledge related to the role performed, based on experience, and perhaps, underpinned by related academic qualifications. This is a useful definition as it reflects the professional characteristics of all the participants in this study.

Early research by Sightler et al. (1996) identified a gap in the literature claiming that very little was known about the psychological effects of unemployment on unemployed professionals. The majority of research on psychological effects had been largely based on non-professional and non-managerial employees (Sightler et al., 1996).

In the more modern context, Sightler et al.'s (1996) contentions have been supported by Shacklock (2005) who claimed that there is little doubt that age discrimination encompasses the diversity of the different levels of workers, from unskilled labourers and tradespeople, through to professionals. However, this thesis deals specifically with highly educated professional men and, as a consequence, this literature review focuses on how and why a professional man, and his mindset, is different to the other levels of workers within our society, and why his reaction to discrimination and its consequences may vary.

Shacklock (2005) made numerous distinctions between the attitudes of professional, tertiary-educated workers and other lesser educated or qualified workers; for example, blue collar workers. Her findings indicated that the participants reacted commensurate with their higher level of education and their more respected and prominent employment position, meaning a loss of status or job has different meanings and connotations than those at a lower level of employment (Shacklock, 2005). Sightler et al. (1996) also added support for this argument by claiming that as a professional’s reactions to unemployment may differ; their adjustment to unemployment might affect their subsequent job search behaviours, coping skills, family relationships, and their personally-felt stress. The earlier research by Peretti et al. (1986) also aligned neatly with both Shacklock (2005) and Sightler et al. (1996).

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Factors which influence workplace participation (positively and negatively) include passion for work coupled with job type, having a life partner and outside interests, and a range of negative factors in relation to work (Shacklock, 2005). Shacklock (2005) also concluded that various factors had an impact on differences in professionals’ attitudes to employment. She stated that an academic’s career usually started later than other general staff, and to glean as much as possible from their career, they usually worked for longer. Shacklock (2005) also claimed that a professional worker’s environment may be more flexible and offer more choice and autonomy than that of general or non-professional staff. Shacklock (2005) cited Friedmann and Havighurst (1977) and Gallie and White (1993), who claimed that work is more enjoyable for a professional worker and that this promotes a will among professionals to maintain their employment and the additional array of benefits.

Shacklock (2005) further claimed that older workers may be marginalised by the increased occurrence of casualisation within the workforce; thus, experiencing employment in a reduced capacity, or being targeted for unemployment. More recent support for this contention has come from Palan (2013, ABC News) who related recent figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicating exactly the above. Shacklock (2005) stated that organisations have not been successful in promoting positive human resource management strategies, such as gradual transition to retirement (or part-time work), or in planning the retention of older workers who have been targeted for redundancy (Shacklock, 2005). She claimed that many older professional workers have themselves found insufficient rewards to continue working, and that the lens through which the end of a worker’s working life is viewed by employers, needs reviewing in itself.

A further issue which is relevant to the professional man is whether he possesses relevant knowledge of what level to apply for after job loss or dislocation. The following research indicates that he should question the merit of applying for positions below his previous level or perceived skill level. Wright (2012, in Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing Productive Ageing Centre, June 2013) conducted a study of people aged 50 years and over and found that those in middle income brackets, therefore earning less than AU$80,000 per annum, were more than twice as likely to report experiencing age-related discrimination as those “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
earning more than AU$80,000. This knowledge could then tend to act as a deterrent to a professional man contemplating employment at a level lower than his skills, qualifications, and abilities.

Relational identity and the balance of family power

Liem and Liem (1988) claimed that employment provides the infrastructure for the family system and determines that work is a primary source of material, social, and psychological resources. They stated that the family unit derives its routine and ordering of time and place within a social network, while social status and material well-being are derived through labour force participation.

Haslam (2001) and Pratt (1998) (both in Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) claimed that person-based identity relates to the situation in which individuals define themselves in the collective according to what the relationship means to them. For example, an individual may identify with his or her role or relationship with a co-worker, because of the appeal of the role-based identity of mutual support and the co-worker's display of humour and empathy. Putting this into perspective, Haslam (2001) and Pratt (1998) claimed that the greater one's relational identification, the more empathy, understanding, and loyalty one will have regarding one's partner and the more cooperation, support, and altruism one will display. This will result in greater in-role performance, provided other important role relationships are not denied. This also equates to the support that an unemployed spouse (for example, the husband) would get from the wife who empathises with his position (Haslam, 2001; Pratt, 1998).

Guilt and shame associated with unemployment

A long-term comparative study by Stokes and Cochrane (1984) uncovered significant psychological differences in the attitude and disposition of employed and unemployed people, in terms of the effects on other family members and broader society. Stokes et al. (1984) revealed that unemployed persons possessed greater levels of psychophysiological symptomatology, self-dissatisfaction, hostility, and

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dissatisfaction with the degree to which they were accepted by others. They were also found to display paranoid attitudes and feelings of guilt, and to be more critical of others.

Stokes et al. (1984) did validate their hypotheses that the jobless demonstrated negative self-attitudes, manifested hostility, and showed greater dissatisfaction with their global self-concept. They noted however, that in Britain in the 1970s (the location and time of their research), there also existed considerable amorphous external loci of responsibility relating to government policy and global economic recession, which then added to the perception that unemployment involves frustration in relation to needs and expectations. They also stated that the increased incidence of being critical of others may be an alienated redundant workers’ only available mechanism to give expression to extra punitive feelings.

**Psychological Capital**

In a study on the relationship between work, well-being, and psychological capital, Cole, Daly, and Mak (2009) claimed that psychological capital relates to an individual’s personality traits that influence the productivity of labour and might mediate the impact of unemployment on well-being and affect re-employment.

Cole et al. (2009) claimed that a number of economic and psychological theories suggest that psychological capital interacts and reacts with well-being and labour market status, resulting in a cumulative integration that develops coping mechanisms to deal with unemployment. In citing Creed et al. (1999), Flatau et al. (2000), Goldsmith et al. (1997), Layard (2005), Morrell et al. (1998), Murphy and Athanasou (1999), Shamir (1986), and Theodossiou (1997), Cole et al. (2009) claimed that unemployed people have poorer psychological health than employed workers and experience ailments ranging from reductions in self-esteem, anxiety, depression, lowered levels of coping, hostility, loss of motivation, loss of confidence, learned helplessness, paranoia, poorer cognitive performance, lower levels of happiness, suicidal ideation, and psychosomatic and behavioural problems.

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Cole et al. (2009, citing Liem & Liem, 1988) claimed that the impact of unemployment worsens over time, suggesting it may have a psychological scarring effect. Clark, Georgellis, and Sanfey (2001) claimed that well-being is not only lower for currently unemployed people, but also for those who have experienced higher levels of past unemployment. They claim that men who have been unemployed for roughly 60% of the last three years, show no difference in life satisfaction between their current employment and when they are, or have been unemployed, again suggesting a psychological scarring effect (Clark et al., 2001).

Cole et al. (2009), citing Goldsmith et al. (1997), claimed that psychological capital includes a perception of self, and could contribute to an individual’s productivity, attitude to work, ethical orientation, and general outlook on life. Cole et al. (2009), citing Luthans et al. (2007), reinforced their claim that psychological capital refers to a person’s mental and emotional development and is characterised by self-confidence, optimism, perseverance, hope, and resilience. Cole et al. (2009), citing Luthans et al. (2007), also claimed that psychological capital differs from concepts of intrapersonal human capital (a person’s capabilities, knowledge, and attributes), and social capital (a person’s social and vocational connections, and what defines the individual and their current status and potential).

People with heightened self-esteem and self-assurance have a greater likelihood of achieving vocationally and academically and, in general, exhibit better interpersonal skills (Cole et al, 2009, citing Luthans, 2007). Such success reinforces confidence, and builds vigorous support networks that, in turn, induce a state of mind characterised by dignity and pride underpinning ongoing success.

Cole et al. (2009), citing Robbins et al. (2004), claimed that psychological capital is malleable and can change as a person develops and grows over their lifetime. They (Cole et al., 2009), citing Judge et al. (1997, 1998, 2001), concluded that the four core self-evaluation personality traits of self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability are essential to predicting a person’s productivity. In further citing Judge et al. (1997, 1998, 2001), Cole et al. (2009) claimed that these traits explain 20 to 30 per cent of an individual’s work performance. They further claimed that more highly motivated individuals will exert greater effort and are more "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
productive, and through motivation, individuals are more likely to evaluate outcomes more optimistically and then also to persevere in the face of adverse conditions. Cole et al (2009) stated that individuals are capable of producing desired outcomes and, as a result, endeavour to meet higher expectations. They are also then more likely to draw on positive thoughts regarding their strengths and previous successes after a failed experience. At the other end of the spectrum, Cole et al. (2009), citing Earley et al. (1987), Goldsmith et al. (2000), and Robbins et al. (1994), claimed that people with low psychological capital are more likely to reduce their efforts, or submit to failure, which may take the form of resignation or failing to compete for higher-level jobs.

Cole et al. (2009) also referred to the ‘Skills Atrophy Model’, through which it is theorised that work skills deteriorate and become outdated and redundant during periods of unemployment, and this, combined with loss of motivation, self-confidence, and self-discipline may then impede a return to work. This motivation issue is also apparent in what they term as the ‘social-psychological theory of hysteresis’, to use a term from the discipline of physics, meaning that the reaction of the circumstances and changes depends on past reactions to change.

Cole et al. (2009), citing Darity and Goldsmith (1993), claimed that the above model relates to the increase in health issues over a period of unemployment. Darity and Goldsmith (1993, in Cole et al., 2009) claimed that self-esteem, depression, fear, and learned helplessness affect an individual’s motivation to keep searching for work. Helplessness and diminished cognitive efficacy sets in as one perceives that their actions will have no positive end result (Darity & Goldsmith, 1993, in Cole et al., 2009). The lingering and residual effects of helplessness and hysteresis may result in a newly-employed person underperforming, and consequently, returning to the unemployed pool (Darity & Goldsmith, 1993, in Cole et al., 2009).

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Mental Health and Work: Quality of the new job and factors which may impede the job search

Guindon and Smith (2002) concluded that emotional and stress reactions associated with job loss may inhibit one’s ability to search and secure suitable future employment. Guindon and Smith (2002), citing Kleinman (in Herr & Cramer, 1992), supported Kleinman's view that severe work or economic problems trigger distress, demoralisation, and despair which have possible symptoms tied to biological, physiological, and psychological health factors. Guindon and Smith (2002), citing Bartley (1994), and Krystal, Moran-Sackett, Thompson, and Contani (1983) who all claimed that grieving is a common reaction when any significant loss is experienced, with job loss being no exception. Guindon and Smith (2002) also quoted statistics in the work of Taube, Burns, and Kessler (1988) which showed that almost 65 per cent of mental health patients being treated by a psychiatrist were unemployed. However, the statistics further demonstrate the deleterious impact of unemployment, with 80.5 per cent of patients undergoing treatment by psychologists being unemployed (Guindon & Smith, 2002). Guindon and Smith (2002), in reviewing early research by Brenner (1973) and Hanisch (1999), claimed that unemployment and subsequent financial decline can be associated with increased psychiatric hospital admissions.

Lewis (in Guindon & Smith, 2002) stated that clients’ career and personal concerns, including emotional issues, are often interconnected. Guindon and Smith (2002) considered that for treatment to be effective, counsellors need to be cognisant of the emotional toll that unemployment can have biologically, physiologically, and psychologically, and of being able to assess the emotional state and stage(s) of the unemployed person within the job loss process, as well as being able to recognise the symptoms of distress which may inhibit their client’s job search for positions they once considered appropriate to their skills, qualifications, and experience.

Studies by Kessler, Turner and House (1989), and Pugh, Skarlicki, and Passell (2003) explored the impact of distress after job loss, and the recovery associated with re-employment. These studies indicated that unemployment causes poor health and that re-employment may reverse this effect (Kessler et al., 1989). However,

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Kessler et al. (1989) did caution against interpreting the high distress of the unemployed as evidence that current unemployment causes emotional reactions which are totally resolved and reversed with re-employment. This projected recovery will be explored further in the findings chapter, as the notion that poor health is reversed by re-employment did not apply well to any of the participants in this study.

The research by Kessler et al. (1989) studied stable employed workers, currently unemployed workers, and recently re-employed workers and found significant elevations of depressed mood, anxious mood, somatisation (the conversion of anxiety into physical symptoms), and self-reported physical illness for the unemployed group. Kessler et al. (1989) provided data that supported the theories of Sightler et al. (1996), Zawada (1980, in Shelton, 1985), and Guindon and Smith (2002) by maintaining that poor emotional functioning subsequent to, or in the face of, unemployment also interfered with job search activities.

Kessler et al. (1989) examined job quality, including earnings and job security, to determine whether re-employment into the first job that was offered to unemployed persons would provide satisfaction – a reversal of emotional reactions as a result of re-employment. This study found that the very high levels of distress among the unemployed were, if anything, an under-estimate of the emotional damage created by job loss, rather than the over-estimate which they initially suspected (Kessler et al., 1989). Not surprisingly, this study did hypothesise that the functioning of those who found work improved more than those who remained unemployed (Kessler et al., 1989). However, Kessler et al. (1989) believed that there may have been other residual effects, one of these being that the re-employed may not have returned completely to their emotional state prior to their previous job loss. There was also significant evidence that many re-employed feared that they would involuntarily lose their new job within a year (Kessler et al., 1989). This job insecurity was associated with the earlier depression and somatisation among the re-employed (Kessler et al., 1989). It was also identified that those re-employed who held these insecure jobs were significantly more depressed than the stably employed participants, indicating that re-employment does not fully relieve unemployment-related distress, if future unemployment is anticipated (Kessler et al., 1989).

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Pugh et al. (2003) also established a residual psychological effect whereby an individual's contract violation by a former employer had a negative impact on their subsequent attitudes toward a new employer. A negative effect was evident as the employee displayed ongoing concern over the possibility of similar mistreatment from their new employer, and this affected the trust relationship. They also claimed cynicism to be a residual factor. Shamir (1986) found that emotional recovery after re-employment required that the new job be seen at least as favourably as the old one, while Fineman (1983) reported that re-employed people who felt inadequate to the tasks of the new job were even more distressed than when they had been unemployed.

In support of the above findings, Fineman (1983) found a psychological and legacy effect in approximately half of the re-employed people in his study. Feelings of personal failure, and doubts about abilities to perform adequately in their new jobs, were particularly common among the recently re-employed. Kaufman and Cal (1982) supported this by claiming that feelings of low self-esteem were particularly persistent after re-employment, and even suggested that some of these emotional residuals may be permanent. This was also supported by Fagin (1979), who suggested that personality changes resulting from prolonged unemployment could be permanent, although other researchers found that the extent of emotional recovery following re-employment varied depending on the nature of the new job.

Sinfield (1981) claimed that once mature-age workers lose their jobs, they have great difficulty in re-entering the workforce because of myths and stereotypes which limit their potential and degrade their abilities. Additionally, and unfortunately, according to Colquhoun (2001) and Hannen (2002), well-credentialed former managers also find it difficult to re-enter the workforce due to their own personal view that they are still at their previous level. Prospective employers may also view them as being commensurate with this previous level, and thus, may deem them unsuitable for recruitment into lower-ranked positions.

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The moderating effect of self-esteem

Caplan, Vinokur, Price, and Van Ryn (1989), Hui and Lee (2000), Pierce and Gardner (2004), Price et al. (2002), and Vinokur and Schul (1997), all claimed that higher self-esteem facilitated the re-employment effort. However, with job loss, a wide range of unhealthy and health-threatening behaviours occurs. Linn, Sandifer, and Stein (1985, in O'Brien, 1999) claimed that loss of work affects self-esteem, but that unemployment also limits a person’s chances for feelings of achievement, accomplishment, and satisfaction, while also increasing feelings of guilt relating to failure to support other family members. Lin, Sandifer and Stein (1985) commented that some men have the ability to cope better than others, and have a significantly better relationship to self-esteem issues. In a cross-sectional, cross-longitudinal comparison of Israeli employed and unemployed adults, Shamir (1986) discovered depressive effects, morale, and anxiety issues which were affected predominantly by employment status, but were moderated by self-esteem. Of significant relevance was the finding that the unemployed with low self-esteem were considerably more flexible when considering new job offers.

Judge and Bono (2001) described self-esteem as a moderator of the relationship between job performance and job satisfaction. Hassell and Perrewé (1993), citing work by Butler (1969), Cowgill (1974), and Rodin and Langer (1980), suggested that the assigning of negative labels to older workers can lead to rejecting such people as viable colleagues and new recruits to an organisation. This, when coupled with internal negative attributions, or the use of derogatory phrases concerning older people in the workplace, can induce failure and lower self-esteem, affect behaviour, and lead to lower perceived personal control.

Hassell and Perrewé (1993) further suggested that incompetence may be inferred from very subtle environmental cues, quite independent of direct experiences of failure. Therefore, organisations, despite a conscious effort to eliminate age discrimination, may still be faced with a culture and subtle behaviours that surreptitiously convey negative messages and cause older workers to perceive age discrimination. Hassell and Perrewé (1993) further stated that an older person’s momentary lapse in attention, or inability to remember a word or name, may be

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attributed to old age rather than tiredness, stress, or workload, as it may be for younger workers.

**Debilitating depression. Effects on health, and links to mortality and suicide**

A major effect of discrimination and job loss is depression, which is classified by The American Family Physician (2006) as a medical illness.

> An individual with major depression has symptoms such as feeling sad or empty, crying easily, restlessness, and thoughts about death or suicide. Mental depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain that makes it hard for the cells to communicate with each other. It can be linked to events in life, such as death of a loved one, a divorce or job loss (p. 1395).

On the world scene, the effects on professional worker job loss following the reunification of Germany (after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) culminated in a number of university experiments which resulted in the recognition of a new mental disorder known as Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED) (Linden, 2003; Linden, Baumann, Rotter, & Schippan, 2008a, 2008b; Linden et al., 2009; Rotter, 2009). It was discovered that after the reunification of Germany, former high-ranking DDR (East German) officials were forced to accept mundane, non-challenging work to survive. Their fall in status precipitated a range of physical, mental, and social phenomena including embitterment (toward the offending source), anger, aggression, frustration, and suicide, as well as having a severe impact on families and social welfare systems (Linden, 2003; Linden et al., 2008a, 2008b; Linden et al., 2009; Rotter, 2009). Similar effects relating to fall in status have been documented in other settings such as the UK (Hornstein, Encel, Gunderson, & Neumark, 2006), and the United States (Brown & Vinokur, 2003; Peretti et al., 1986).

The Australian setting has also seen considerable research covering not only the incidence and events surrounding age discrimination, but also the particular damage it causes (AHRC, 2010; Bennington, 2001; Bennington & Wein, 2003, 2006; Intergenerational Report, April 2007). In broadening the depth of the damage, Daniell (1985) indicated that discrimination has far deeper implications than merely

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those which affect the individual, as other family members and friends are also inextricably embedded within the web of effects.

Sluss and Ashforth (2007) looked at relational identity and the work relationship and provided insights on the impact of such relationships on a person’s own development, performance, and well-being. They (Sluss et al., 2007) described the consequences of the work environment on three levels - intrapersonal (individual), interpersonal (group), and social (collective). They stated that a person acts and reacts according to each varying setting, situation, and environment. The adoption of these three constructs (Sluss et al., 2007) provides a useful thematic approach to classifying the issues that emerge from this literature review, and when placed into a simple overlapping matrix (King, 2011), enables the methodological analysis of the participants’ comments, the research questions, and the a-priori (anticipated) and emerging themes. This framework forms the basis of the methodological analysis in the findings and conclusion chapters.

Crawford (2004) concluded that depression creates disability. He stated that the data used to judge a relative disability from one condition to another is based primarily on expert opinion and there have been concerns about the validity of this approach. Crawford (2004), citing Gold et al. (2002), claimed that this has led to major depression being classified as equally disabling as blindness or paraplegia.

Thayer and Bruce (2006) claimed a link between job loss and depression. Major depressive disorder (MDD) can be mistaken for, or masked by, the reactive sadness of a comorbid condition occurring simultaneously, and may include insomnia, anxiety, and depression (Thayer & Bruce 2006). Citing the Global Burden of Disease Study, Thayer and Bruce (2006) reiterated that depression can often be induced by job loss and, although this was the fourth leading cause of global disease burden in the 1990s, it is projected to be second by 2020. Although one does not have to lose their job to become depressed, Dragano, He, Moebus, Jöckel, and Siegrist (2008) suggested that an adverse psychosocial work environment may contribute to depression.

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In a Macquarie Radio broadcast (18 September 2013), announcer Chris Smith interviewed motivational speaker and author of the Back from the Brink Series, Graeme Cowan, who quoted a Medibank (2012) report which related the following statistics on depression (Cowan, 2013). He claimed that 20 per cent of Australia’s population suffered depression and this accounted for 34 per cent of lost productivity in the workplace. He further claimed that 86 per cent of sufferers do so in silence as they fear an adverse effect on their work career. Alarming, Cowan (2013) claimed that 26 per cent of GP (general practitioner) visits were depression-related, yet in the course of their medical training, GPs only received six hours of tuition on depression.

Wanberg (2012) linked suicide and unemployment, and stated that “of 18 post-2000 articles identified for the current review, 15 reported findings that unemployment and suicide are related” (p. 374). In quoting Platt and Hawson (2000), Wanberg (2012) stated that “unemployment is associated with an increased risk of both suicide and parasuicide (self-injurious behaviour)” (p. 374).

The increase in the incidence of suicide highlights the personal impact of unemployment in the extreme. Mittal, Brown and Shorter (2009) examined the link between depression and suicide, while Brown et al., (2003) drew a correlation between suicide and feelings of self-esteem, whereby the victim descends to such a low level that they actually feel that they are a burden on society. In bringing this life-terminating action into full perspective, a study by Platt (1983, in Daniell, 1985; Winton, Heather, & Robertson, 1986) established that men who have been unemployed for less than six months are six times more likely to attempt suicide than those in work, while those unemployed for over a year are nineteen times more likely to try to kill themselves. Platt concluded that loss of employment can be a blow to identity and create an imbalance of the proportions between love and work, which has implications for the mental health of the entire community.

**The benefit of sleep (as a coping mechanism)**

Sleep presents itself as a means of coping with the stress that unemployment presents. Dim (2009) determined that sleep releases an army of T cells that improve

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immunity, fight off infection and colds, and stabilise the waking brain. In so doing, it enhances alertness, information processing speed, and memory. Furthermore, sleep not only assists one’s working productivity, but it also resets the appetite controls and promotes many related health functions.

De Los Reyes and Guilleminault (2007) claimed that antidepressant medication generally results in the normalisation of sleep patterns, and when nocturnal sleep and the circadian rhythm are in synchrony, depression is reduced.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a commonly abused substance with people who are under stress or out of work. Chediak (in Dim, 2009, p. 3) claimed that alcohol “messes” with the normal sleep cycle. He stated that “Four hours into sleep, alcohol wears off and leaves you in an excitable state” and that “you’ll sleep lighter, wake more easily, and be hung over when you do wake” (p. 3). He further claimed that alcohol is a muscle relaxant as well as a sedative, and can even create sleep apnoea symptoms in snorers who would not otherwise have the condition. He claimed that, unfortunately, alcohol is a “go to therapy used as often as over-the-counter sleeping pills, and more often than prescribed sleep medicines” (p. 3).

Winton et al. (1986) offered an enlightening perspective on the link between alcohol and unemployment. They claimed little evidence to support this link and suggested that the connection between drinking problems and unemployment is derived from the social, psychological, and health effects literature on unemployment, and possibly from the link between occupation and drinking behaviour. They (Winton et al., 1986) stated that the unemployed drink more as a means of coping with stress or boredom. They further suggested that it is important to distinguish the stress hypothesis of increased drinking during unemployment from a boredom hypothesis associated with leisure, therefore presenting two alternatives to the conundrum - one being stress and the other relating to significantly increased leisure time. However, there was no argument offered to override the contention that drinking due to stress is a factor with the unemployed.

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However, a study conducted in England and Wales by Wilson (2006), concluded that there is a correlation between unemployment and alcohol. It indicated that 20 per cent of unemployed males were drinking more than the safe limit (50 units a week) recommended by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, compared to 6 per cent of males in the general population. Wilson (2006) postulated that a certain freedom from supervision applied to the unemployed, and it is the work setting where the first signs of alcohol problems are detected in the forms of lateness, absenteeism, reduced efficiency, and other telling signs.

Wilson (2006) also claimed that studies of the unemployed tended to indicate that people were more emotionally unstable when unemployed and lose their sense of status and prestige, thus developing feelings of inferiority and loss of self-confidence.

The next section will broaden the research beyond the intrapersonal effects of age discrimination in the workplace to the interpersonal dimension.
Interpersonal effects of age discrimination

The research in this section shows that the impact of age discrimination in the workplace affects more than just the victim, with families and social networks also falling victim to residual negatives.

Buffering: Effects of family support; and on-job network support

The Redman and Snape (2005) study into workplace age discrimination revealed negative effects in relation to job satisfaction, power and prestige, affective and normative commitment, and also found a correlation with withdrawal cognitions. Of significant relevance is that the study assessed the impact of non-work based (social and family) support to the person experiencing perceived age discrimination, and determined that it actually increased (enhanced) the negative effects of perceived discrimination on job satisfaction and normative commitment; therefore, increasing negative attitudes toward perceived discrimination and legitimising feelings of having been affronted.

Redman and Snape (2005) further identified that the buffering effects of support from both family and the workplace lessened the full impact and effects of discrimination, with the result that the discrimination was not fully felt if there was support in the style of sounding boards (good listeners) being available. They claimed that buffering - support from family members, social groups, and the workplace - serves to comfort the individual in the face of perceived discrimination, noting that stress has a higher negative effect on well-being when associated with low social support (Redman & Snape, 2005). Social support acts as a coping resource as it contributes to lessening the strain for a given stressor, such as age discrimination; thereby, demonstrating that the psychological consequences of stressors can be reduced through social support (Redman & Snape, 2005).

However, Kaufmann and Beerh (in Redman & Snape, 2005) claimed that where support is derived from the same source as the stressor (for example, in the workplace), then the support may intensify the strain being experienced, possibly

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due to legitimising the ill-feeling toward the discriminating organisation and reducing the sense of obligation (normative commitment) to the organisation, while at the same time, comforting and reassuring the individual’s life satisfaction.

The family relationship often plays an integral part in an individual’s relationship with work. Daniell (1985) claimed that the attachment to work can provide an opportunity to deal with unresolved conflicts arising from early relationships and leads to a stronger sense of personal identity. Daniell (1985) suggested that mental health may well depend on emotional well-being, living in loving relationships, and having a liking for work. Daniell (1985) argued that the work task can either support, or fail to support, personal development as can a marriage, and when things go wrong in the work environment, this can deleteriously affect the relationship. The loss of work can be analogous to the loss of love, with implications for the personal sense of identity (Daniell, 1985). Daniell (1985) reported that where one partner within the relationship has become reluctantly unemployed, the individual and the partner both experience a cycle of grief reactions which are similar to those in bereavement.

Liem and Liem (1988) stated that employment provides the infrastructure that underpins the key aspects of the ‘family system’ and determines that work is a primary source of material, social, and psychological resources. The family unit derives its routine and ordering of time and place from labour force participation (Liem & Liem, 1988). The Liem and Liem (1988) study investigated recently unemployed men and their families and a control group of employed men and their families to determine differences in the psychological effects of the residual impacts of unemployment. Interviews were conducted with both groups at two, four, seven, and twelve months. Unemployed husbands had high levels of psychological symptoms, with elevated levels of anxiety and depression and increases in somatisation. The condition of somatisation is quite serious as it manifests as a propensity to experience and communicate psychological angst in the form of somatic symptoms and the need to seek medical intervention. People who suffer from this affliction may exhibit excessive concern about their health, or a particular complaint, despite the physical symptoms not being readily evident. Hostility and paranoia were added psychological problems, while unemployed husbands also suffered from fewer moods than their employed counterparts (Liem & Liem, 1988). "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
The study revealed that stress and depression had increased at the four month level, but surprisingly (to the authors), had not increased any further at the seven month level (Liem & Liem, 1988). Warr et al. (in Liem & Liem, 1988) referred to this as resigned adaptation and argued that adjustment to their position had occurred around the four month stage, thus accounting for the lack of any increase in stress and depression beyond this stage. Liem and Liem (1988) determined that there was nothing which allayed the initial strain of job loss more so than a return to work. However, Dooley et al. (in Liem & Liem, 1988) claimed that, in many instances, rather than re-employment providing relief, those going through the stage of positive adjustment found re-employment to be a disruption to the unemployed lifestyle they had experienced, thus refuting the view of Warr et al. (cited in Liem & Liem, 1988).

Both men and women suffer the indignity and consequences of age discrimination; however, considerable research indicates that they handle the situation and outcomes differently. Locked in the breadwinner tradition of having to provide for the family, the effect on men was initially deemed to be far more serious than for women. However, this view was contested by Yuan (2007), who claimed that the consequences of age discrimination are far greater for women than for men. This is supported by an earlier study by Targ (1983) who claimed that women have been discounted as workers and have been regarded as simply the people who have to deal with the effects of male unemployment. Additionally, Howe, Levy, and Caplan (2004) also claimed that women are more likely to take on the burden of other family members, and that when a man loses his job, the associated stresses of unemployment and financial strain are taken on as a common burden by both partners; however, when the female partner loses her job, she is more likely to face this crisis on her own.

Howe et al, (2004) studied couples subsequent to the loss of one of the partner’s job. They argued that many studies had focused on the effects of job loss on the wives (women) after their partner had lost his job, but very few on the common effects on both partners, the main reason being that women entered the labour market en masse far later than men. In contradiction to other findings, Howe et al. (2004) proposed that women who suffer job loss undergo a far greater level of stress than “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
men and the female partners of men who suffer job loss also suffer to a higher degree. This is asserted on the basis that women are more likely to be more sensitive to the distress of men than the reverse (Howe et al., 2004). This further posits that the stress levels of the couple with a male job-seeker would be higher than the stress levels of the female job-seeker couple. This fits the stress transmission model (referred to below).

Howe et al, (2004) developed three models to represent the stages of stress in job loss victims. These are:

1. **The Common Stressor Model**

Howe et al. (2004) argued that for those with families, the impact of job loss (particularly the new level of shared monetary restrictions) was felt by the entire family. The study revealed both primary and secondary stressors, with the job loss itself being primary and leading to a cascade of secondary stressors, such as the need to move to cheaper accommodation or to defer the payment of bills (Howe et al., 2004). Westman and Vinokur (in Howe et al., 2004), in a study of Vietnam veterans and their partners, add support to the research by Howe et al. (2004) by claiming that the couple’s correlation of stress levels is explained by these secondary stressors when the veterans left the force and their job.

2. **The Stress Transmission Model**

Rook, Dooley, and Catalano (1991, in Howe et al., 2004) suggested that people with a family who lose employment, place a burden on other family members and transpose their stress onto them. They claim a link between the stress transmission model and the common stressor model as both predict stress levels correlated within a couple’s relationship. Job seeker distress is evident by emotional reactions and increased depressive symptoms or anger, and this is transmitted to the partner, commensurately producing increased partner distress (Rook, Dooley & Catalano, 1991, in Howe et al., 1984).

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3. The Relationship Disruption Model

Job loss and economic stressors disrupt a relationship and interfere with how a couple supports each other and settle conflict. As support subsides, conflict remains unresolved and relationship satisfaction is reduced. As a result, the quality of the shared relationship suffers (Howe et al., 2004). This correlates with Komarovsky’s (1973) findings in relation to wives’ reactions to their husband’s job loss during the Great Depression.

Partner roles and power (Optimal Distinctiveness Theory)

Liem and Liem (1988), in looking at the family power balance, claimed that the less power one has in relation to the power ratio of one’s partner, the more uncertain this person would be in relation to their role expectations and capabilities, and the greater the likelihood that he or she will then identify with the limited subservient role.

However, Liem and Liem (1988) claimed that there are natural checks and balances on the magnitude of this identification (with the limited subservient role). The authors cited a theory known as optimal distinctiveness theory which holds that individuals strive to balance the tension between assimilation within, and separation from, the relationship or the group, so that assimilation and/or over-identification foster a competing desire for separation. Additionally, employment/unemployment is a network in which individuals usually identify with multiple relational identifiers. This means that they foster relationships and synergies with people who they believe can assist them in an employment role, and so at varying stages with different people in different situations, a person's disposition is also likely to be different or to change (Liem & Liem, 1988).
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Social impact of the effects of age discrimination

There is considerable literature that reinforces the concept that age discrimination impinges upon others, both within the discriminated person’s contact group and within wider society (Shelton, 1985).

Some of the most significant impacts of age discrimination are unemployment, employment at a lower level of capability, and under-employment. Shelton (1985) claimed that this is accompanied by a fall in status, which also has significant social costs. The author related this to lost productivity and the cost of other social services that are needed to overcome and cope with the psychological problems stemming from the negative impacts that can occur with unsatisfactory employment circumstances. Shelton (1985) claimed that these auxiliary problems include mortality, suicide, imprisonment, mental illness, and (family) abuse. A longitudinal United States-based study over a period of 34 years, by Brenner, (in Shelton, 1985), stated that a 1 per cent increase in unemployment resulted in an increase of 4.1 per cent in suicides, 5.7 per cent in homicides, 3.4 percent in first-time admissions to mental hospitals, and 4 per cent in state prison admissions. The obvious fiscal costs to broader society and the public purse is a key issue given these statistics.

Shelton (1985) also cited a US study by Liem and Rayman (1982) which reported that spouses showed increasing levels of depression, anxiety, and interpersonal problems as the unemployment duration became extended. Significantly, Shelton (1985) perceived that the level of stress experienced was actually under-represented in the study group, “because many couldn’t cope with the high level of stress and dropped out” (p. 19).

Woodward (2005), quoting Vines (2001), claimed that chronological age has traditionally been regarded as a reliable way of judging ability and agility. People are now living longer and healthier, and personally consider that at age 65, they are still in mid-life and have much to contribute to the workforce and to society in general (Woodward, 2005). This contention was also forthcoming from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005).

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Murray and Syed (2005) claimed that older workers often have a different view about work, and are likely to value opportunities for mentoring, horizontal mobility, and a continuous learning environment where skills can be upgraded over a period of time. They envisage that these same opportunities and experiences will probably not be as appealing to younger workers, which indicates that an increase in support or control over work conditions as one ages may be more valuable to older workers (Murray & Syed, 2005). Murray et al., (2005) expressed the view that job design for older workers should focus less on task complexity and quantity of work, and instead, should be structured around a person's job-life experiences, also noting that younger workers are more likely to be task-oriented and seek extrinsic recognition.

To Murray et al, (2005), this is an important policy that employers should be adopting to increase productivity.

An earlier study, similar in content and outcome to Redman and Snape (2005), was conducted by Orpen (1999) in an Australian financial services firm. It surveyed the attitudes of older employees to their work environment and the organisation, once they perceived that they were victims of age discrimination. The size of the sample was not large, but was nevertheless of a proportion from which compelling conclusions could be drawn. Orpen (1999) sampled 118 workers (age-range 49 to 68; average age - 55.6). The study specifically looked at the relationship between perceived age discrimination and the three outcomes of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job involvement. It involved quantitative research using a job-satisfaction survey, an organisational commitment scale, and a job involvement scale. The outcomes indicated significant negative attitudes on all three factors and supported the hypothesis that the perception of age discrimination negatively affects jobs and organisations.

Social attitudes, youth perceptions and making way for youth

Research has shown that aged people have been the subject of many false claims relating to their productivity and value in the workplace (Gringart et al., 2004). Independent studies by Büsch and Königstein (2001), and Finkelstein and Burke (1995), support this as they have contended that young people appear to hold

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stereotypical views about the aged, and that this has potential negative effects on aged employability. Conversely, it is interesting to note that Büsch and Königstein (2001) also perceived a reverse negative attitude towards the very young in the recruitment and selection process.

Both Büsch and Königstein (2001) and Finkelstein and Burke (1995) concluded that in a similar fashion to ethnocentrism, many young people may have a significant bias favouring their own age group and that this can have a consequent effect on the employment of older workers. Büsch and Königstein (2001) viewed age discrimination in hiring decisions in the German context and found that the younger people surveyed (all university undergraduates) had stereotypical opinions about older workers in relation to performance capacity and their potential for development. Both of the above studies (Büsch & Königstein, 2001; Finkelstein & Burke, 1995) indicated that if young employers or recruitment consultants hold such perceived biases, then this would affect the recruitment of the older worker.

To support their study, Büsch and Königstein (2001) cited a European Poll (Eurobarometer) which indicated that the respective figures for age prejudice at the recruitment level for both men and women aged 45 and over, was 77.6 per cent in Germany, 81.8 per cent in France, 82.4 per cent in the UK, and 83.2 per cent in the Netherlands (Australia did not feature in Büsch & Königstein's 2001 research). Their research also indicated a bias favouring the young in relation to their own perceptions of their beliefs, relating to their own capability to learn, flexibility, and greater potential for development, resulting in a more favourable wage and hiring correlation (Büsch & Königstein, 2001). This study conceded that older workers were more stable and concluded that as the participants were generally quite young, they may have had a bias favouring their own age group (Büsch & Königstein, 2001).

In the UK, Amos (2005) interviewed a large sample of 1,843 people over the age of 16, and concluded that ageism varies as individuals perceived age as relative to their own. For example, a 24 year old person viewed a person of 55 as old, while a 62 year old considered a person aged 55 to be young (Amos, 2005). Other findings by Amos (2005) indicated that from the age of 55, people are nearly twice as likely to have experienced age prejudice as any other form of prejudice, and that age

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prejudice is on the increase. Amos (2005) also noted that nearly 30 per cent of his research participants indicated that this form of prejudice is worse than five years ago, and that the ageing demographic of society will result in a lower standard of living, affecting security, health, employment, and education.

Marshall (2001), and Kluge and Krings (2008), concluded differently to most other literature reviewed in this thesis, claiming that attitudes to older workers are becoming more positive over time, particularly in the US\(^2\) and Canada (Marshall), and Switzerland (Kluge & Krings). However, a wealth of countering literature refutes this and indicates that changes in attitudes in the western world have been very slow. The statistics tend to indicate that Australian attitudes have not changed even after legislation, and a dramatic change in these attitudes will be necessary to enable Australia to avoid slipping further behind other OECD countries. Marshall’s (2001) study could well have come to this conclusion because the US implemented age discrimination legislation in 1967 (Neumark, 2003), with Canada implementing the Human Rights Act of 1977 and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982, both incorporating age legislation (Charters, 2008; Canadian Human Rights Commission, NY) Therefore, legislation has had considerably more time to gain traction in these countries, while Australia, with its age legislation being implemented in 2004, was already behind its global competitors in this regard.

Kanter (1994, in Marshall, 2001) stated that from the perspective of American companies, the ageing workforce is a mixed blessing, with many companies focusing on the higher compensation costs, rather than associating age with loyalty, experience, and knowledge. Kanter (1994, in Marshall, 2001) also considered that the rising health care and pension costs attached to seniority and tenure systems made it harder to replace people and, in light of pressures for innovation and change, the belief that there are limited returns from experience is fostered.

The costs associated with retaining older workers may also have a negative impact on employment decisions. For example, Marshall, (2001) quoting Rojo (1996),

\(^2\) Hornstein (2006) claimed that the positive effect on employment rates of older workers in the United States is mostly due to older workers leaving jobs at a later age rather than to more hiring.

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stated that it is quite common in Europe for senior business executives to either move to lower-level positions to make way for younger workers’ upward mobility, or to have their senior-level pay-rate reduced. Moving the older worker into part-time work is another option espoused by Marshall (2001), stating that a university might place a ‘Full Professor’ onto phased retirement at half salary, and use the other half to secure a full-time ‘Assistant Professor.’ To Marshall (2001), the university is refreshed with the new ideas of the younger worker\(^3\), while retaining the wisdom, experience, international scholarly contacts, and mentoring skills of the older senior scholar. Kanter (1994) and Rojo (1996), in Marshall (2001), both described a mindset accepting of upward mobility of youth to the detriment of the older experienced worker, an acceptance which determines that older workers should move aside and make room for the younger employee.

There is widely-held public contention that the basis of age discrimination has its foundations in the promotion of youth and beauty. This contrasts with the idea that the existence of stereotypes which unfairly label any group is unfair and unfounded. The AHRC (2010, p. 4) identified such labelling in their description of the “Work Intensification Model”, which presents older people as experienced but “high risk and inefficient”, and youth as “inexperienced and compliant” (p. 4). At the same time, the television media, and predominantly, the multi-billion dollar beauty/ageing industry, are also responsible for promoting youth and beauty with negative stereotypes about the aged, which reflects and reinforces society’s repugnance towards ageing (AHRC, 2010).

**Other possible reasons for job rejection**

There may be a number of reasons why a person is rejected for employment, including the subjective appraisal of attitude, appearance, and other perceptions relating to fitness for the position. However, Macnicol (2006, cited in AHRC, 2010), stated that our society promotes an obsession with appearance and being vital and

\(^3\) This comment is disturbing, provocative, ageist and illogical, and is representative of the attitudes which this thesis is attempting to overcome. Note comments in the Findings Chapter.

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young. The stereotyping of people into different technical and social experience has been intensified with distinctions and classifications relating to Gen Y, Gen X, and Baby Boomers, and when these assume personality traits for an entire age grouping, they result in stereotyping (AHRC, 2010). The AHRC (2010) stated that life choices do not neatly fit into rigid age-related boxes, yet this out-dated one-size-fits-all idea still persists. The AHRC (2010) claimed that age discrimination is systemic, with discriminatory practices embedded into the structures of our society which then produce disadvantage for a range of groups, including older people.

There is considerable evidence (Gringart et al., 2004) that employers’ preference for younger workers is based on attribute stereotyping such as trainability, adaptability, creativity, and the ability to use new technology. Converging evidence dispels many of these stereotypes, with one example being Bennington and Roberts-Calvert’s (1997) research, who claimed that evidence on the work performance of mature-age employees does not support the commonly-held stereotypes. Additionally, employers surveyed in the quarterly job index (TMP/Hudson Global Resources/Hudson, 2003) expressed dissatisfaction with younger workers in relation to communication (28.4 per cent) and organisational skills (26.7 per cent), but despite this, still conceded hesitation in employing mature-age workers.

A similar study by Ograjenšek et al. (2009) measured the attitudes of Slovenian employers, and found that older workers were perceived to perform better than their younger counterparts in relation to decision-making competence, professionalism, reliability, honesty, integrity, attentiveness, willingness to work hard, and loyalty. The perceived disadvantages stemmed from the employers’ evaluations of older workers’ adaptability toward new technologies, ability to acquire new skills and knowledge, readiness to learn, and adaptability to change. The study indicated that Slovenian companies behave negatively toward older workers, regardless of the activity sector, size of the firm, age of the participant, and participant’s education level, with the majority not actively targeting new employees aged 50 to 64, or only employing a very low percentage in this age range (Ograjenšek et al., 2009).

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The tall poppy syndrome

A problem exists when people learn skills and gain qualifications, and may consider that they will be given the opportunity to use these acquired attributes in a vocation. As will be demonstrated through the participants’ stories, this is often not the case. The question must be asked why. Is it that their skills are not valued? Is it that their skills are resented by others in what we have come to know, in Australia, as the Tall Poppy Syndrome (Haley, 2007; Mouly & Sankaran, 2000)?

Cheng and Seeger (2012, p. 82; quoting Haley, 2007, p. 34) claimed that:

… a tall poppy is someone who stands above the crowd because of his achievements. It is the tendency of the media and the general public to use the tall poppy syndrome to belittle the achievements of prominent individuals. Specifically, the tall poppy syndrome is “the tendency to cut down the ostentatious or merely successful” (p. 82).

Peeters (2004) supported this by claiming that the Australian tall poppy syndrome scrutinises high achievers and ‘cuts them down.’ Peeters claimed, in relation to collocation, currency, and incidence that the syndrome is part of a wider Australian egalitarianism which, he pointed out, is one of Australia’s most espoused and prominent cultural values. Peeters continued that the term is also used to refer to outstanding scholars who deserve to be publicly acknowledged for their work.

It is claimed, and will be shown, that the individuals in this study, and older people in the Australian workplace, are being held back in employment. Whatever the reason, and whether it is deliberate, perceived, or otherwise, it is creating a problem for individuals, organisations, and Australian society as a whole. This is addressed in the findings chapters as an issue requiring urgent resolution.

Rising social costs

On the issue of rising healthcare and pension costs, Marshall (2001) stated that the defined contribution pensions (such as are in operation in Australia) can offset the "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
costs of National healthcare plans (in operation in Canada and the UK), and can also relieve the private organisation of their responsibilities around the care of older workers.

Marshall (2001), citing Kanter's (1994) issue relating to seniority and tenure, claimed that countries such as the United States and Australia have systems in place to support employment tenure. However, Marshall (2001) expressed concern that with the decline in unionism (in the US and Australia), there is a reduced guarantee of continued employment with seniority. When relating this to the ability to change and innovate, Marshall (2001) asserted that it has been proven that older workers adapt well to new technologies.

**Buffering: (removing the financial burden)**

A study by Kessler, Turner, and House (1998) determined that unemployed workers did not suffer the same level of unemployment stress when the consequences of financial strain were removed. Further to this, no reports of psychological distress were detected in countries which provided generous social security benefits to the unemployed, as is the case in the Netherlands, thereby suggesting that financial loss and an uncertain financial future is a catalyst for depression. This correlates with the consequences for the unemployed who are under financial strain, as espoused by Rantakeisu et al. (1999), and Creed and Muller (2006), cited earlier.

Van Raaij and Antonides (1991) also conducted a study in the Netherlands and discovered findings commensurate with the above. They balanced the government-paid unemployment benefits against the minimum wage and determined that one’s motivation to accept employment could be seriously affected by the social security payout, adding that this was more likely to be the case at the unskilled, uneducated level and where the unemployed person is most likely to have a history of unemployment and social benefit payments.

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Unsupported unemployed and financial damage

Linn, Sandifer, and Stein (1985, in O'Brien, 1999) claimed that social support is a potential mediator of stress. In citing Gore (1978), they found that the unsupported unemployed demonstrated significantly higher elevations, and more change, in cholesterol levels, illness symptoms, and affective responses than the supported unemployed. In citing Kasl (1982), they claimed that a higher level of social support did produce a buffering influence when the unemployment status remained uncertain over a more prolonged period of time and, in citing Kasl and Cobb (1980), they also found that job loss increased the use of medical care. This is supported by Tessler et al. (1976, cited in Linn et al., 1999) who found a correlation between psychological distress and the use of primary healthcare services. Those depressed persons who viewed their health as poor, sought medical advice and, in this respect, the medical practitioners and institutions often fulfilled the social and emotional needs of the patients (see social buffering above).

Susan Ryan (2012, p. 1) claimed that when the Commonwealth Age Pension was introduced in 1909, the life expectancy for men was 55 and for women 59. As eligibility was 65 and 60 respectively, most people did not live long enough to receive it. However, today’s demography has changed considerably, with Ryan (2012) claiming that in Australia today, 80 per cent of over 65 year olds are reliant (to some degree) on the pension, with 55 per cent (in 2007) being totally reliant. Ryan (2012) also predicted that over the next 40 years, the number of people aged from 65 to 84 will double, while those over 86 will quadruple.

Ryan (2012, p. 2) also presented a conundrum by claiming that in today’s Australia, we are in better health and live longer, and therefore, need to find ways to fund our retirement. She quoted Treasury predictions which project that Australia’s ageing population will add about A$60 billion to government expenditure by 2050. The question then must be asked - who will fund this expense? Ryan (2012) suggested that one viable option is work, and quoted Professor Ian Hickie from the University of Sydney, who stated that “older brains are healthy … and work keeps them that way” (p. 2).

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Ryan (2012) claimed that in Australia, “three in 10 older workers have directly experienced age-related discrimination” (p. 2), while the AHRC (2016) claimed the figure was 27% for over 50s and increased with age. Ryan (2012) continued that this has serious implications which have a negative impact on our future. She (Ryan, 2002) stated that “The lack of work opportunities for older Australians contributes to this dismal picture and age discrimination is one of its major drivers” (p. 2). With this reality, the question is now being asked - what can be done to overcome the above postulations and predictions?

The modern man – house-husbands with breadwinner wives

There is a great deal of contemporary literature relating to the modern man. Carl Jung (2001) published research in this area as long ago as 1933. The modern literature relates the vastly increased entry of women into the workforce since the Second World War and women’s ability to experience new vocational options (Gardner, 2006). This development saw the emergence of the new social concept of the house-husband, which emphasises males as being totally committed to equality in both the workplace and the home; who cook, change nappies, and sew (and more).

Kaufman and White (2014) claimed that men have traditionally emphasised the overriding importance of their own careers coupled with the benefits of maternal care. However, in the modern context, men alone are often unable to earn enough money, and so rely on their wife or partner’s desire to work. Kaufman et al. (2014) claimed that the egalitarian man rejects the traditional roles and embraces and supports his wife’s career and the value and benefits of children and family. However, Wentworth (2003) claimed that despite the many social changes associated with the discarding and realigning of tradition, power, and control, the allocation of social norms and expectations and the concept of the house-husband is still not fully supported within US culture.

Calvin Smith (1998) supported Wentworth in relation to the Australian context, stating that:

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Prior research has found that house-husbands suffer alienation and ostracism from a variety of sources … hegemonic conceptions of who ought to be minding the children and the house subvert or thwart these men’s attempts to validate themselves and these practices. The consequences are a feeling of illegitimacy on one hand and social isolation on the other (p. 138).

The modern man and house-husband concept will be further debated in the Findings chapters.

Poverty and the elderly


The AHRC (2010) stated that in 2009, more than “one in four older people were living in poverty” (p. 17), with Australia having the “fourth highest old-age poverty rate among OECD countries” (p. 17), this being “more than double the OECD average” (p. 17). Between 1990 and 2000, during a time of strong Australian economic growth, the number of people 50 years and over living in poverty increased from one-quarter to one-third (AHRC, 2010). Obviously, this dilemma has implications for society as a whole.

The AHRC (2010) also claimed an increase in demand on the Social Security system, with (as of July 2010) over one-third of long-term job-seekers being over the age of 40. The AHRC (2010) also predicted that if the participation rate of mature age workers increased by 5 per cent over the next 40 years, Australia’s real GDP per capita would increase by 2.4 per cent (figures replicated earlier by Ryan, in Raine, 2012).

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The AHRC (2010, p. 16), citing the Australian Productivity Commission (2005, p. 303), stated that “higher economy-wide productivity and participation rates are the keys to future economic growth” (p. 16). The AHRC (2010) continued:

“… in situations where mature age workers are forced out of work or are under-employed because of unlawful age discrimination, this may have the effect of limiting both our productivity and the growth of the Australian economy. ‘Workers will work for longer’ … But can they?” (p. 16).

The under-employment figures stated by the AHRC (2010) earlier in this thesis are repeated here to reaffirm the current Australian picture. The AHRC (2010) claimed that in November 2009, there were 156,300 workers aged between 45-54 years of age, and 101,500 persons over 55, who were under-employed. It is notable that mature age workers also experience longer periods of under-employment (AHRC, 2010). These claims were reflected in Bennington’s (2001) research which cited the ABS (2000), Chan and Stevens (2001), Hirsch et al. (2000), Schwartz and Kleiner (1999), and Yearta and Warr (1995), and also claimed that, in general, older people experience longer periods of unemployment, have the lowest re-employment probabilities, a higher probability of part-time employment, and suffer the largest wage losses. One of the consequences of age discrimination and the failure to obtain employment (job loss, failure to gain promotion) is the cost in terms of diminishing accumulated capital wealth. Quite obviously, and quite unfortunately, are the claims of O’Brien (1999, viewed in Lee, Probert and Watts (ed), 1999) who stated that “a lower quality retirement will ultimately result from the diminishing assets” (p. 209).

It is also relevant here to mention how inflation has had a negative impact on the older retiree. The National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre (NSPAC) produced a research report (October, 2013) which scrutinised household cost of living pressures among Australia’s older population – those aged 50 years and over. The report indicated that the prices of several essential items had increased significantly in the five years prior to March 2013, with one example being electricity, which increased by 83 per cent. The report highlighted that distinct population groups are financially stressed and are struggling to pay their bills. The report further revealed that low-

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income households spend over 80 per cent of their disposable income on essential items, and that the increase in consumer prices is causing problems for almost 250,000 senior households.

Chapter summary

To facilitate the ordering and control of the material viewed in this chapter, the literature has been dissected and placed under the subject headings of Intrapersonal (self); Interpersonal (family and friends), and Social (society itself) (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Conceptualising these disparate elements is essential to provide a simple framework to make sense of the stories. In summary, key theories and empirical issues have an impact on the understanding of stories about age discrimination in the workplace. These are both identifiable alone, but are also intrinsically interconnected, as follows:

A. Organisational displacement. A culture and mindset which fosters older worker discrimination and the promotion of youth and beauty. Controlled emotions (resentment, anger, embitterment). Disgruntlement with the system (in overlooking older, better qualified people). Animosity towards others (notably, anger towards youth).

B. Masculinity, power, and ego (pride, achievement, success) and damage to ego.

C. Health (psychological, physical – including depression and suicide etc).
   i. Uncontrolled emotions (rejection, disappointment, uncertainty, damaged job search ability – hysteresis and self-screening out of a job application pool).
   ii. Controlled emotions (resentment, anger, embitterment). Disgruntlement at the system (in overlooking older, better qualified people). Animosity towards others. Notably anger towards youth.

D. Buffering (positive).
   i. Financial support (and other social welfare systems).
   ii. Family and social support (sharing the load).

E. Negative family responses. Non-support (abandonment).

F. A personal mindset (of the victim) to continue acquiring qualifications in the belief that this will enable workplace re-entry and competitiveness.

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G. Effects of financial limitations, restrictions, and uncertainty (present and future).

The literature presented is both wide in context (as it introduces the many facets and variations of the effects of the phenomena) and compelling in nature (and it is presented in a way which draws attention to its existence). I have deliberately searched for, and included, literature which would not only alert attention and awareness to both the past and current impending drama which is unfolding before our eyes in Australian society today, but which also relates to the very live issues which will be presented in the personal stories in the subsequent chapters. It will point to, and uncover, a global dilemma which affects individuals, families, peers, society, and governments today, and which has the potential to compound and affect all of our lives into the future.

This chapter commenced with identifying the gaps in the literature which made this study essential, and certainly, not before time. It progressed on to view a range of government reports which highlighted statistics and demographics which brought compound cognitive recognition to a dilemma which has the potential to greatly increase. It is noted in these reports that the Australian government has only recently commenced paying attention to this long-term phenomenon, and is now incorporating strategies into the workplace, and into their own policies and legislation, to address these issues which affect every aspect and corner of society, including workplace cultures and government coffers (current and future). The chapter also identified that there is an increase in older person work retention (notably part-time and casual) while, at the same time, recognising a dearth in young people entering the workforce. This has serious connotations for Australian productivity, including wealth and well-being, and for older persons’ retirement options.

The chapter has recognised that the essential components of the embedded autoethnographic research method are facilitated by addressing the personal issues of the participants within the study. As such, the literature which highlighted the effects and consequences of the age discrimination phenomenon was viewed. This included issues such as one’s decline in status and prestige, and the decline into "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
poverty and exclusion, together with the commensurate effects on mental and physical health and well-being, including the extreme instances of severe depression resulting in suicide and para-suicide tendencies. The chapter viewed personal coping mechanisms and welfare and support systems which, in varying degrees, defray the burden faced by an affected individual. It also discussed mechanisms such as family and spousal support, unemployment benefits, counselling, medication, alcohol, and sport (and more), which also mediate the negative effects.

The next chapter describes the method that underpins this research, and follows the framework presented in my own article published by Sage Research Methods Cases entitled The Ins and Outs of Doing Autoethnography: An Insight into the Methodology of My Thesis on Australian Male Age Discrimination (Brown, 2014a).

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This thesis is an autoethnography, and follows the ethnographic conventions defined by Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) and Denzin & Lincoln (1998), which refers to forms of social research usually having a number of the following features:

... a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them;

... a tendency to work primarily with “unstructured” data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories;

... investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail;

... analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most (p. 110).

What is ethnography - autoethnography? Where did it come from?

This chapter examines the key elements of the research method used in this thesis and explains its application to this study of age discrimination. The method underpinning this research is a reflexive autoethnography utilising the methods of interview, case-study, and life history (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hammersley, 1992). In clarifying the difference between ethnography and autoethnography, a specific feature of ethnography is that although it reports a cultural phenomenon from close proximity as a participant, the researcher is still an observer (or outsider) perceiving the phenomenon under study (Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2014; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography, according to Denzin (2014), specifically relates to culture from the concept of self: therefore as an inside member of the group or phenomena under study. He (2014) further defined the auto (in autoethnography) by relating an instance whereby an entire Native American Indian tribe was the subject of autoethnography by one representative member.

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Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) defined the difference succinctly by stating that:

…ethnography, studies a culture’s relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture … Ethnographers do this by becoming participant observers in the culture. … When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity (p. 3).

Background to the chosen method

The following short extracts, highlight the clarity, validity and essential need for autoethnographic acceptance into our modern compilation of research. While considerable literature indicates that this has been well achieved, I personally believe, and stated instances above, where pockets of non-acceptability still exist. I also perceive, particularly in Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2015), a prior personal and academic fear (now overcome) regarding this acceptance by other traditional methodologists, particularly so in relation to personal narrative. This paper addresses this issue.

I reinforce my selection of method by stating that I feel an absolute connection with the words of Carolyn Ellis (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2015), who in her part to the introduction of her most recent Handbook of Autoethnography, stated, “I have been an autoethnographer all my life, I also have been interested in peoples’ emotions and intentions and how they create meaningful lives and cope with the problems of living” (p. 17). She continues that her academic life enabled her to connect her sociological eye with a communicative heart and how her later connection with Art Bochner created a synergy which enabled the “joining of social science and humanities to make scholarship more human, useful, emotional, and evocative … with a focus on narrative and autoethnography; and contributing to the world in which we live” (p. 18).

In the same book introduction, Holman Jones (Holman Jones et al., 2015) relates how her specific learnings from a university course entitled “Fictocriticism and

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Cultural Critique”, convinced her to affirm “writing stories offers us a powerful form for theorizing the daily workings of culture …” and that she came to accept autoethnography “as an effort to create work that changes the world” (p. 19). The relevance of Holman Jones to this paper is also supported by her informing of risks associated with the research method. She states “telling personal stories in/as research always carries personal, relational, and ethical risks … I view these risks as necessary not only for our research but also for living full lives and changing our world in important and essential ways” (p. 19). She (Holman Jones et al., 2015) continues by quoting Butler (2005) who writes “our willingness to risk ourselves – our stories our identities, our commitments – “in relation to others constitutes our very chance of becoming human”” (p. 19).

Risk and humanities also appears central to the postulations and mindset of Adams (Holman Jones et al., 2015). He states “I initially steered clear of autoethnography as the primary research method for my dissertation; stubbornly, and ignorantly, I thought that the method would thwart the possibility of having an academic career” (p. 20).

Ethnography (in its varying forms) had its origins in research stemming from anthropological and sociological research. This study incorporates the ethnographic form known as autoethnography, and although often considered a poor relative and ‘not real research’ by the traditional rigid quantitative, statistical researcher, it developed credibility and came to prominence with the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Emotive moving personal renditions were related through stories of prejudice, discrimination, and suffering, and the women’s struggle to be heard (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Olesen, Denzin, & Lincoln, 2005). From there, ethnography (and autoethnography) expanded into many different forms and variations and, by the 1980s and early 1990s, there was a “complex and confusing intellectual landscape of many forms and conceptions of ethnography” (Lofland, in Huberman & Miles, 2002, p. 139). Gobo (2008) explained postmodern ethnography as an ‘umbrella term’ used to denote and encompass a number of variants of the ethnographic approach and lists interpretive and critical ethnography, ethnographic philosophy, and autoethnography within this array.

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Berger and Luckman (1967, in Shacklock, 2005) described ethnography as interpretive, and claimed that interpretations of experience vary between people. They (Berger & Luckman, 1967) claimed that reality is constructed by individuals and is based on different individual experiences and perceptions; it produces inductive, subjective, contextual knowledge. Bruner (1999), labelled the interpretative construction as the hermeneutic circle and claimed that the human processing of knowledge in an interpretive way makes the individual parts of the narrative come together to form a whole, with the events themselves needing to be constituted in light of the overall narrative.

Creswell (citing Richardson, 2005) positioned ethnography in an emotive environmental framework, which he described as a “highly personalized” play that captures the “unruly, multi-sited, and emotionally laden” subject matter better than standard writing” (p. 934). Ellis and Bochner (2000) claimed that this is quite unique to ethnography and not possible in any other method.

Gobo (2008, p. xi) described ethnography in more tangible dimensions and stated that “doing ethnography” is akin to a book of recipes.

*It teaches you how to cook … Methodologists are not accustomed to giving recipes, they do not go into the basic details of how research should be done. They believe it more important to transmit an attitude, a reasoning procedure, a way to deal with problems. They leave it to the researcher to draw upon his or her creativity and experience to resolve contingent problems, applying general guidelines to particular research contexts. They are quite right to do so: ethnomethodologists said as much in the 1960s, and I agree (p. xi).*

Smith (2005, p. 71) credited Hayano (1979) with the original coining of the term autoethnography as referring to “anthropological studies by individuals of their own culture.” Smith claimed that “the exact definition is elusive” and incorporates many other genres “too many to list, that fall under its umbrella.” Smith cited Behar (1996, p. 174) who described “emerging genres, such as autoethnography, as efforts to map an intermediate space we can’t define yet, a borderline between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autoethnography, art and life” (p. 71). Spry (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) defined autoethnography as:

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... a personal political praxis, an aesthetic/epistemic performance, and a critical/indigenous/advocational ethnography that operates from a compassionate and lionhearted will to usurp and resist injustice (p. 499).

Effectiveness of ethnography - autoethnography

In placing the ethnographic umbrella into the research assemblage, it must firstly be stated that this form of research is relatively new, and despite considerable controversy (Hammersley, 1992) and early scepticism (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), its use is now more common as an increasingly popular form of research that transmits a message through the medium of real-life narratives, which may expose the pain of the victims, the deprived, and depressed (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hammersley, 1992). These narratives deliberately attempt to involve the reader through stirring their conscience and understanding (Hammersley, 1992; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). By engaging emotions and empathy, and by telling narratives of despair and pain and always using the words of the victim through the first person language medium, an emotion is transmitted which only the victim can convey to others (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 746) projected the author in an autoethnography as having literary license to enhance the level of impact. They stated that in autoethnography, it is more important to get the message across, so that the true feelings and reflections can be experienced by the reader. They pose questions such as:

*Does my story reflect my past accurately ... as if I were holding a mirror to my past?* They add, *What are the consequences my story produces? What kind of a person does it shape me into? What new possibilities does it introduce for living my life?* The crucial issues are what narratives do, what consequences they have, to what uses they can be put (p. 746).

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Ellis and Bochner (2000) introduced arguments for autoethnographic research by stating their impatience with writers who “belittle or diminish therapeutic consequences of stories” (p. 746). In reverting back to the origins of ethnography, they stated that for these critics, narratives threaten the whole project of science:

…’If you can’t pitch a theory, then you can’t play in the big leagues.’ … What they oppose is what they equate with the therapeutic: the sentimental, the mushy, the popular. Thus, they engage surreptitiously in what feminist critic Jane Tompkins (1989) calls ‘the trashing of emotion,’ a war waged ceaselessly by academic intellectuals ‘against feeling, against women, against what is personal’ … (p. 746).

Carolyn Ellis (2009-2016) continued to expand on the above with the following;

I resist the impulse to take a defensive or attacking posture against all these criticisms. I continue to believe that the “attack and defend” style of communicating differences in perspectives on inquiry, while perhaps necessary and useful for some purposes, has rarely changed anyone’s mind. I doubt it has opened anyone’s heart. How much is to be gained by speaking to critiques that are contradictory and cancel out each other, that speak primarily to what autoethnographers do not do rather than assessing what we do, or that seem to ask us to work from the same perspective and toward the same goal as that of the critic? Given the number, variety, and contradictory nature of some of the critiques, I have a sense that we must be doing something right and that we should continue doing what we are doing.

Hannabuss (2000, p. 1) also highlighted the advantages of this form of phenomenological-ethnographical research by stating that it is not just the things that people say and do, “but that they say it in their own words” (p. 1). They explained the internal representations of meaning as “reflexively revealed or exteriorised” (p. 1) and justify what they do know and appear to know to know with the meanings that they alone attribute. Hannabuss (2000) stated that “Ethnographic research allows us to regard and represent the actors as creators as well as executants of their own meanings” (p. 1). Basically, Hannabuss (2000) used ethnography as a form of research in which truth surfaces – a fundamental aspect of epistemology.

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Creswell (2005, quoting Thomas, 1993) stated:

> Critical ethnographies are a type of ethnographic research in which the author is interested in advocating for the emancipation of groups marginalized by our society … Critical researchers are typically politically minded individuals who seek, through their research, to advocate against inequality and domination (p. 441).

Creswell (2005, citing Denzin, 1998) concluded that “a critical ethnographic report will be a ‘messy, multilevel, multimethod’ approach to inquiry, full of contradictions, imponderables, and tensions” (p. 441).

**Why select autoethnography over other methodologies?**

According to Flick (2002), history in the contemporary context, has shown that the ethnographic umbrella has become an essential and increasingly popular tool in the social sciences. Flick (2002) claimed that this is predominantly because of the failings of the more traditional deductive methodologies. Flick (2002) contended that due to rapid social change and the consequent diversification of life worlds, social contexts and perspectives have altered. Flick (2002) stated that “the deriving of research questions and hypotheses from theoretical models, followed by testing against empirical evidence, was failing the modern researcher” (p. 14).

Flick (2002) stated that research has increasingly been forced to make use of inductive strategies, and instead of starting from theories and testing them, new concepts exhibiting and respecting sensitivity and awareness were required for these social contexts. The introduction and development of Grounded Theory, as espoused by Dick (2005), Corbin and Strauss (2008), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser (1993), Kinach (1996), and Strauss and Corbin (1997), whereby the questions for analysis and research actually arose from the study itself, and not the other way around, is a significant example of this approach. In quoting others, Flick (2002), identified that contrary to widespread misunderstanding, the qualitative

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concepts are themselves influenced by previous theoretical knowledge. For example, Flick (2002), citing Bruner (1991) and Harré (1998), claimed that the study of subjective meanings and everyday experience is essential to the contemplation of narratives and discourses. Dörner (in Flick, 2002) argued that research, particularly in psychology, lacks relevance for everyday life because it is not sufficiently dedicated to exactly describing the facts of a case; hence, the emergence of ethnography as a suitable form of representation of such phenomena.

Flick, (2002) citing Beck and Bonß (1989, p. 31), stated that “science no longer produces absolute truths which can be uncritically adopted. It furnishes limited offers for interpretation, which reach further than everyday theories but can be used in practice comparatively flexibly” (p. 14). Flick (2002) also controversially claimed that “social science is rarely perceived and used in everyday life as in order to fulfil methodological standards their investigation and findings are often far removed from everyday questions and problems” (p. 14). Flick (2002) reiterated Ellis and Bochner’s (2000) ideas by identifying that each case of qualitative research stands alone as a separate unique entity making it unfeasible to apply to another situation and case.

Flick (2002) further claimed that the essential features of qualitative research differ markedly from quantitative research because of the correct selection of method and theory; the “recognition and analysis of different perspectives; the researcher’s reflections on their research as part of the process of knowledge production, and the variety of approaches and methods” (p. 14). Flick (2002), cited Bortz (1984), whose criteria for assessing the object of research relates to the complexity of the object under study. In applying this to my specific autoethnography, the fact that I, as the author, have intrinsically experienced the phenomenon relevant to this study, provides an easy choice as there are very few theoretical methods which align with my study as completely as this.

The need to explore new research avenues, and indeed, the flexibility and personal reflection highlighted above, is supported by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), who in quoting Bochner (1994), stated that:

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... gradually, scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines began to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proffered stories rather than theories, and if they were self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free (p. 2).

Ellis et al. (2011) continued that autoethnographers’ influence the research process through personal experience.

... a researcher decides who, what, when, where, and how to research, decisions necessarily tied to institutional requirements … and personal circumstance … Consequently, autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist (p. 2).

By embracing such an open, interesting, and flexible research method, the wide-ranging stories and pathways can be many and diverse, as the focus and perception of the reader is paramount, and the single items which make up the story come together to form the whole picture (Bruner, 1991). Bruner (1991) claimed that the goal of this research, unlike quantitative research, is not to test the already known, but to discover the new. The accuracy of the study is also assessed with reference to the issue, person, or phenomena under study, and does not exclusively follow abstract scientific academic criteria, as does quantitative research (Bruner, 1991). Interestingly, another dilemma of qualitative research, which adds significantly to its attraction, relates to the personal perspective of the researcher and the direction they intend to take to clarify the problem under investigation.

The variance and idiosyncrasies of ethnography - and how to select the most appropriate form

There is an abundance of writing styles, characteristics, and idiosyncrasies of ethnography and, so too are there many variations (and many arguments) relating to the applied label, the classification or genre of this form of narrative. This is

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demonstrated by an endless stream of authors, including Atkinson and Hammersley (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), Chang (2008), Ellis (2000), Ellis and Bochner (2004), Hammersley (1992), Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), and Van Maanen (1988) to name but a few, who relate a number of varied and idiosyncratic forms and representations. Many of these genres overlap and their definitive nature is arguably drawn to close alignment.

Selecting the most appropriate research method left me pondering how to enable myself to be fully conversant with an appropriate style of writing and to be able to justify this to an academic audience. After considerable research and dissection of a range of forms of ethnography, I reached the conclusion that the actual label of the research method was less important to the overall thrust of the thesis itself. Labelling mattered very little, as it is the personal appreciation and self-absorption of the phenomenon, the depiction and interpretation of the story’s message to my readers and to my interview participants who believed that my representation mattered to them, to whom I owed my allegiance.

This appreciation of variance of ethnographic methodologies was reinforced in October 2010 when I attended the International Institute of Qualitative Methodology Conference – ‘Advances in Qualitative Method’ - in Vancouver. The keynote speaker, Dr Morgan (2010), stated that there was far too much emphasis on the categorising of all methodology into specific boxes. He stated that if the methodological design does not exactly fit into the predetermined and ordered label, this does not mean that it is not sound research. Morgan (2010) stated that fulfilling the research obligation outweighs the labelling of the methodology.

So, the battle to have my study fall into a particular category, label, or box was initially (as a PhD novice) quite important to me. However, now at the completion of my study (and with the support of Morgan and others), I am able to stand back from my research dilemma and reflect and realise that I have set aside this conundrum, as I am convinced that my ethnographic research fits into quite a number of methodological categories simultaneously. So, although my method encompasses autoethnography, depicting ‘self’ as the central theme and character, and following (to the letter) the template set by Ellis (2004), and Ellis and Bochner (2000), and "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
supported by methodologists such as Chang (2008) and Delamont (2009), it is also a reflexive ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), as I reflect on my own experiences and dissect the knowledge and information of the life-changing events of others who similarly relate their history through their own eyes and in their own words. It is a critical ethnography (Averill, 2006; Foley & Valenzuela, in Denzin & Lincoln eds, 1994; and Quicke, 2010), as it weighs merits and contradictions in one’s life and unearths the prejudice inside both our life world and the individuals within it. It is an evaluative ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), as it places value on the many aspects of the presented criterion. It is also an analytic ethnography (Lofland, in Huberman & Miles, 2002), and moreover, in reflecting upon the different perspective of Taylor (2009), it is a therapeutic ethnography. Given the extensive variations and idiosyncrasies of this methodological form, a more fitting label might be ‘participant member ethnography’, as this delineates any confusion over the use of ‘auto.’ However, I personally believe that a more specific label for this particular study would be ‘cathartic autoethnography’, as this terminology enables the personal activation of a therapeutic phenomenon as the stories and life dramas are presented and unfold.

The autoethnographic form of reflexive narrative is open to the injection of personal bias and opinions that may affect and influence the interview and discourse process (Denzin et al., 1998). Denzin et al. (1998) claimed that this form of personal bias facilitates an understanding that would be missing from less emotive studies with less personal implication, attachment, and involvement.

In autoethnography, our own perceptions and comparisons with others is sought in the retelling of the stories and the filtering of the data. It is important to recognise the existence of a human dilemma, in that our own lived experience naturally colours and may blur our perceptions. In overcoming this conundrum, Moustakas (1994) relates Edmund Husserl’s (1931, original version) term ‘epoche’ (note Shacklock’s 2005, pp. 111-2 usage of the term “bracketing”). The framework of this labelling requires the setting aside of previous knowledge so as not to taint the research and allow a more objective interpretation in all stages of design, data gathering, coding, and developing of themes. Although this difficulty is acknowledged, the telling of

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stories in the participant’s own words allows, and requires, a stringent degree of honesty in this regard.

Flick (2002) claimed that autoethnographic research should be viewed through ‘new eyes’, as rapid social change and the resulting diversification of ‘life worlds’ have increasingly confronted social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives. Flick (2002) stated that the traditional deriving of research questions and hypotheses from theoretical models, and the testing of them against empirical models, has failed and left a place for narrative/qualitative research alongside the traditional paradigms and research methods. Hence, the new forms of research, such as autoethnography, go beyond figures and statistics and tell the real-life phenomena of the issues that lay behind the statistics, revealing that many aspects of life cannot be measured (Flick, 2002).

Shacklock (2005), citing Creswell (2003), claimed that the phenomenological approach stresses that the human experience is unique, in that human experiences and actions follow from their self-interpretation, and that a person’s explanation is a perception. In quoting Moustakas (1994, also cited in Creswell, 2003), Shacklock (2005) stated that “understanding the ‘lived experience’ marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method … to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (p. 129). It is important to note that this study, while being concerned with the incidence of age discrimination, has its focus on the impact this phenomenon has had on professional men. It is concerned with discovering the meaning behind the phenomenon; therefore the phenomenological autoethnographic approach will enable the data to be extracted in rich form through this method, which is unlikely to be extracted using any other method (Shacklock, 2005).

**Placing myself within the text**

This autoethnography is viewed from my own perspective and perception as a key member of the group and phenomenon under study. I relate events from my own personal experience, where I know only too well the effects of workplace prejudice and discrimination on personal well-being, disposition, and attitude to life and to

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others. Similarly positioned group members who contrast, complement, and even contradict my experiences were sought to retell their own real-life experiences and stories, so that at the end of this, a vision can be perceived and presented that highlights the issue of age discrimination, which needs to be told and shared.

Following the conventions of autoethnography, the components of the story are presented in the first-person. Ellis and Bochner (2000) claimed that in autoethnography, the author becomes native, and it is their voice that is important and central to the story. They (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) stated that autoethnography is not a dry, abstract, anonymous, prepositional, third-person essay devoid of personal involvement, but involves personal feelings, passion, and empathy that require the voice to be heard at its most effective. To further illustrate this point, Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 740) credited feminism with a significant contribution to the autobiographical voice associated, in particular, with reflexive ethnography. They stated that it starts with one’s own experience and explains their personal connection to the project, or uses personal knowledge to help in the research process.

As Creswell (2005), Taft (1999), and Ellis and Bochner (2000) all advocated non-neutrality in autoethnography, this critical autoethnography and, in particular, the interview process, will take the form of positioning myself in a non-neutral position and presenting my own personal experience so as to elicit, gauge, develop, and ponder similar, different, contrasting, and contradictory experiences from the interviewees. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 748) claimed that the goal is to encourage compassion and to promote dialogue, and by placing myself in the text, “become an agent of self-understanding and ethical discussion” (p. 748). To illustrate this point, Ellis and Bochner (2000) further discussed what they call the ‘illness narrative’ (p. 749), where an author presents their battle with infirmity and hospitalisation and, while not seeking pity or portraying themselves as helpless victims, the personal narrative with its effective voice actually empowers both the author and the participants, demonstrating their resistance to the forces of domination of their predicament.

I feel vindicated in doing this, as a person whose life has been turned upside down, rearranged, and hardened by my personal experience with age discrimination. I can “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
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naturally locate myself as an ‘insider’, possessing all the manifestations and interpretations of anger, injury, embitterment, and hurt that this experience has inflicted upon me. In researching the phenomena, I came across other ‘insiders’ such as Smith (2005), who in her very personal autoethnographic study on “Acquired Brain Injury” (ABI) (p. 69), stated that:

… I felt privileged to be able to offer such an intimate and exclusive ‘insider’ portrayal of life after an ABI and the struggle that such a life can be. My experiences engaging in creativity during my recovery from ABI provided the inspirational fuel I needed to decide what to explore for my thesis (p. 70).

Smith (2005) then questioned how she arrived at autoethnography, and how she became a participant in her own research. “What was my place in the study? ... I knew that I was more than just the researcher” (p. 70).

Smith (2005) stated that sustaining an ABI redirected her life, and changed the person she was into the person she is now. She reflects on how this could have influenced her interpretations of her participants’ experiences. She stated that she had to adopt a position that not only legitimised her voice, but also allowed her to express her thoughts without marginalising the voices of her participants.

I too have struggled with similar challenges and dilemmas in my study on discrimination and, like Smith, I also believe that as I am of the same culture as my interview participants, my opinions, views, and feelings on the subject should certainly contribute to my own study and, again like Smith (2005), I cannot ignore my role and the relevance of my experiences. This is contrary to the traditional role of the ethnographer in which objectivity is observed, and in which I would not have been allowed to embed myself (Gobo, 2008).

Smith (2005) stated that “By definition, autoethnography enabled me to tell the story of my life-changing experiences of ABI and incorporate my views, thoughts, and story to enrich the ethnography of my participants. … Using autoethnography permitted my experiences to play a valid role in the study” (p. 71). Smith (2005), quoting Gerbin and Gerbin (2002, p. 14), stated that “In using oneself as an “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
ethnographic exemplar, the researcher is freed from the traditional conventions of writing. One’s unique voicings - complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expressiveness - is honored” (p. 71). In extending this assertion, Smith (2005), citing Goodall (2000), stated that she was in a position to “look at my own story through the same lens that I am using to interpret the worlds of my participants” (p. 71).

The impact and relevance of narrative - Why tell stories?

Harper (2010, no page), a well-renowned and well-documented Melbourne-based motivational speaker, wrote an article on his website entitled ‘Why Story Tellers Make the Best Teachers.’ He related an incident in his life which he retold to his large audience prior to commencing a keynote address. He stated that years later, people still remember and relate the story, along with the creative expressions and gestures which he used to bring the story to life. They recall this story as if it was told yesterday and yet they cannot remember any of the contents of the major theme of the evening, the keynote speech. The lesson to be drawn from Harper’s words is that stories are an enjoyable part of our childhood and development which he claimed “liberate us.” He further claimed that “they are often the most effective way to teach, learn and create a deeper level of understanding and connection”, because people are interested and fascinated in the ethos of story-telling. He related his own childhood experience with all the trials and tribulations of growing up as a “fat kid.” He explained that he does not need to give the audience clarity and cognition of this experience, as the story unfolds as three-dimensional and people listen and create their own mental pictures. He claimed that “stories are simply information with pictures and feelings, which touch us mentally, emotionally and, even, physiologically.” He further explained that unlike the one-dimensional, stories make us “laugh, cry, happy and sad.” They excite us, scare us, and affect our nervous system; they can increase (or lower) our heart rate and trigger chemical changes in our body. To Harper, stories have the potential to “open the door to a level of understanding that only comes through a three-dimensional - physical, emotional and psychological - learning experience.” This resonates with the research

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approach of this study. The stories outlined by the other participants and myself, and the discussion of these, may be an effective method for people to understand.

The writing styles associated with autoethnography

Chang (2008, pp. 143-9) outlined four distinct styles of autoethnography, which she also claimed can overlap. They are ‘descriptive-realistic’, ‘confessional-emotive’, ‘analytical-interpretative’ and ‘imaginative-creative’ (pp. 143-9). This overlap is evident within my study, as it is certainly descriptive-realistic and contains clear analytical-interpretive overtones with quite overpowering elements of the confessional-emotive.

The characteristics of descriptive-realistic are narratives which “depict places, people, experiences and events as ‘accurately’ as possible with minimal character judgment and evaluation” (Chang, 2008, p. 143). Chang (2008) also claimed that detailed descriptions add life to autoethnography, and when expressed in a few simple words, draw readers to the world of the writer. This is certainly a major theme, and a predominant intention, of my writing in this thesis.

The analytical side of the analytical-interpretive approach urges the writer to highlight features and relationships among data fragments, and then through interpretation, to transcend the factual data and analysis and probe into what to make of the data itself. This again is a significant element in my study as common threads appear throughout the analysis and interpretation of each story.

Finally, the confessional-emotive component exposes a vulnerable self and opens the door to the reader’s participation. This aspect should certainly be appealing to many readers and invoke deep understanding and empathy. Chang (2008) claimed that the power to be able to speak to the heart of the reader is a natural attraction to this type of writing. In citing Sparkes (2002), Chang (2008) stated: “confessional-emotive writings do not always enjoy favourable reviews. Rather they are sometimes branded as emotional catharsis or ‘self-indulgence’ because they are

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seen as unloading their authors’ personal burdens in narration” (p. 145). This aspect will be seen later in this paper.

Regardless of the style and whatever the label, Chang (2008) stated that “Although you can benefit tremendously from reading other writings, you will ultimately have to find your own style to express your interpretation of your life and its connectivity to the world” (p. 149).

In the search for what is now generally considered to be a standard modern ethnographic interpretation, Lofland (in Huberman & Miles, 2002) claimed specific similarities in all ethnographic renditions, regardless of label, and although acknowledging perceivable and identifiable differences, he described seven common criteria in analytic ethnology that appear generic in all the types. Lofland (in Huberman & Miles, 2002) stated that an investigative ethnographer:

(a) attempts to provide generic propositional answers to questions about social life and organization; (b) strives to pursue such an attempt in a spirit of unfettered or naturalistic inquiry; (c) utilizes data based on deep familiarity with a social setting or situation that is gained by personal participation or an approximation of it; (d) develops the generic propositional analysis over the course of doing the research; (e) strives to present data and analyses that are true; (f) seeks to provide data and/or analyses that are new; and (g) presents an analysis that is developed in the senses of being conceptually elaborated, descriptively detailed, and concept-data interpenetrated (p. 137).

This autoethnography has followed all these above conventions.

Ethnographic intrusion: To maintain or not maintain distance?

As stated earlier, modern authors, including Creswell (2005), Taft (1999), and Ellis and Bochner (2000) all advocate non-neutrality in autoethnography. However, different emotive extremes have swamped ethnography, with many researchers supporting the examination of personal lives as necessary science (as I do), while "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
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others, such as Foucault (1975, in Gobo, 2008), claimed that “it is a limitless intrusion into private life, which in the name of an extreme interpretation of the rights of science, tramples on the rights of people, treating them as objects” (p. 61). Turner (in Gobo, 2008) supported Foucault, by claiming that participant observation may unwittingly perpetuate the repressive scientific purpose for which it was invented, that of observing and noting the behaviour of the prisoner, the ill, the poor, and the deprived and disadvantaged members of our society.

As a personally involved autoethnographer, I interviewed an assortment of victims who had experienced similar discrimination. They were all of the belief that by telling their story, they were freeing themselves of the burden placed on them by a discriminating society. Most significantly, in modern ethnographic writing, and what makes autoethnography quite distinct from other forms of research, is that the modern autoethnographer becomes involved in the phenomenon of his/her study and disputes the authority of the objective participant observer.

From this embedded position, the modern (auto) ethnographer criticises the early classical ethnographies as being essentially realist, impersonal, and falsely neutral (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont (2003) also claimed that the modern concept of autoethnography is a departure from these earlier conventional ethnographies as, by adding personal perceptions and interpretations, they break away from the past methods where accurate descriptions of cultures and writing for realism (the tools of anthropologists) were engaged in the fervour of presenting facts and science. Atkinson et al. (2003) stated that the modernisation of this unique style of ethnography frees the researcher to use emotional expressiveness and his/her own voice, including colloquialisms and reverberations from multiple relationships with and within the research. In the past, sociologists were encouraged to adopt the stance and vocabulary of anthropologists and were warned against ‘going native’; however, the modern concept of embedding oneself in the story is now deemed as acceptable and appropriate (Atkinson et al., 2003). As Atkinson et al. (2003) stated, it is designed to “deliberately jolt readers into facing up to issues” (p. 51).

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An example of this change in autoethnographic perspective is provided by Atkinson et al. (2003, p. 51) who, in their analysis of Hortense Powdermaker (1996), identified her intense efforts to remain detached and objective, and credited her with a methodological fear of over-involvement and of “going-native” (p. 51). Atkinson et al. (2003, p. 51) claimed that Powdermaker “walked the wire between personal involvement and over-familiarity”, and represented only partial explorations of the relationship between herself and her study focus. They (Atkinson et al. 2003) continued that although these authors’ accounts were “… ‘vivid and emotive’, they were sanitized, and exhibited ‘the personal and the emotional in partial rather than holistic ways’…” (p. 51).

Atkinson et al. (2003) claimed that the perceived dangers of over-familiarity and over-identification do not make sense in relation to the practices and processes of ethnographic fieldwork today, and if the cautious ethnographer navigates a pathway somewhere between engagement and distance, he/she is setting up a false dichotomy which masks the lived experiences of real-life. However, Atkinson et al. (2003) cautioned that the balance between distance and immersion is often difficult to accomplish, and the issue should be one of recognising that ethnographic work is the outcome of complex negotiations and relationships in which the self is central, rather than peripheral.

Moreover, it is essential to recognise that it is not just the retelling of one’s story that ethnographers and autoethnographers set out to do; they also have the responsibility of retelling and interpreting historical and personal events through their own eyes. Part of this interpretive process requires the author to gain new knowledge and insight into oneself and others, and to constructively transform this information into a personal expression (Chang, 2008). An author of this form of narrative is involved, immersed, and totally embedded within the story (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2004), and it would be impossible to compile a worthwhile ethnography without this engagement and focus (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

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Interview participants and their link to the research method

I was fortunate that my interview participants were all previously highly regarded and respected professional men. They were very highly educated, all with a university education, and all had an exceptionally high command of the English language and the ability to express it. They were extremely capable of relating their intended meaning through their language discourse. Having to decipher and decode difficult and potentially meaningless, or conflicting, dialogue did not therefore enter the equation; it was clear what was being said, and being said with an enthusiasm and willingness to have their words recorded and broadcast. However, I was also aware that the described impact of the consequences of the phenomenon of discrimination could potentially result in discourse based on frustration, anger, and guilt. This then may have had the potential to blur the stories, making it essentially more important for me, as the interpreter and writer of the story, to better consider the truth arising from some emotionally-laden and potentially blurred material.

Having a first-hand insight into the world of the discriminated and unemployed, I believe that any participant’s emotional blurring certainly tells a story in itself in that the injustice dealt to them resulted in anger and the potential to add some form of unconscious bias, meaning that a significant effect had occurred within the participant for him to act in such a way.

I was also fortunate in that, through sheer good luck in the pooling of my participants, the analysis of their stories became an exercise in comparing the significant differences and similarities in each (and all) of the cases. Examples that became apparent were the forgiving and accepting nature of one particular participant, countered by the anger, despair, and hopelessness; sleep deprivation (and other sleep disorders); manhood issues (the challenge to their status); suicidal tendencies; and seeking refuge in the bottle or in gambling. Alternatively, and very much a sign of these individuals’ strength of character, it became obvious that a will and determination to fight, challenge, overcome, and survive was apparent.

Following the standard set by Pamphilon (1999), and supported by Ellis and Bochner (2000), the research target group was originally six men (including myself); however, "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
it was reduced to five when one man withdrew because the impact that his enforced retirement had on him and his wife, and the reliving of this experience, proved too painful to recall. Both his marriage and his financial future were going through a destructive phase because of the consequences of the treatment to which he (or they) had been exposed.

The final five were recently re-employed (in varying categories), or struggling to come to terms with certain aspects of employment discrimination. They were all English first-language, Australian males. The group was recruited through either my own knowledge of their workplace predicament, or through direct contact with friends and associates. The reason for using only Australian English language users was to facilitate a target group with similar backgrounds, thus minimising the possibility of other factors impacting on the research (see Hammersley, 1992). While the study sample was small, it fitted the autoethnographic/ethnographic parameters espoused by a range of researchers (Atkinson & Delamont, 1998; Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Being such a small sample also allowed a more in-depth view of each participant’s case and a more comprehensive analysis of the effects of discrimination on these individuals, thereby keeping this study within manageable proportions. Of considerable advantage was that this small quantity of participants also enabled a comparable and convincing dialogue to be put forward, enabling a richness and fullness of meaning. It also fortunately came to be that many (if not all) perceivable and conceivable scenarios and outcomes were presented and subsequently analysed. Chang (2008) is relevant here as she relates the need for quality over quantity.

**Interviews**

The interviews were initially single 'one-off' interviews lasting from one to one-and-a-half hours, with the results, outcomes, and findings determining the necessity for further follow-up interviews. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggested that in following up the interview, it is appropriate to present the draft transcript to the narrator for amendment and approval. In all instances, I followed up the participants with further

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meetings, phone calls, and emails to obtain additional information and clarification on issues.

At the initial interview, I presented the thesis topic and allowed unstructured participant information to be recorded (with participant permission). I attempted to manage the conversation so as to elicit the ‘voice, emotion, and bias’ of the individual with minimal prejudice and interference. Although I have a personal interest in age discrimination, and a personal story to tell about its impacts, I had a clear intention to represent the participants’ own freely elicited contributions truthfully and without bias. Approval had been obtained from the participants to conduct the interviews and all aspects and conventions of the interview (for example recording, name-usage) were in line with my university’s ethics approval process.

**Analysing the data**

Earlier in this chapter, I broke the term autoethnography/ethnography down into its component parts to add meaning and understanding to the actual methodological labelling. This is repeated here - Auto = self; Ethno = culture (in this instance, age discrimination); and Graphy = study of. So, by this qualification, this is a study of a culture (age discrimination) using myself and my personal experiences as the major focus, in conjunction with the experiences of four other participants to highlight the impact and effects that the damage of age discrimination has caused to me and others.

This data collection technique is termed a ‘story analytic technique’ (see Figure 1 below), which Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes (2010), citing Polkinghorne (1995), claimed collects, invites, and generates stories for analysis from which the resultant data is organised into the flow of themes to be separately analysed. Phoenix et al. (2010) maintained that stories make up fundamental data for systematic, rigorous, principled narrative analysis, and through standing back from the stories, the researcher analyses and scrutinises the emerging themes to develop theoretical abstractions which are often retold and represented.

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I commenced my interviews and this study with the expectation that perceived or actual discrimination would have caused a degree of damage to my thesis participants. I was aware that I was in a very similar contextual situation as my interview participants and sharing a very similar predicament to them. I was quite aware of the personal impact that the age discrimination phenomenon had on me, so I carried an expectation that I would find similar occurrences and outcomes in others. The research findings show that this occurred to a large degree, but also that each story was, in itself, quite different and therefore unique.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) added that narrative analysis is as much about how something is said as what is actually said. They (1996) stated that “there are no formulae or recipes for the 'best' way to analyse the stories we elicit and collect. Indeed, one of the strengths of thinking about data as narrative is that this opens up the possibilities for a variety of analytic strategies” (p. 80). Smith and Davies (in Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010) supported this theory by stating that “there are no hard and fast rules about the best way to go about analysing your data” (p. 145). The difficulty lies in knowing where to start when you do not have a recipe to follow; while the advantage is that, with a recipe, the analysis can be the most creative and rewarding part of your research (Smith & Davies, in Dahlberg & Craig, 2010).

Also paramount in the analysis of modern ethnography is choice. Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 109) stated that the writing of “qualitative research has never been monolithic” and this reflects the differences among disciplines, academic styles, and subject matter. They claimed that there have been shifts from generation to generation “even within the same field of specialization” (p. 109); however, what is ‘new’ is the focus on how social scientists critically and self-consciously reflect to produce their texts for a variety of audiences. Coffey et al. (1996) claimed that this reflection has particular implications for the writing of ethnography and other qualitative research.

Throughout this thesis, I have consciously attempted to maintain stringent adherence to rigour and accuracy, and have committed myself to undertaking all the research and the analytical findings with the utmost care and precision. In supporting my ethos, Coffey et al. (1996, p. 190) appealed to the researcher to “engage with one’s "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
data” (p. 190) through constant dialogue, emphasising that the analysis of this data is not a separate task, but instead, proceeds throughout the entire research process. She stressed the need to do the research methodically with rigour and care, but added that the researcher needs to “be reflexive and critical” (p. 192) and document all actions systematically and in detail, testing ideas with clear relevance.

Coffey et al. (1996) emphasised that the focus on discipline in analysis is paramount, as the “contemporary popularity of qualitative research owes much to its flexibility and to the absence of methodological straightjackets” (p. 194). It has been argued that it would be a considerable threat to social research in general, were the popularity of this methodology to flourish in an undisciplined, ‘laissez faire’ atmosphere (Coffey et al. 1996). So, in practical application, the data collection approach used in this study was to record spoken data elicited from the participants in their own time and words. As is common practice with autoethnography, I did not present focus questions, but allowed the participants to outline their own histories and experiences without interruption and in their own time (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This dialogue was then transcribed into dot-point form using the exact words from the interview, and then presented back to the participants to check for accuracy.

The data obtained from the participants was coded into a written dialogue using first person speech with particular focus, and emphasis, on the emotions within the language, such as to highlight the personal pain of this subject matter and the impact it has had on the participant. The chronological method (see Sandelowski below) of time ordering was quite predominant in laying out the dialogue, with particular emphasis then being placed on prevalence (again, see Sandelowski below) and the search for words that linked to the theme of the effects of age discrimination on the recipient. Coffey et al. (1996) stated that words are the data and “that qualitative data analysis deals with meaningful talk and action” (p. 5).

In addition to the abovementioned analytic technique of narrative analysis, Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes (2010, p. 4), citing many authors (Atkinson, 1997; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Bochner, 2001, 2002; Ellis, 2004; Lieblich et al., 1998; Polkington, 1995; Riesmann, 2008; Richardson, 2000; Smith & Sparkes, 2006), outlined the storyteller technique. This analytic concept takes the viewpoint (as espoused by "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Ellis & Bochner, 2000) that a story is already analytical and theoretical as, when
people tell their own stories, they employ their own analytical techniques to interpret
their own worlds. This thesis therefore has notably employed the story analysis
convention, by identifying, interpreting, and promoting both personal and participant
information, and so the analysis and self-analysis has ultimately enriched and
elaborated the researched phenomenon. Autoethnography, by Ellis and Bochner’s
(2000) definition above, has been central to this thesis; however, it has been
employed without the need to enrich through the use of fiction and drama depicted in
the storyteller’s technique.

Coffey et al. (1996) cites Wolcott (1994) who described analysis through three terms,
“description, analysis and interpretation” (p. 8). Firstly, ‘description’ is applied in
terms of an underlying assumption that the data speaks for itself, and it is the job of
the researcher to accomplish the description in as accurate a way as possible.

The second term, ‘analysis’, according to Wolcott (1994), suggests that the data is
transformed by expanding and extending the data beyond a descriptive account.
Key factors and key relationships are identified to search for themes, patterns,
features, and relationships. Analysis is therefore both cautious and controlled and,
according to Wolcott, is structured, formal, bounded, systematic, grounded,
methodical, particular, carefully documented, and impassive.

The third term, ‘interpretation’, is where the researcher offers their own interpretation
of what is going on and “transcends factual data and cautious analysis” and probes
into what is to be made of the factual data. This engages the researcher to use

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“freewheeling, casual, unbounded, aesthetically satisfying, idealistic, generative, and impassioned” interpretation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 9). Wolcott (1994, in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) argued that these are “the three ingredients of qualitative research from which different balances can be struck” (p. 9), and are not mutually exclusive. In support of this revelation, I have used all three of these descriptive methods (in varying degrees), throughout my research. It should be noted that as I am also a participant in my own study, I have a significant insight into the phenomenon and how it affects the victim. I believe that my understanding of the topic and the usage of Wolcott’s “interpretation transformation” (p. 9) assists in binding this study together.

Fetterman (1989) claimed that in the final stage of analysis, an ethnographer needs to configure all the data (notes, reports, tape recordings) and draw an overall picture of how the system works from the initial fragmentary conclusions. He stated that this is the most creative step, as the researcher synthesises ideas and makes logical leaps that lead to useful insights. Fetterman (1989) proposed the idea of flexible thinking and allowing the mind to wander to consider unusual combinations of thoughts. He further asserted that the researcher must then backtrack to ensure that the data supports and validates the data and random associations.

**Writing the participants’ stories**

Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggested that the form of documenting and writing up the interviews would evolve as the interviews progressed, and may vary in the later stages. The options they offered included commencing the narrative with a short personal story, or a separate personal commencing chapter, therefore positioning oneself for the reader. I have followed Ellis and Bochner’s directive and prepared an opening personal chapter (Prologue) on the instilling of ethical mores and social justice in my own childhood. I have presented this prior to the thesis introduction as a lead-in to both mine and the participants’ stories.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) also offered the suggestion of integrating parts of one’s own personal story into each participant’s story, as a contrast or comparison. In this

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way, each story will highlight its uniqueness and reflect each different or similar experience, and in so doing, will reflect something about the character of each participant. Ellis and Bochner (2000) stated that if the write-up is successful, then you will not only unmask yourself and the participants, but you should also discover the face under the mask.

My own story is presented independently (in a separate chapter) to the four interview participants. This enabled comparisons which led into the analysis of all five stories. This is the basis of autoethnography, and is intended to build a strong research foundation which enables the broadening of the findings, with the aim of searching for, and discovering, common themes and contradictions (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

This study has used interviews as its major source of information from the professional interview participants. While the initial interview essentially related the individual's personal history and experience of age discrimination, I found it necessary to return to the participants for a more in-depth voice relating to the personal impact this phenomenon has had on their past lives and their future. In the majority of cases (as my participants are well dispersed throughout Australia), this was done by way of phone conversation and email. This proved to be quite effective as it allowed the participant additional time to focus, and if necessary, to correct the stated impact that emanated from their circumstances.

Coffey et al. (1996) claimed that the writing up of our research is an analytical task in which our own reports and representations are “as powerful and significant as their content” (p. 109). They also argued that the writing makes the researcher think about the data in new and different ways, and this representation then forces the researcher into considering the meanings, understandings, voices, and experiences that are present in the data, so that the writing actually deepens the level of analytic endeavour. Coffey et al. (1996) stated that we do not use the literature in order to provide ready-made concepts and models, but instead, use the ideas from the literature to develop and filter our own perspectives on our data, gleaning comparisons, analogies, and metaphors. Similarly, we can look to other sources for ideas about how to construct our own narratives of social life.

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Reporting the data analysis

Smith and Davies (2010, in Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010), suggested that along with the perception that there is no ‘one-way’ to analyse, so too is there no ‘one-way’ to write it up. Smith and Davies (2010) suggested that you choose which story you are going to tell, and how you are going to tell it, and include extracts of your raw data to illustrate and corroborate your story and those of others, claiming that these will bring your report to life.

Sandelowski (in Smith & Davies, 2010, p. 157) listed three framing devices for presenting the findings. I have predominantly used the chronological ‘time’ reflection (the first point) structure to undertake my write-up, as this follows the natural order in my own mind. I have also, in part, emphasised the ‘prevalence’ perspective as central, repetitive themes appear constant throughout all five interviews. The three devices (Smith et al., 2010) are:

1. **Time.** The write up reflects the unfolding of time in the participants’ lives (or indeed the researcher’s). It shows what happened first, second, and so on, and is useful in showing how certain events are linked temporally.
2. **Prevalence.** The write-up is organised around central tendencies and ranges. The most prevailing themes within the data could be covered first, with deviations addressed later. This approach helps to emphasise convergence and divergence.
3. **Sensitising concepts and coding families.** Here, concepts from theory are used to help structure the data. If you are looking to generate your own theory, you might draw on one of the ‘coding families’ used in grounded theory (p. 157).

Displaying the findings and developing the discussion

Having personally experienced the phenomenon of age discrimination, I am in a position to anticipate many of the findings even prior to interviewing my participants. However, King (2011) cautioned against becoming ‘blinded’ as a result of one’s own relationship with the study.

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With closer analysis of the expressed words of the participants, the findings chapter will exhibit a cross-reference between the research questions on the one hand, and the themes and sub-themes on the other, utilising the Template Analysis theory created by King (2011). The initial research questions (repeated from the introduction and again listed below) are numbered along the top axis in the grid. The findings were coded initially under the ‘a-priori’ findings listing (outcomes which were expected to evolve from the study) and listed as A to G. Sub-themes, were coded as i, ii etc. This resulted in a grid configuration such as: Finding 1A (financial effects) or 2C (perception of an ego-damaging workplace decision). It was anticipated that after this initial coding, the analysis would develop and new themes would evolve. These new themes would then be added to the template.

The focus throughout has been to link the a-priori and emerging themes to the thesis research questions. The main research question is (repeated from the introduction):

- What are the effects of age discrimination on Australian professional men?

Secondary questions that relate to the main question, but which warrant separate investigation are:

- How do older professional men perceive and react to decisions potential employers have made?
- How does the experience of age-related employment discrimination affect other family members?
- How does the perceived view of a level (or lack) of support from government (and protective legislation), society, and family impact on professional men who have experienced employment age discrimination?

Themes relating to initial perceptions were described at the end of Chapter 2 and are repeated here. These frame the findings, analysis and discussion.

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Organisational displacement. A culture and mindset which fosters older worker discrimination and the promotion of youth and beauty (controlled emotions; resentment, anger, embitterment).

Disgruntlement at the system (in overlooking older, better qualified people). Animosity towards others, notably anger towards youth.

- Ego (pride; achievement; success) and damage to ego.

- Health (psychological, physical – including depression and suicide etc).
  - Uncontrolled emotions (rejection; disappointment; uncertainty, damaged job search ability – hysteresis and self-screening out of a job application pool).
  - Controlled emotions (resentment, anger, embitterment).
    - Disgruntlement at the system (in overlooking older, better qualified people). Animosity towards others. Notably anger towards youth.

- Buffering (positive).
  - Financial support (and other social welfare systems).
  - Family and social support (sharing the load).

- Negative family response. Non-support (abandonment).

- A personal mindset (of the victim) to continue acquiring qualifications in the belief that this will enable workplace re-entry and competitiveness.

- Effects of financial limitations, restrictions, and uncertainty (present and future).
This matrix displays the research questions and their link to anticipated outcomes. Please note that not all these potential/possible effects are elicited, and not all have been indicated within this study. This basic matrix then links with an expanded and colour-coded matrix placed at the commencement of the findings chapter, which highlights the actual extent of the impact upon each individual participant, cross-matching the research questions with both the anticipated and discovered themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A-priori and emerging themes</th>
<th>Research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Effects of discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Organisational culture</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ego</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Health – rejection etc</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cii. Health – anger etc</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Buffering – Financial</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dii. Buffering – Social</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Negative family effects</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. More qualifications</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Financial – life restrictions/limitations</td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 1. Matrix – Adapted from King’s (2011) Template Analysis.

Legend: X = unknown or negative One tick (✓) = minor impact Double tick (✓✓) = major impact

The Legend is subjective and personally perceived, however it is designed to challenge the reader to question; and to further support the Analysis and Findings.

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Ethical issues

As this study was humanistic, it was appropriate to consider all possible ethical considerations. In response, my university’s ethics approval procedures, conventions, considerations, and standards were fully applied and adhered to throughout the writing of this thesis.

Data recording and collection

All the interviews, collected documents (and drafts), audio materials, field notes, and transcripts have been maintained for future reference and verification. The application of correct protocols and procedures, and the selected document format, are all as per my university’s ethics processes.

I have used my own name throughout this thesis, but a pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of each of my interview participants.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 76) discussed “adequacy”, and stated that in qualitative research, it is the amount of data that is collected rather than the number of subjects (interview participants) that is important. They stated that “saturation” occurs when sufficient data has been collected and variation is both accounted for and understood. My initial thoughts at the commencement of this study was a concern at how I could justify only interviewing four or five participants and consider this a complete and thorough piece of analytical research. However, in hindsight, I believe that the target sample (including myself) provided ample in-depth data with sufficient variation to provide an indicative study that illustrated the multiple problems perceived, or actual age discrimination posed, for individuals, their families, and society at large.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 76) considered that in qualitative research, “appropriateness” refers to the correct selection of the interview sample along with the elicited information to meet the theoretical needs of the study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) also placed considerable merit on maintaining a credible audit trail,

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and in so doing, reproduced a six item list developed by Halpern (1983). This trail has been recorded almost as a natural occurrence within my study and commences with the collection of the raw data; followed by data reduction and analysis; data reconstruction and product synthesis; process notes; intentions and dispositions; and finally, instrument development.

Taft (1999, p. 117) posited the term “reliability”, and claimed the need for a period of time and exposure to the study area for the opportunity to cross-check observations to reconcile inconsistencies. I have done this stringently in this study and ensured that “validity and reliability” are guaranteed by my returning to the participants with draft transcripts of all interviews, including the final draft of the thesis itself. This feedback enabled, as suggested by Ellis and Bochner (2000) and Silverman (2000, citing Reason and Rowan, 1981), an opportunity for participants to refine, alter, refute, and expand on any of the previously acquired information; however, it is recognised that caution must be exercised as the participants may have additional knowledge after the context of their earlier disclosures (Silverman, 2000, on findings by Fielding & Fielding, 1986).

Taft (1999, p. 117) referred to “validity” as a quality of the conclusions reached, and claimed that this depends on the criteria of the truth adopted. However, from the researcher’s perspective, the abstract term “faith” is also incorporated into his discussion and he recommends the strict need for the author to act accordingly and be loyal to the research objective. Taft further related the idea that plausibility is implied by the term “credibility”, and is determined by the accuracy of the data. Accordingly, Taft (1999) claimed that a report should contain indications that the investigator is aware of the need to convince the audience of their credibility and of the validity of the study. In following the above guidelines and pathways, I have fully adhered to, and complied with, Taft’s criteria.

This chapter has outlined how the modern autoethnographic method aligns perfectly with this form of personal study. It sets the parameters of the study and lays the platform for what is to follow. It demonstrates how the modern interpretations of this form of study are strategically pieced together to bring out the drama of the narrative (in this instance, discrimination and personal hardship). The described "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
autoethnographic method encompasses a freedom of placement, which Ellis and Bochner (2000) claimed would not be produced with any other methodological form.

The next two chapters document both my own and the participants’ personal stories of the effects that perceived age discrimination has had on our lives and those of others around us, noting that wider society is also involved and implicated in the effects of this form of perceived discrimination.

Each of the following stories conclude with a brief summary of each story’s individual findings. These findings were reviewed, dissected and expanded in the subsequent chapter (6), which has been appropriately titled ‘A deeper investigation into the findings’ and was considered necessary to enable a further dissecting of the findings to connect the evaluations and interpretations to the themes which have evolved throughout, and have become an integral part of this research.

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As a young man, I undertook many employment ventures in a number of countries around the world. I completed a trade, and then, through my personal need to achieve a higher education, attained a Diploma in Education and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Intercultural Studies (Aboriginal Anthropology/Sociology). In 1994, at the age of 47, and after (at the time) 12 years in business, I decided to sell up and join the Australian Public Service to facilitate an easy pathway to retirement. I was very confident of my abilities and experience in many areas and had recently read that the reformed ‘new’ public service placed people into areas that would utilise their developed skills, qualifications, and experience. I envisaged entering with some ease into an area that would take advantage of my business experience, education, and/or cross-cultural qualifications and Aboriginal education experience (or a combination of any of these).

It took two years to gain entry (at the lowest level) into a department totally irrelevant to my skills and experience. I was certainly mystified as to why I would be placed into a department where it was blatantly obvious that there could be no mutual benefit for either myself and for the department. This department did not and would not ever use my skills and experience. So much for the skill placement propaganda and let’s face it, this is a person’s life they are dealing with. Was this someone’s idea of a sick joke? After four years of constant frustration and disillusionment at the Public Service’s empty promise to fulfil its extravagant employment claims, coupled with anger at my total failure to achieve any advancement, I resigned. I had witnessed many new recruits, some fresh out of school with the most basic education and experience, advance with ease up the career ladder on the oft repeated premise (or blatant lie) that ‘they were better qualified’, while I with multiple qualifications and experience, was left floundering in the basement. Discrimination (from my perspective) was obvious and sometimes blatant, which left me frustrated, insulted and very indignant, and not at all accepting of this imposed predicament. As a person who had previously held a number of well-respected professional positions, I was not at all conditioned to being treated, as I perceived, as a worthless, inferior

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object, so I resigned out of protest and moved to Japan where age and qualifications were considered an advantage. I established and ran a Business English Language program for Mitsubishi, returning to Australia in mid-2001. Although I then applied for many more jobs, I failed to obtain anything other than casual or part-time work, always being fed the disgusting lies that others were better qualified.

Finally success – an interview - and (I considered) a job written for me

As I relaxed in the cosy reception area, waiting to be called into the interview room, I read the departmental propaganda on the benefits of working for this public service organisation. I pondered, with high expectation, of what life would be like in this apparently ‘forward-focused’ and modern department. What level would I achieve, and in what way could I contribute to the departmental goals and the lives of others before my anticipated retirement in a few years’ time?

Although I had lived in this Australian city for well over 40 years, I had only ever spent four years (1996-2000) in the public service, and I must add it was a very long and demoralising four years. I had no doubt at all that being in my fifties, I had been the subject of extremely pointed age discrimination (in my opinion it reeked), but although holding reservations, I doubted that this new department would also engage in this behaviour. After all, I rationalised that this job (unlike my earlier government experience) appeared to require all my skills, qualifications, and experience, and I considered that I would have to come very close to being the perfect fit. I also believed that the organisation would undoubtedly benefit from having me and my experience on board. The job functions related to small business practice, and with my background, skills, and wide array of very relevant tertiary qualifications - a number specifically in this area - I would surely be a valued asset to this department and would certainly make a difference. Of course, my fears of a repeat of the earlier discrimination certainly wouldn’t be justified. Or would they?

This was not a particularly high-level position, but this was fine by me. As a well-travelled teacher, university academic, and businessman with years of relevant practical experience and four tertiary qualifications, I could tick all the boxes and was quietly confident that this would only be the start of a very long and fruitful career.

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I was even more confident when I walked back out into the street after my interview. I had, by my own humble estimation, very eloquently and capably answered all the questions and had (I thought) obviously impressed the interview panel comprised of two females and one male. They had after all, at the conclusion of the interview, asked me when I was available to start and which of my referees I would like them to contact. Having briefly experienced life in the public service, and being a trained and appointed university equity officer, I was aware that this information was only ever sought (I thought) if the candidate had impressed and was to be progressed to the next (recruitment) stage.

Little did I know, however, of what lay ahead. Two months passed and I was becoming a little anxious wondering why it was taking so long for them to ring me to offer me the position, when a letter arrived informing me that I had been unsuccessful. The wording of the letter stated that others were better qualified and had addressed the selection criteria better than I had. This stunned me - I wondered what else I needed to do to be as qualified as the successful applicant; what did that person have that I didn’t? I thought a little more transparency and disclosure would certainly help. Suffering more than a little shock and disbelief, I rang the department to request feedback from the interview panel chair (as advised to do so in the letter), only to be informed that she was on long service leave for the next 10 months. I was certainly stunned by this lack of professionalism and total disregard for an applicant’s basic rights. I asked for, and later received the written feedback from the interview panel which stated that I was unfamiliar with the practices and procedures necessary to carry out the function of the position and was categorised by them as unemployable. The ultimate insult, gleaned from the document, was that I was ranked number 11 of 11 interviewed applicants. What had happened subsequent to the interview and prior to selection?

To say I was dumbfounded and deflated (and certainly seeking answers) was an understatement. I questioned myself on how these bastards could get away with

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4 This term is (mostly) socially accepted colloquial Australian vernacular and does not relate to the general dictionary usage. It can be used as endearment or as emphatic disdain. The latter usage is applicable throughout this thesis.

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this blatant dishonest disregard of my rights. I was very much aware of the rhetoric regarding the public service dishonesty in hiring practices and of the favoured appointment of sycophants, but how could I possibly have read this situation so wrong. I had worked for a grand total of 16 years as a manager/owner in my own private enterprise organisations which dealt directly with, and gave me a very healthy objective perspective of, the very relevant functions of this department. My businesses had actually been nominated by the Apprenticeship Board for excellence awards in a range of categories in the Business of the Year Awards. I was also at that time engaged as a university lecturer in a position and a faculty which taught this very department’s subject area. I personally considered myself, if anything, very much overqualified for the position and the level for which I had applied, so how could I then be regarded as unskilled, unqualified, and at the bottom of the heap? This just did not make sense. How could they do this to me? Had they made a mistake, and were they possibly confusing me with another applicant?

I had two years earlier had a personal meeting with an Australian Federal Government Senator (2002, name withheld) who informed me that “all politicians at Parliament House know that their departments blatantly age discriminate, we just sweep it under the carpet. I’m only one person, there is nothing I can do.” Was I again being subjected to this disgraceful prejudice? I immediately wrote to the relevant minister requesting an interview and intervention and, in due course, received an extremely patronising report from a departmental executive informing me that all correct practices and procedures had been adhered to. Absolutely frustrated and very eager to obtain transparency, I then applied through my solicitor, for a Freedom of Information (FOI) order. This subsequently revealed absolutely nothing, with a great quantity of what could have been relevant information blacked out. A couple of pages were also missing, and when I asked why this was so, their reaction was astonishment that I should even dare question them. I attempted to get to the bottom of this anomaly (and missing pages), including attending a grievance meeting at the department where I was confronted by a team of openly hostile and arrogant snobs who appeared to take pleasure in their positional power. The terms misfeasance and malfeasant behaviour certainly appeared appropriate here.

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I eventually gave up my appeal on the grounds (whether deliberate or not) that this entire scenario was dragging out for far too long and was damaging my already considerably damaged ego. Additionally, my legal costs were already quite prohibitive and (for a low-income earner) I could not warrant continuing to engage a solicitor for a further and protracted legal fight.

**The final insult (how do these people sleep at night)?**

In 2010, while employed on a part-time contract at a university, I was offered some part-time teaching work at another tertiary education institution (hereafter referred to as 'Institute'). Shortly after my commencement, I became aware that a vacancy existed within this institute as a trade manager, an essential criterion in addition to the trade, being the possession of a degree. Being of the frame of mind that this late-life career change would suit me perfectly, I applied for the position. As a university lecturer in Management (HRM), and having both Australian and international trade qualifications and experience spanning over 40 years in this specific trade, I believed I was well-qualified for the position. I had also taught this particular trade at technical college and managed my own businesses in this trade for 16 years, where I had trained, coached, and mentored adults, apprentices, juniors, and trainees (in both trade skills and personal development). I was very enthusiastic as, from my perspective, I had every box ticked and this could only benefit the institution, myself, and the students.

My application for the position was unsuccessful. I made enquiries in relation to the successful applicant and my own failure, and was quite shocked at what I believed to be a blatant cover-up of the criteria that both the institute and the recruitment agency used to disqualify me from selection. I immediately resigned my part-time position at the institute to protest these practices and related this in correspondence to them. I then set about disclosing these anomalies through legal forums in an attempt to obtain justice and fairness. I initially approached a government agency who was commissioned to resolve workplace disputes and irregularities. This experience was rather disconcerting as my case manager was unreliable in that she was seldom available to talk (far too often on leave), never returned phone calls, and failed to meet her own designated time agendas and appointments. I became particularly

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disturbed when she informed me that she had not followed a particular investigative action because she did not want to ‘set a precedent’ (her words). I questioned and reacted to this preposterous statement, as this was an aspect of her employment commission and the reason I went to this agency in the first instance. This agency (on my case manager’s recommendation) found that my claim lacked substance and that the institute had no case to answer. In total disbelief at this agency’s matter of fact, dismissive attitude to my case and to their portfolio workload; and to what should and could have been an open case of blatant discrimination, I appealed, but was unsuccessful. I could not believe that my case had anything resembling insufficient substance and certainly stood on its merits. I was also appalled that some blatantly inefficient girl was sitting on her lazy backside and drawing an over-inflated salary for not doing her job.

Through my solicitor, I then lodged another separate application through another government agency also commissioned with resolving workplace disputes. A meeting was convened with me and my legal representative on one side, and a number of managers from the institute on the other. The meeting was overseen by an appointed agency counsellor/arbiter. This first meeting was totally unproductive, with the institute smugly hiding behind a veil of total non-transparency. It also alarmed me that the government agency representative did not appear to possess (or desire to exert) the power to overcome the institute’s reticence, with the counsellor actually taking me aside and informing me that the institute had the power to alter their selection criteria if they wished (in effect, to move the selection goalposts). This, I still contend is illegitimate. The counsellor proceeded to also ask why, with my qualifications, I would want such a job anyway? Of course, she was unaware that I had been struggling to find work for the previous 11 years and, as a result, I would have been happy to accept a position which utilised a number of my skills and also paid more money than I had seen for 11 years. The counsellor then suggested that I withhold any further action until the institute had further opportunity to provide me with additional details requested by my solicitor through the Freedom of Information legislation.

When the Freedom of Information paperwork arrived, it was as non-transparent as the manager’s responses provided at the initial meeting, as it contained masses of "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
blacked-out text. In effect, it told me nothing that I didn’t already know. As a result, I elevated my complaint to a third agency and attended (now with two solicitors) a series of meetings relating to hearings, directions, and mediations, in May, July, and August of 2011. This was very fruitful as it finally produced a broad range of disclosures and anomalies on the part of the institute. Firstly, it was disclosed that the person appointed to the position held qualifications far below mine and far below those advertised as being essential for the position (being only in possession of a Certificate IV TAFE qualification), and had considerably less trade experience and less recent practical experience than myself. Three of the other four position applicants (none with a degree) were interviewed; and one, who had not even addressed the position selection criteria, was on interview standby, should it be deemed necessary. I was the only person not considered for an interview, noting that one of the reasons given was that I had not addressed the selection criteria as well as the others. The Tribunal revealed that all were very much younger females (in their 30s), and none with my qualifications or experience. Further pressure from the Tribunal Chair brought an admission from one member of the institute’s panel that they had not complied with their own criteria and were careless in their decision not to interview me, and “may have made an error in judgement, but when this was recognised, it was then too late to consider you [me] as an option” (2011, Institute panel member).

There was no actual finding in favour of my age discrimination claim (as this was outside the agency’s authority), and no compensation or offer of future employment, but when this above admission of their own wrongdoing was forthcoming, I (for some reason) softened and felt quite conciliatory toward them. I accepted that they had admitted that they had erred and, in my heart, I felt that this was a huge victory. I had feelings of elation (even the air smelt different) and for the first time, I could take pride in that I had come out on top and could perceive that maybe this was a turning point for all people who have been confronted by, and subjected to the arrogance of, intransigent agencies and employers. Furthermore, with their heads held low, I believed I could feel their shame. Together with my legal team, we had undermined their arrogance and gained a degree of honesty which I could never have hoped to achieve if I had not progressed this grievance to the length that I had. I shook all their hands and departed, on the way suggesting that, in future, they “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
might take a little more care in their employment decisions. This brought no reply. I then smugly added “now make sure you look out for my next application.” To which one lifted his head, smiled and responded, “we look forward to your next application.” I did not ask for clarification.

It is interesting to note that any learning from this experience must have gone over the heads of these spineless, dishonest and deceitful low-life jerks (aka the institutes’ panel). In fast forwarding to 2014, this job again became vacant (same position and job description), but instead of endeavouring to address their prejudices displayed in the previous 2010 processes, they simply changed the selection criteria. The job was no longer presented and titled as a management position and no longer required a degree (plus more changes). It is sad that the panel’s previous display of ignorance of rights and fair play continued, as it would appear that by changing the criteria, they were not realigning their questionable practices, but attempting to ensure future control which also served to cover their sins of the past.

The above story raises questions of why and how organisations are allowed to shun and sidestep their ethical, fair-employment responsibilities. New legislation, including the commission of a range of agencies with powers designed to safeguard individual workers against such abuse, has not solved this dilemma, and the fact that this abuse is still occurring is a stigma on our government agencies and on society itself. The claims of the Human Rights Commissioner, Susan Ryan (in Marshall, 2011), again resound very loudly here. She stated that in the Australian context, there have been no successful prosecutions of age discrimination cases. Little wonder, I must add!

**Emotional damage and the future**

On a personal level, this story also recounts how all the possible range of emotions had again intensified and welled up inside me, and how the feelings of hurt, anger, frustration, shame, and embarrassment all came pouring out, as they had done years earlier when a discriminating government department rated me unsuitable behind 10 other applicants. How my anger could so easily turn to embitterment, and (I must admit) a need to claw back lost ground, was quite incredible and

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demonstrated the overwhelming intensity of my feelings. I had withdrawn from the earlier conflict due to both depression and lack of personal finances, but paramount in this instance, was the need to regain control, to demonstrate to agencies that they must never treat people this way. I was adamant, irrespective of the financial and personal cost to me, that discrimination (in any form) should not be allowed to exist and thrive in our so-called egalitarian society.

In returning to the present, nine years have now passed since the first of these unsavoury experiences, and in recalling the details (so that I can put pen to paper for this thesis), I find myself unable to sleep (a very common occurrence) and again, quite impulsively and unpredictably, feel my breath shortening and the anger welling up inside me. The lump in my throat again appears and I am left acknowledging and dwelling on the resurfacing of the pain that I have allowed to lay dormant for many of these intervening years. I realise that this damage and personal loss is still very much with me and still lingers on, surrounds, and affects my everyday functions of life. I am aware that these intense feelings are borne out of frustration and often precede a period of depression and feelings of hopelessness. I ponder my drab future and run scenarios through my mind of how I can escape from my current lowly-paid, often passive, and very demoralising predicament and achieve a level of employment and respect that I consider I have earned through merit and hard work. As a child, I was brought up to respect age, authority, and qualifications, and conditioned to expect that an individual who had travelled the world and who had an array of real-life experiences and multiple tertiary qualifications, should be able to gain and command a high level of respect and subsequent placement into the upper echelons of management – rather than to survive on the fringes of unemployment and poverty.

Again I ask myself how an organisation which espouses the values of equality, justice, and participation could devalue an older person to the point that they are influencing their very existence, their life, and their career. I am appalled that our espoused values continually appear to equate to only lip-service and are constantly degraded. I am horrified that the hurt and pain that people inflict on the innocent can still go unnoticed and unpunished, and are ‘swept under the carpet.’ That my future has been significantly affected probably matters nothing to these promoters of youth

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and prejudice; otherwise, why would they engage in their sheepish mentality of following inequitable misplaced precedents, agendas, and what they may even consider to be normal and accepted practice.

The damage to my very being has been quite dramatic and certainly long-term. My pride and ego has certainly taken a severe battering. At times, I have believed and feared that, quite possibly, I do not have the skills and abilities of others who are achieving (or why else would they be the ones recruited and promoted and not me)? Except on some occasions, as alluded to in my prologue, when I experienced discrimination in my childhood, I have never been a person who considered that I was inferior to others. In fact, my competitive nature, which partially shaped my quite high level of sporting prowess, coupled with many years of acquiring tertiary qualifications and achieving a higher level of education than most, has actually implanted quite contrary sentiments in me, including the notion from my childhood schooling, misguided or otherwise, that education and experience would facilitate a certain rite of passage leading to fruitful and meaningful adult vocation.

My fear of an uncertain future is an enormous part of my everyday life, and is on my mind constantly. I certainly have many worries relating to my future retirement aspirations. The funding that I received from the sale of my last business (20 years ago) has long gone, and I am left to ponder a future where I will never be able to retire or will be forced into retirement on a small government pension. I do not relish this prospect. Of course, this financial scenario has influenced and impacted upon my family relationships. My youngest son asked me for financial assistance a few years ago and I was unable to assist him. I have never forgiven myself for this, although I know that I was not in a position to support him.

It would be an understatement for me to say that I am angry, as anger is only a small part of what I feel. I have been frustrated, humiliated, and certainly made to feel that I am standing in the way of the younger, lesser qualified, although apparently ‘rightful heirs’ to any job. I did not undertake many years of study so that I could be told that I am not as qualified as younger people who do not have my qualifications or experience. The experience has left me quite embittered, demoralised, frustrated, depressed, and financially destitute (and more). I have certainly battled a war

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relating to my increased alcohol intake, and often rely on anti-depressants and sleeping tablets as coping mechanisms.

A number of my interview participants have suffered, in varying degrees, similar experiences and two have considered suicide. One of these men actually made a very serious attempt, but survived. I have also thought of this as a very viable option of not wanting to face such an uncertain future, but recognise that this is the easy way out. I have always considered that tomorrow will be a brighter day and, in any case, I have to continue to fight the cause (for me and all older people) and not let the dishonest low-life mongrels, employers, agencies, politicians, and others get the better of me in that regard. So, I have survived to make a nuisance of myself to those agents of prejudice and injustice. I have survived to point the finger at disreputable people and organisations that hide behind supposedly equitable practices which they smugly violate. I have survived in the hope that someone (maybe a politician or a champion employer) will read this thesis and recognise the injustice being enacted on innocent older Australians (both men and women) and will stand up and make a difference. I have survived to inform people of the life-long damage that their thoughtless, selfish actions and misfeasance have inflicted. But the damage that this lengthy experience has had on me is done, complete, and dramatic. I have lost friendships, including a very strong and loving relationship, because of my anger, frustration, and inability to cope. I have gone years without a decent night’s sleep as I lay awake thinking of ways that I can recover from my poor lowly job status and my financial deprivation. I now work on this thesis in the middle of the night because it is a challenge that assists my mental recovery and helps me beat the pain and boredom of lying in bed awake. I have, on occasion, felt a complete loss of my pride, and often feel that I can no longer stand proud of my achievements, because they are not recognised in the most basic of forums - ‘the workplace’.

**Analysis - The impact on me - and application to theory**

While putting aside the financial ruin that I am now in, and the many changes and implications this has had for my life and my family, I perceive the major impact of

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workplace discrimination as being on my personality, and particularly, my psychological disposition, and principally, above all, my anger and bitterness. In the literature review, Liem and Liem (1988) discussed resilience as a factor of personality, through which one stands and supports principles connected to what one perceives as the correct course of action. I have twice demonstrated (above) that I do not let go of injustice easily and will always stand up for what I believe is right. I have been told by both my current partner and my former partner that I am a ‘terrier’, and they suggest that I should let go in order to survive and thrive in this unjust world. But this injustice continues to well up inside of me, and to do as they suggest is certainly easier said than done. And then why should I meekly and placidly allow myself to be degraded to a lower level while someone else with inferior skills and qualifications is promoted to the upper echelons of success because they possess youth and beauty?

I am angry and why shouldn’t I be? Rotter (2009), Linden (2003, 2009), Linden et al. (2008a, 2008b), Cole et al. (2009), and many others in the literature review, all related their participants’ felt anger and embitterment towards the perceived offending source. I possess multiple tertiary qualifications and considerable diverse experience and yet I have to bear the humility and embarrassment of being told that I have not addressed the selection criteria as well as others, or that others have better or more recent experience, or are better qualified. I do feel worthless, hopeless, and helpless that I am unable to secure a position for which I (inwardly) know I have been deliberately overlooked. These three states of personal affliction are separate issues, but it is certain to me that they manifest themselves into the onset and representation of deep depression. The pain that comes from unemployment and sustaining life in the workforce basement is demoralising and unbearable, yet every day I have to face the world and people who have risen to the top, and I question the merits of their progress and achievements. For many years, I viewed the Internet and the Saturday newspaper employment section, and for a fleeting moment, I would be instilled with a ray of hope. I would become energised knowing that the vacancy before my eyes was almost certainly written ‘only for me’. I would then engage in the farce of applying for the position, only to later realise that I would not get the job anyway.

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The damage to my personal disposition has also affected my attitude to others. I often have to hide my disapproval of public servants and many younger successful people, many so-called high-fliers who have far lesser qualities (in regard to qualifications, skills, and experience), but who have been promoted and recruited into positions in which they make errors in judgement, probably due to their lack of experience - but then does anyone in this modern workforce care anyway? I do not consider that envy is part of my anger and frustration, as I have never been jealous or envious of any individual who has aspired to achieve and then gained the heights. My anger stems from the knowledge that people have taken my place without merit and without supposed higher-level skills. Surely, I am not alone in recognising this as an injustice (see Karpin, 1995; McKeown, 2006).

For the period in which I was researching and writing this chapter, I became preoccupied with the hurt, pain, and anger that I was constantly, and both consciously and unconsciously, remembering and reliving. I awoke every night with thoughts of the past and with ideas to turn this into a chapter with great impact. I was constantly cautioned and counselled by friends and acquaintances that I was distant, aggressive, abrupt, and certainly not myself. I believe that I knew why! My state of mind subsequent to my perceived discrimination, which I was reliving for this chapter, may well relate to an embitterment towards the offending source and the injustices that I perceived, and which may well fall into Linden’s (2003, 2009) and Linden et al’s (2008a, 2008b) Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder introduced in the literature review.

In applying my story to the research and theory from the literature review, I referred (in general terms) to a number of government reports (Armstrong, 2010; AHRC, 2010, 2016; and more) which cite figures, statistics, and demographics which posit the existence (often covert) of Australian workplace age discrimination. I further related the multiple practical research contributions of Bennington (2001, 2004), and Bennington et al. (2003, 2006), who outlined a wide range of real-life examples of Australian workplace discrimination. The literature review abounds with evidence on prejudice and stereotyping, particularly the work of Armstrong (2010), the AHRC (2010), Colquhoun (2001), Hannen (2002), Ryan, in Raine (2012), Sinfield (1981), the UNFPA and HelpAge International (2012), and others.

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My story has covered many of these personal dilemmas such as masculinity, manhood, and personal identity, and has proceeded into viewing the legacy effect of issues affecting future employment and my attitude to others who I believe may have disadvantaged me, or may be in a possible future position to disadvantage me. I related how I fear that my own personal attitudes and disposition, which I defend as a response to my experiences, may affect my relationships with others, and this may well be quite transparent. In what I consider to be of significant relevance to my disposition is the ‘social-psychological theory of hysteresis’ (Cole et al., 2009). This theory hypothesised that the reaction of circumstances and changes depends on past reactions to change, and therefore, we react to elements from our history. I am also in the position, after many years of considerable effort, of believing that my actions and efforts will have no positive end result. Darity and Goldsmith (1993, in Cole et al., 2009) indicated that, at this stage, helplessness and diminished cognitive efficacy sets in. Hopefully, I will never reach this low. Legacy effects and the value of future employment have been comprehensively covered in the literature review by Sightler (1996), Guindon and Smith (2002), Kessler et al. (1989), and Pugh et al. (2003).

I do believe that I struggle with a personal battle with debilitating depression and the possible existence of some degree of Linden’s ‘Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder’, which could be reflected in my attitude to the perpetrating source and potential future employers. I have suffered from sleep deprivation, sleep disorders, and excessive alcohol consumption and can relate totally to ‘The cascade of negative life events’ as espoused by Price et al. (2002). I have also undergone issues relating to family and peer support (and more).

**Personal reflection, summary and conclusion**

The feelings I have experienced when confronted with, and reliving, the examples displayed within my story were intense. I had to question the powers that were depriving me, but I also began to question myself. Was I at fault? Had I committed some cardinal sin which precluded me from employment or promotion? Was there

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some form of hidden agenda that I was not aware of? And how could I overcome this prejudice and gain meaningful employment that I worked and studied so hard to achieve? Was there any truth in the contentions of the employers and agencies and did I need to acquire more and better skills and qualifications? Was I at fault? Was I in any way adding to my situation by presenting problems I may have not been consciously aware of? Was I too short or too ugly or dressed too shabbily to be considered? I accept that factors such as height, attractiveness, and power dressing (and more) may have an impact on employment decisions, but as I was not even getting interviews this did not ring true. Were my applications faulty in any way? Was I scaring the selection panel by displaying too many qualifications (a suggestion made later in this thesis)? I do not have a ready answer, but regardless, my failure did leave considerable legacy effects on my health and mental state.

I later relate my experience from a public service job application writing course, in which I was advised by the facilitator that it was deemed necessary to reduce one’s qualifications and ‘obscure’ one’s age as these would not assist an applicant’s chances. The instructor stated that it was not in my best interests to go into the interview with better qualifications than the bosses. He further alluded to the tendency of recruiters and employers to recruit what he called “clones” - clones of themselves. He claimed that it is a natural disposition to support and promote those similar to oneself. Burns (Oct 2005) related an article she wrote for the Australian Institute of Management which analysed a range of employment irregularities, including descriptions of the sycophant and the psychopath in organisations. Also relevant here are the views of Amos (2005), Büsch and Königstein (2001) and Finkelstein and Burke (1995) who all related anomalies in recruitment perceptions. However, I must question, other than age (and possibly qualifications and experience), was I so dissimilar to others?

I certainly acknowledge that qualifications and experience are not the sole attributes for hiring or promotion, with other factors, it can be argued, quite possibly making a difference to a recruiter’s perceptions. Stevenage and McKay (1999) published their 1999 experiment online in December 2010 (no page) and discussed attractiveness in recruitment. They stated that “the fact that attractiveness is associated with goodness has dominated the literature on first impressions over the last few

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decades”. They further added that “However, one situation that has been largely ignored is the recruitment setting” (Stevenage & McKay, 1999, no page).

Their research (Stevenage & McKay, 1999) viewed physical disability and the impact of facial disfigurement in recruitment. They revealed the existence of negative perceptions towards the physical impairments of others, but a greater negative effect associated with facial disfigurement. They contended that recruitment experience did somewhat offset this bias, and further discussed the theoretical understanding of reactions to disability and the possibilities for workplace re-education.

I must also state that I have been informed a number of times, by both recruiter’s and agencies, that if I am not getting interviews, then it could only mean that my applications are not up to scratch. As a result, I have questioned myself, and taken this on board and submitted my application and CV to a recruitment agency (who undertook assessments and assisted with my applications). They informed me that my application and CV were first-class and could not be improved, other than, they suggested, as did the public service trainer (who I make reference to on page 123 and again on page 212) that I remove some of my qualifications and further blur any reference or links to age, which indicates an acknowledgement of their perception of bias. I teach academic communication skills, including the job application process, and so would probably have a distinct advantage over most other applicants. This employment skill should also cast a degree of doubt on the comment relating to the quality of my applications.

Could my personality be a limiting and debilitating factor in my job search? I have been informed by a close colleague that I may appear conceited, superior, and aggressive, and I must admit to possessing a degree of intolerance towards those who I believe are not attempting to help themselves and who take advantage of other people (possible cases of ‘learned helplessness’). If there is any grounding in these contentions, then I must question if these traits also emerge in my written job applications. However, a close university colleague tells me to be more assertive, aggressive, and more demanding, and to convince recruiters that I am the best person for the job!

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A further related factor which may have had a bearing on my failure is my honesty. I have received a considerable amount of informal feedback (over many years) that my honesty does me no favours. I am informed that to get ahead (particularly in the public service), one must cover up and hide the real truth and, in effect, only relate what you know the other person (or the bosses) want to hear. Harry gives similar examples in his story (to follow) in which he states that employers will recruit a favoured sycophant who would play the internal political game, allow themselves to be manipulated, and do just as they are told. Was this a factor? Was there a fear that I would not do as I was told? (Harry seemed to think exactly this).

I discovered a cultural syndrome while I was living in Japan, which underpinned the avoidance of conflict and the importance of Japanese relationships between people. It was labelled ‘honne-to-tatemae’ which, when translated, meant ‘honesty and saving face’. This was a very important feature of life in Japan, and being a person who was brought up to believe that one had to be responsible for their own actions, I must admit (quite possibly mistakenly) that I did not fully subscribe to this cultural philosophy. I link this to employment, and particularly the public service, as I have frequently heard it discussed that one must remain secretive and very much non-transparent if one is to survive and thrive in the (frequently touted) deceptive corridors of the public service. Shacklock and Shacklock (2005), viewed later in this thesis, undertook research into ethical dilemmas in the public service and discovered considerable dishonesty at many levels and in many instances.

In regard to the removal of qualifications from one’s CV, the following references and syndrome may be pertinent. Many articles discuss the Australian ‘Tall Poppy Syndrome’ and these may be relevant when it comes to recruitment and promotion within the Australian work setting. Mouly et al. (2000) investigated this phenomenon in the Australian and New Zealand setting and, in brief, declared it to be an Australasian reference to the politics of envy, jealousy, and covetousness. Larsen (NY) expanded on this, claiming that the Tall Poppy Syndrome is rooted in Australian culture and, apart from damaging the actual ‘Tall Poppy’, also damages the Australian economy.

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Could the Tall Poppy Syndrome, given the qualifications that all the participants in this thesis possess, be the link which inhibits a professional, qualified, skilled, and experienced person’s advancement? Is jealousy and resentment a factor? (Refer to Harry’s perception in his following story).

The stories in the next chapter are extracts from the thesis interview participants, and are included to highlight evidence which supports my story of prejudice and the main thesis of personal damage to the rejected and displaced older Australian professional man. This support (or otherwise) of themes is intended to add validity to the contentions espoused within the literature review and in my own story, and to provide evidence in their own voice. Using the participants’ stories overcomes accusations of any personal bias (Denzin et al., 1998) which could be labelled or gleaned on my part and from my story.

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The following stories relate, in their own words, the damage that perceived age discrimination has inflicted on four participants. These stories demonstrate incidents and events which not only support, enhance, and enrich the incidents and events within my story, but also broaden the boundaries and strengthen the legitimacy of the ingrained culture under investigation. All the issues highlighted in the following stories add to the alignment and complexity of the ethnographic umbrella that we are viewing. This enhancement of the main theme with others’ support is standard autoethnographic practice (Atkinson et al, 2003; Atkinson & Delamont, 1998, 2006; Atkinson & Hammersley, 2003; Chang, 2008; Delamont, 2009; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; and more, all in the Method Chapter).

I will add here that my story evolved as the central story, only because I knew more about it, and was personally involved, and believed that I could express the emotions and incidents on a different level than simply relating the words of my interview participants. I did seriously consider undertaking a reflexive ethnography using Bill’s very emotive story as the main theme, but as the thesis evolved, this did not eventuate. I will reinforce the idea that all forms of ethnography study an overlying culture (in this instance, age discrimination), and are not specifically about individual’s personal lives. Therefore, all the participants are embedded within this study and play an integral part in the overall autoethnographic research investigation.

I will also repeat that by including support for the thesis through other participants, any issues and accusations of narcissism, bias, subjectivity, and self-indulgence have been overcome. The inclusion of others eliminates these accusations as the repeated themes and stories deliver both common themes and a degree of complexity to the study, therefore enabling significant validation for each individual claim.

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Bill’s story

Bill’s story in expanded further in my article entitled Phil’s Story. An ethnographic drama relating an Aboriginal man’s experience of Australian workplace professional age discrimination. Published in Journal of Masculinities and Social Change vol 3 – issue 3, Oct 2014 (Brown, 2014b).

The following story is about Bill, a 58 year old indigenous former public servant whose high-flying executive career was suddenly cut short. The story relates Bill’s pain, anger, and disbelief when he was made excess to current work requirements.

The story traces the last seven years (at the time of writing) of Bill’s recent employment history, starting in 2004 when his department was disbanded and resumed functions under the umbrella of other government departments. Bill’s new department implemented a job spill, thereby throwing open all the positions within its divisions and declaring that it was policy to formally fill and reallocate all the positions. Bill was told that he needed only to re-apply and that his re-employment was merely a formality. Shock, anger, and disbelief hit like a brick wall when Bill was advised that other younger applicants were better skilled and better qualified and that, as he was close to retirement, he was no longer required and should accept a voluntary redundancy package.

A rapid saga of deteriorating health, declining personal well-being, and weakened work prospects ensued. With no stable ongoing offer of work, Bill returned to university where he rapidly completed his master’s degree and began lecturing in Indigenous studies. We briefly worked together on a (university) student indigenous social management project and then I did not see him again until our meeting in Brisbane in 2008.

As I waited for Bill outside my hotel, I wondered whether he was really the right person to be interviewing. From my perspective, Bill was probably the friendliest most laid-back person anyone could meet. He oozed warmth and approachability and appeared to have the respect of all he came into contact with. This was not at all surprising, as Bill presented himself as the epitome of professionalism, and while

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at his public service agency held an SES (Senior Executive Service) director’s position. Bill’s quite large physical presence appeared to befit his high career position, and together with his rather distinguished thick mop of greying hair (which was the only factor which could have confirmed his late-50s age), displayed an air of one in total command, signalling his stately, almost regal manner. He was self-assured, approachable, well-spoken, and extremely knowledgeable on a wide and varied range of issues. I had previously approached Bill on a number of sensitive topics at both the agency and the university, and had always been impressed with his support and willingness to assist.

Then I saw him, striding confidently down the street toward me, big grin from ear to ear, the same old Bill! Nothing had changed; his disposition was unmistakably of one who commanded respect, a tower of strength who certainly gave every impression of being quite a formidable, confident, and positive man. We shook hands and immediately ventured across the road to grab a quick take-away breakfast.

**History of achievements**

Ten minutes later, sitting at a table on the balcony of my Brisbane hotel room, Bill commenced by telling me that he had grown up in an Aboriginal fringe-dwelling community on the outskirts of Rockhampton in Queensland. To put this into perspective in regard to possible life disadvantage, the quite standard racist and clichéd view of an Indigenous ‘half-caste’ child is that they are nurtured to be a welfare recipient, reliant on handouts and alcohol, and surrounded by violence, police interference, and imprisonment (Berndt & Berndt, 1978; Sykes & Johnson, 1975). This picture is typically accepted by white society as characteristic of Aboriginal reserve life across the breadth of Australia, and is made worse by greater white Australia’s embedded intolerance and the short-sightedness of politicians and policy-makers who have failed to see that a people deprived of political, economic, social, educational, and legal advantage, opportunities, and redress, is starting life in total disadvantage (Australian Council of Churches, 1981; Smith, 1982).

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To claw oneself up from this bleak and disadvantaged outlook into one of high achievement I believe is quite remarkable. That Bill should outwardly have no apparent recrimination or large chip on his shoulder, and no resentment toward the policy-makers and authorities is quite significant. To further climb through the government agency ranks from a Public Service Officer 5 (low-mid range) position in 1980, to later achieve the status of SES and director positions of government departments in a number of states and territories, typifies the strength of the man. He told me that he had been secure in these positions for many years and had held direction over enormous budgets ($30 million in Queensland), and a wide range of personnel, both administrative and professional.

Sudden and unexpected job loss

Bill told me that the Federal Government had consumed the Queensland State Housing Grants and Aids Program of which he was the head. He then undertook a succession of managerial positions in a number of other states and territories. Bill’s fortunes experienced a downturn in 2004 when his tenured agency disbanded. Bill had been heading up the agency’s Indigenous Macro Economic Development Division and this was subsequently transferred into a mainstream government department. Shortly after the transfer, the new department commenced implementing new indigenous coordination centres within the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination and disbanded all previous job positions - Bill described this as quite a common “position spill” and so naturally re-applied for a number of positions with the expectation that this was merely a formality (a shake-up) and, as usual, he would be redeployed into a senior management position. To Bill’s surprise, he was not even granted an interview. When he rang the recruitment agency to enquire about this, he was advised that “obviously there are people who have better qualifications.” Bill then related his quite outstanding history of Indigenous managerial positions, obviously suggesting very marketable and competitive qualifications, particularly in the Indigenous policy area. He outlined how he had managed department policy and had negotiated inter-governmental (State and Commonwealth) contracts and agreements on justice and social welfare. Bill said that: “this just fell on deaf ears” (Bill, interview notes 2008).

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Changing fortunes

Bill advised me that he had previously been very secure in his job, and very reassured in the belief that, subsequent to his division’s job spill, he would be reappointed to his previous executive level position. Along with not obtaining even an interview came an array of emotions, including disbelief and the sudden realisation that his life was entering a new uncertain phase with a new unmapped future that he had never before envisaged to be possible. In the blink of an eye, Bill's world had dramatically changed. He said:

"I couldn’t believe I didn’t get the job, let alone an interview. I rang the recruiting agency and they tried to fob me off, as if I wasn’t worthy of any respect, let alone a proper answer. They told me that obviously there were people with more experience; so I related my history of managerial positions where I’d negotiated inter-government contracts and agreements on justice between the various state governments and a number of Commonwealth Federal governments. They flippantly said – ‘Oh well perhaps they were better qualified?’ Although my qualifications weren’t exactly amazing, I did have a Bachelor of Business degree and told them so, but they weren’t even listening and really weren’t able to give me anything resembling a satisfactory answer - and all I was getting was silence, excuses, and bullshit, and so they came to a bumbling halt. I then realised that it was discrimination, because I looked at the names of the people who got the jobs, they were all people I knew and none had my skills or experience. Some of them were my previous subordinates - I’d trained them for heaven’s sake, some were still wet behind the ears, inexperienced, and unqualified. All were considerably younger than me - in their 30s, maybe early 40s, and some were quite new to indigenous affairs. As a manager and an indigenous person, I felt insulted and very much degraded" (Bill, interview notes 2008).

He continued:

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It’s funny because while the selection process seemed to be pointing towards age discrimination, and very much accompanied with the excuse that I didn’t have the experience or qualifications, I was then, within two months, placed on a contract and selected as part of a panel to actually evaluate indigenous shared responsibility agreements on behalf of the government. That the department could consider me quite suitable for this role, yet unsuitable for the permanent positions is quite puzzling to me, and I think this puts in doubt the earlier selection process … I think they needed me to do a job that they knew I could do, probably better than anyone else they had, but they didn’t want me to be in a permanent position and in the way of some up-and-coming young hotshot. I also know however, that departments have secret agendas and make allowances within their budgets for retirees, so anyone close to the age would be placed into their retirement bucket and, of course, they are not going to tell you this (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill’s laid-back disposition had now dissipated; he was shuffling in his seat and gave the distinct impression that he had become quite uncomfortable. He was looking quite serious and his facial expression had become significantly stern, he gulped and took in a deep swallow, his voice fluctuated and quivered as he continued:

There had been an incident in my new department that had been blown out of all proportion. I had a disagreement with a staff member, another Aboriginal, who had actually told me lies about the completion of a task. I swore at him, and then I thought about it and apologised. He accepted this. Then, what I found quite disturbing was the fact that everything was fine, he coached the local rugby team so I thought that the word didn’t really offend him. Then all of a sudden, I was asked to come into the manager’s office and it was suggested that maybe I might want to apply for a redundancy. My view was that when I looked around that area, the only other two people who were offered redundancies were another guy who was the same age as me, and another a couple of years older - I said, ‘well I don’t think so’ - because at that time, I had quite a bit of time up, over 20 odd years. I had a superannuation scheme that I was particularly fond of because of the fact that it was for my retirement. I wasn’t in good health because of my diabetes, which is common

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with indigenous men, and being an Aboriginal male over 50, I found that I really needed some protection of my security in relation to my employment (Bill, interview notes 2008).

It shortly thereafter came to Bill’s attention that the above Aboriginal colleague was going to take out harassment charges against him. Bill stated that:

I felt absolutely helpless and had no control over the situation. I needed someone to turn to, but did not know where to go and who to approach. I asked myself ‘what can I do about this?’ I was rapidly coming to the conclusion that this was a conspiracy and part of a plan to have me removed from the department. I was shattered. So, I began weighing up my options and my future and wondering where in hell I was going to go. … What was I going to do? How could they do this to me? My morale was already shot to pieces from the redundancy request - or I should say demand - I was suffering so much mental anguish and I began to drink and gamble. I worried every day I was at work and stopped sleeping at night. It was in this light that I decided to count my losses and I accepted the redundancy. Incredible that the time-frame of all these happenings from start to finish, was only about two months. I think this indicates just how determined they were to get rid of me, and after all my commitment and contributions, my excellent performance management ratings and reviews, they all counted for nothing (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Downward spiral

The redundancy package didn’t last long. I spent it on booze and gambling and trying to work my way out of this … I was just so depressed, I couldn’t think straight and I couldn’t cope with life. I fought with the fear that I couldn’t pull myself out of this. But more to the point, it was that niggling side, that niggling feeling of not being worthy or not having … Bill paused and took a deep breath - because of my age, because that is the only thing I could think of because my history is one of achievements (Bill, interview notes 2008).

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At this stage, Bill was very close to tears. His speech was hardly audible and he was shaking his head in disbelief as he recalled the past and his new position in life. He then took time to draw breath and stood up to gaze out of the enclosed balcony window while he regained his composure (and maybe cleared his eyes). He continued:

> My relationship with my wife began to suffer. We started having marriage problems. In December 2004, I left. We tried counselling. I’m still undergoing counselling now and this is 2008. The relationship with my wife deteriorated badly enough and my health began to deteriorate as drinking took hold. There was no counselling offered from outside the department. There was no exit interview, and I felt as though the whole system was geared to discriminate against people and that they were not interested in any explanation as to the reason for the exit, those sorts of things. I think while there were some financial incentives, and you were able to go and see a financial adviser, but there was never any offer for any counselling to that effect (Bill, interview notes 2008).

**Anger towards the perpetrators**

Talking of his career deterioration was certainly one negative issue, but the impact on his marriage was possibly still a much deeper wound and still very much more a live issue. Quite understandably, Bill was angry and frustrated at his enforced downfall. He stated that he is receiving counselling in an attempt to address this anger. He said:

> The thing with the anguish that I felt certainly has turned to, has manifested itself in anger. The counselling that I’m getting at the moment is for some of the anger that I felt towards people, whereby I have felt as though I was completely ignored for my contributions. My contributions came to nought and yet one simple disagreement I had with one staff member - and I’ve had a lot of negotiations with unions and staff members over the years - however, I

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find that one simple argument that I had with this one staff member, then I was judged on for the rest of what remained of my career. From the time I had this agreement, until the time I was offered the redundancy, would have been a period of 2 months if that, maybe even shorter. So, it was very obvious to me that they certainly didn’t want me around and I can’t see, other than my age, what difference that could have been if in all else, I was performing, because in each instance, I was at the top of my salary scale for the level, I had good reviews, good performance management reviews, so other than this one argument which was just calling someone a bloody idiot, I think is not exactly what you’d call a dismissible offence. Well, I wasn’t calling him a bloody idiot, I was calling worse (expletive deleted), that’s okay, I wouldn’t have thought that this was a dismissible offence (Bill, interview notes 2008).

I think that what makes it harder is the fear and anguish inside. Again I feel angry about it, but I also feel despair, and I think that if I don’t watch it, then depression? I think that’s worrying me over the period of the next few years. So, I think that once it all happened and you start to think about it, well you’ve got to get back to self and if self is not good, well then you could be up shit creek. I think that somewhere along the line if you think you’re worthy, then you’ve got to prove it (Bill, interview notes 2008).

**Attempting to lift himself**

In ‘half believing’ that further education would assist his predicament, Bill commenced a university Master’s Degree. Six months into his studies, he was offered, and subsequently accepted, a position at a level lower than his previous employment. Bill stated that:

> It was at that period that I was asked to come in to do a job for another department on a lower salary scale. It was in the area of coordinator for an Indigenous forestry strategy. It started off as a short-term contract of employment, however when people were being recruited to positions, I felt as

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though I wasn't exactly encouraged to apply and ... someone said to me well do you really want these positions because of the fact I was ready to finish up. So they weren't going to make the position permanent. I felt as if I wasn't encouraged to apply for any positions ... The negotiated agreements between the department and the forestry associations that I put together was the first of its kind, and the projects I did were done on a shoestring; however, at no stage was I actually encouraged to apply for permanency within the department (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Younger people's attitude to older people

Bill believed that the turning point in age discrimination came when he reached his 50s:

I found that ongoing when I applied for my current position. I find it rather interesting that you can't discriminate against age, but people always want to know how old you are in the interview process, and I find that totally amazing, yet it's not supposed to be taken into account. But I found that while I was working there, that young people also viewed older people as though they were idiots. I had that feeling when you had some young graduates come in, that they had the academic knowledge but no real life experience in relation to their degrees, which is part and parcel of the criticism that's been levelled at some of them. In the areas of work that I've been into, whether it's an academic degree or whether it's some sort of TAFE or other institute qualification, people say the new ones can't hit the ground running (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill frequently repeated the theme that he had to prove himself. When he said this again, I commented “you already have.” Bill replied:

Yeah, but you've got to believe it yourself because after you get kicked in the guts ... you can take so much kicking and then you collapse. My situation now is that I've got atrial fibrillation because of the fact that I get anxious now,

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because if I think I’m going into a new project, my self-worth and my self-esteem has been shot so much and I start getting anxious because I think what happens if this fails? They’ll sack me. What happens if this doesn’t happen, or what happens if this goes bad? And I start to panic over little things, whereas before I would have thought, well that’s it, let’s do the learnings, see the outcomes, and let’s take it from there. However, I’m doing this with one head on my shoulder, I find that at my age people don’t really want to bond with you and work it out, like when you’re in your 30s and 40s, you want to have a team around you. When you get older, that team says well, you’re the boss, you tell us how to do it. When you’re in your 50s, they see all their ideas as better than yours because yours are old ideas. What they don’t know is that their ideas that they were taught at university came from people my age who are giving them their experience through a textbook. So, what we’re saying is that they won’t take us on as the teachers, they just see us as cast-offs instead of someone whose opinions should be considered; a secondary opinion if at all. So therefore, when you start doing these sorts of projects and working on these projects now, what you really need is someone to share that with, but whereas when you start looking at other 50-somethings, if you don’t get a peer group relationship going, then you find yourself ostracised, outcast, and then you’re left alone. What do you do? (Bill, interview notes 2008).

I interceded with “You’re saying because of the age difference between you and the younger people who you’re working with, you don’t have the same social interaction to help assist you with putting the projects together because of the different perspective of you in your old position.” Bill stated:

In this 50s bracket, you find that people have a tendency to ignore you. So, what I’m looking for, what to me that means, I’ve got to go out and ensure my saleability as a worker, maybe do another degree, a Masters or something, but how many times do you need to do that to prove yourself? (Bill, interview notes 2008).

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I asked Bill whether, to the best of his knowledge, the discrimination he felt was replicated in all other government departments. Bill replied:

_"I believe this to be society as a whole, whereby it [society] seems to think that you don’t have anything to contribute anymore. It’s so difficult because I know that I can still be of value and can contribute so much. But it is fruitless trying to get work and get promoted, because between 50 and 55, there is no encouragement for promotion or whatever, because people actually say ‘if you haven’t made it by now, you are not going to make it’. They seem to be unaware or ignorant of the fact that I did make it and I still can, but they are blocking my path with their stereotyping and prejudice"_ (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill continued:

_IT is amazing that when we were kids, we expected older people to have the best jobs and get the highest promotions because of their experience and life skills. We respected older people for their contributions and values. Today, older people aren’t respected or valued, they know nothing and have to put up with incorrect labelling and stereotype-casting and give way to the self-indulgent spoilt brats who still don’t have the runs on the board, and wouldn’t be where they are now without the input and knowledge of the stupid oldies_ (Bill, interview notes 2008).

**Men’s traditional role**

I stated to Bill that his above experience was also my experience. I had continued to study and attempt to better myself in the belief that others may well have been better qualified and experienced and that maybe I did have a need to catch up. Similarly, Bill as an educated man, executive, and husband also had multiple responsibilities and roles. Specifically as a man, Bill’s socially constructed male ‘role’ and pride is echoed in the following:

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
As a man and breadwinner, I had the responsibility to look after my wife and family. It might be the traditional perspective, but that is why I was put on this earth. And for ‘heaven’s sake’, that is why I am a man. I couldn’t have this taken away from me – no-one had the right to destroy my manhood. I believe in equal opportunity and the best person for the job etc, but what is all this bullshit about being a female, so they must have the job? Being young, so they must have the job? Being an Aboriginal, so they must have the job etc? This is bullshit. I was the best and I’d proven it time and time again. So, why didn’t I get it? Not only were my abilities being questioned, so was my manhood. How could I have a beer at the pub with my mates and not feel shame and look for the closest rock to crawl under? (Bill, 3rd interview notes 2010).

Counselling

Bill related his current counselling cycle and the current effects of the trauma on his life. The drama and confusion has certainly taken its toll and the despair and depression is undeniable. Bill’s health and future are intertwined. He stated:

Now I’m still getting counselling, I go to counselling once a fortnight - which I pay for - and I start to feel as though the counselling does help, it eases the anguish and eases the lack of self-worth. I need to grow my self-esteem and there’s only one person that can do that and that is me. There’s nothing out there, I’m constantly looking around, as to now, how do I feel, my self-worth? No-one’s going to recognise me for what I contribute, so why should I do it? I have no doubt that would be to my own detriment because of the fact that I got the sack (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill concluded:

I’m on a contract now that goes to 2010 and after that, well then I’m 58, so if my prospects for employment were slim after 50, as they say from there, when you’re over 50 or over 45, it becomes increasingly harder to get an

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Appointment, then I'm starting to think well, ok what do I have to do now to ensure that I can get employment after 2010? (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Analysing Bill's story

Bill’s story is full of emotion and pain and demonstrates how a man at the top of his game, and the height of his career, can be propelled on a downward spiral when suddenly confronted with what appears to be age discrimination. This part of the chapter looks at the male ego and the many associated aspects of the trauma, depression, and loss of self-esteem that can occur in job loss with older Australian men, and then looks at both the theoretical and real-life aspects of the impact on the family.

Bill’s major criticism and blame was aimed at the young who he perceived as holding biased attitudes towards older people and seeking advantage and promotions without the life skills and qualifications (research conducted by Amos, 2005; and Büsch & Königstein, 2001; viewed earlier in this thesis indicating that youth hold many negative perceptions toward older people). Bill said:

*It never seemed to worry me before, even though I knew it was there, but now in my new job, it is really very noticeable. It is obvious that the young people deliberately exclude us oldies. We, in our 50s - and even 40s - aren't encouraged to mix with the 20-somethings, and it is as if we are singled out and certainly not part of the younger in-crowd. You really aren't made to feel like you have anything in common with them and certainly nothing to offer. The attitude of the young is that we've passed our 'use-by-date'. But, when you're sitting on the outside looking in, you realise that the whole work psyche depends on a number of requirements being met, one of which is socialisation … and I think that is very absent from this place, and has been absent for a while. I've really noticed it more and more since I reached 50* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill continued to relate the negative attitudes:

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
... as if we are being put out to pasture? And you can imagine with this attitude, this makes for an often difficult workplace environment. However, in fairness to the organisation (name withheld), they do accept older retirees back as ‘Fellows of the Organisation’ whereby they undertake certain experiments and projects (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Fear of repeat failure

The theory behind emotional, or lack of emotional well-being; and the effect and potential damage to prospects of future employment was viewed in the literature review (refer to Guindon & Smith, 2002; Kessler et al., 1989; Sightler et al., 1996; and Zawada, 1980, in Shelton, 1985).

Four years on from the commencement of Bill’s story, Bill now has a new short-term contract position (at a far lower level) in a different Australian state, but the residual fear of a repeat scenario lives with him daily. He said:

Before, I feared nothing; I was full of confidence and approached all new projects positively and with a sense of adventure. I knew no-one else could do the job any better, and I displayed this outward enthusiasm and positive approach to everyone (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill’s dilemma is highly visible. He stated:

I don’t know how to get out of this hole … I don’t know who to turn to for help (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Coping Behaviour

The literature review revealed much research relating to the variety of behaviours which would allow a victim to cope with their fall in position (Redman & Snape, 2005; Shacklock, 2005; Sightler, 1996). Bill indicated that he went through a range of behaviours in order to cope, and did attempt to deal with his dilemma head-on in a

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old*. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
very positive manner by actively seeking to correct the possible labelling inadequacies bestowed upon him when he obtained feedback on why others were preferred for a position. Believing their claim that maybe he didn’t have enough qualifications, he enrolled in a Master’s degree at university. He told me that he considered that if he was not competitive in the labour market, then he would make himself more competitive. He said:

*I only had a Bachelor’s degree and so I thought, well maybe they are right, these young kids coming through with qualifications coming out of their ears. Maybe I did need to catch up. I enrolled in my MBA and finished in record time. I thought ‘now you bastards try and tell me that I’m underqualified’ … Didn’t do me any good though, I’d expected doors to open and opportunities to come flying my way, but nothing happened. I won’t be holding my breath in anticipation* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

**When all else fails**

Regardless of his attempts to lift himself from the depths of despair, Bill did reach a stage in his mental state that brought him to attempt suicide. Bill’s words echoed this reflection:

*I wasn’t coping at all. I’d lost my job, my livelihood, my home, my wife. I didn’t have any future, I was drinking myself to death and I was sinking in my own despair. I’d had enough, I didn’t want to suffer any more of this pain and have these constant feelings of worthlessness! … I was in a hotel room and was absolutely falling over drunk. I don’t remember much, only that I awoke in the morning with my belt around my neck and the broken curtain rod dangling over my head* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

**Conclusion to Bill’s story**

Bill’s experiences are extreme and commence with his initial shock at job loss, followed by the loss of assets and family. His story displays his perceptions of the

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
sorry saga of discrimination, and is one of pain, anger, and emotion. As a result of his experiences, he suffered a range of negative life circumstances, including manhood issues, a decline in status and prestige, and a considerable shift in the balance of family power. He suffered from a fear of a repeat of workplace failure (legacy effect), and pondered the relevance of the quality of his new job; thus facilitating a desire to obtain higher and better qualifications and become more competitive in the job market. He underwent life-changing issues, including depression and a suicide attempt, all of which may have been moderated by counselling and a range of coping mechanisms, including alcohol and gambling.

The issues presented in the framework matrix on page 105 (and later on page 173) all appear to have considerable relevance to Bill’s situation. He was displaced from his organisation, believing that a recently ingrained mindset which promoted youth and beauty was acting against him. He was disgruntled at the system and displayed animosity and anger towards the perpetrators. His ego and pride took a battering, as did his health and finances. He considered other options, including fighting back with new skills development and opting out of life altogether. Bill sadly also suffered considerably from a lack of spousal support, which was a major aspect of the support forthcoming to all the other participants.

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Harry’s Story

When I met Harry in 2009, he drove a Porsche 911 and lived in a million dollar house in a prestige suburb with what could only be described as million dollar views overlooking the city. He had four tertiary qualifications, a Degree in Engineering, a Graduate Certificate in Management, a Graduate Diploma in Industrial Relations, and a Master of Business Administration. He had been a resident of this Australian city for 25 years, growing ever higher in professional status, in the archetypal public service culture. His professional standing included holding a number of extremely high-level public service senior executive positions. In his most recent public service position, he was the Assistant Director, second only to the CEO in an industrial department. His experience and specific set of skills qualified him to work in both industrial relations and safety, and in management.

Harry was established, grounded, and happy in his ‘2IC’ (second in command) position, receiving an exceptionally good salary and exercising a high level of freedom to interpret and implement government policy, make executive level decisions, and delegate authority. Then, out of the blue, a personality clash with his only senior, the incumbent Chief Executive Officer, virtually forced him to quietly accept a rather considerable voluntary redundancy package. So there he was in 1997, pondering life outside of the public service. Although Harry admits he was financially secure and comfortable enough to completely leave the workforce altogether, he did also consider himself too young and too active to “pull up stumps” and retire. He said to me:

… when all your working life, you’ve been going 24/7 and working at a pretty frenetic pace, when you suddenly stop, the thing that has kept you going for so long has gone, and I just couldn’t stand moping around the house (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry was fortunate enough to quickly find himself a managerial position with responsibility for managing safety issues for a private company. He initially enjoyed the change of pace, the challenging level of responsibility, and the apparent lower-level bureaucracy, but within a short period of time, the transport company went into "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
redundancy and soon ceased operations. Harry was again faced with the option of work or retirement.

Again selecting the former option, Harry subsequently undertook a few consultancy jobs but could not gain a permanent position until 2002, when he found himself being head-hunted by another industrial company, and although his initial contract was for only two years, Harry stayed for three. At the conclusion of this period, Harry was proud that the company had moved on from a troubled enterprise, to one which was successfully listed on the Australian stock market and received a number of awards for being a world leader in its industry. The moveable stock under Harry’s management had increased by 350 per cent and although it had experienced a high degree of instability relating to Australian industry regulation irregularities, it was now quite secure and solid in its operations. However, things suddenly appeared to deteriorate when Harry perceived that all was not as well with the safety procedures within this company as he had been led to believe. His closer scrutiny detected many flaws and many more cover-ups. When he attempted to bring attention to this rather long list of irregularities, his objections were quelled and he was threatened with reprisals if he continued to make waves. Again Harry left, and again accepted a large redundancy package that had been significantly inflated because of his newly found knowledge and potential to blow the whistle. He again found himself for the third time within only a couple of years, back with the unemployed. Harry stated:

*I was fortunate in that I received a couple of significant payouts for moving on, and had a very supportive wife who also held an executive high paying position, so I had solid financial support to fall back on. I didn’t really have to go back to work anyway, and I was certainly lucky that I wasn’t in the same boat as many people who lose their jobs and are forced to struggle. However, it still shook me up and the experience of losing my job and suddenly having the rug tugged out from under me was certainly something I don’t think I’d ever get over* (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Being so active for all of his working life, Harry’s transition to unemployment did not come easily, and the negative life changes described by Harry resulted in the onset of depression. This concerned his wife Patricia considerably. Harry stated that the “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
mechanisms to cope with the stressful termination periods and the subsequent lay-offs did not automatically cut in, as they had done so many times in his past, and as a result he was encouraged by Patricia to seek support through counselling. Harry soon commenced this and conceded to me that the psychologist was terrific, taking away the pain and burnt-out feelings. Harry further added that this job loss scenario is a very common occurrence in this city and, particularly so, in the public service.

Harry also stated that the minute he had the falling out with his new organisation, he ceased all contact with them and went straight to a very good solicitor, who confided that this organisation was the most unprofessional organisation that he had ever dealt with. This confidence, although said with his best interests at heart, also played on Harry’s mind, as he considered himself totally professional and always acting with the highest integrity. Harry voiced his concern that he had actually worked for an organisation with a low priority for safety and this made him feel uneasy. Harry stated below how their behaviour towards him when he was leaving also seriously affected him and contributed to the onset of depression. I asked Harry if he had perceived that his job was in jeopardy. He stated:

Oh, working at these places, you never knew whether you had or didn’t have your job, it is solely dependent on whose toes you step on in any given period of time, and I think that is my overall experience in senior management, and that is just the way it is. It’s very much keeping in with the hierarchy and playing the game, and when you’re in the safety industry, that’s not always possible and it does make life fairly difficult (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry’s struggle with depression

For five months, Harry was out of work and struggled with depression. He said:

I went through a period when I sort of retreated and went into my shell. I really was mentally affected by this whole experience. But then I thought, yeah, this isn’t doing me any good; I have to snap out of it and get back into

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Chapter 5 – The interview participants’ stories

the workforce. But I was pretty battered, and I really did blame senior management, so I decided that if I was going back to work, I’d apply for lower level jobs and therefore less stress (Harry, interview notes 2009).

This was the point when Harry was suddenly and unceremoniously introduced to what he believed was rampant age discrimination. He was stunned and shocked when, for the first time in his life, he suddenly found that he was not getting interviews and those he did get were “farcical.” He said “I could tell the minute that I walked in, when they saw my age, I was immediately written off.” This was confirmed with subsequent comments from feedback reports, that he was not up to scratch and not qualified enough to undertake these lower-level positions. He informed me that he came away from interviews quite angry that he should be gauged as not being able to do jobs that he had breezed through for years and knew that he “could do standing on my [his] head” (interview notes). It is interesting to recall here the research of Colquhoun (2001) and Hannen (2002), as viewed in the literature review, who found that well-credentialed former managers find it difficult to re-enter the workforce due to their own personal view that they are still at their previous level. Prospective employers also view them commensurate with this previous level and deem them unsuitable for recruitment into lower-ranked positions.

Harry stated that the problem of discrimination was not at the senior executive level, but only at the middle-management level. Harry said:

I’d experienced mismanagement, incompetence, and downright stupidity at the senior executive level many times before, but I’d always put myself above that and I, for one, would certainly never be a party to any form of workplace discrimination. Individuals were individuals and you didn’t classify anyone by their age or gender or race or colour. At least I believe that at the senior level, discrimination didn’t exist, but then to suddenly be told by lower-level people, who would have been my subordinates only a couple of years before, that I was incapable of doing a particular job that really was a cup of tea and completely in my league. What right did they have to judge me, what was the basis of their prejudice? I had difficulty understanding it, even though it was as blatantly obvious as the nose on your face. I think they felt threatened by "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
an older person’s experience and were hiding behind their prejudicial perceptions of older people. I think it goes hand-in-hand with their lack of respect of older people and with all people in authority. It is a new world out there now, and it is frightening that these younger people who engage in this form of discrimination are going to be the leaders of our country in a few years’ time (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I asked Harry the age of the interview panel; he confirmed “always younger and often considerably younger.”

During the following four month period, Harry wrote about 15 job applications and actually received a proportionately good strike rate of four interviews. He said that having undertaken senior management, he had the very transferable skills, experience, and qualifications for these middle-management positions, but was always left after the interview with the feeling that he had frightened the life out of the panel.

Counselling helped

Harry went to see a mentor - a woman whose sole job was to offer positive encouragement and rebuild self-esteem to enable a battered ego a chance to find a job-fit in the workplace. This assisted Harry’s flagging confidence and helped him to keep his spirits up. He realised that there was something wrong with the new work system and that his major failing was actually in not being able to dissect and analyse the political motivations of the new workplace. He said:

> Things had obviously changed from when one with qualifications would go into an interview one step ahead of those without one. Now it was almost a handicap and left one having to prove that they could actually live up to the expectations associated with having a qualification (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry related how demoralising the rejections were on his mental well-being. He said:

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It is a dogfight and dog-eat-dog environment and because you are older, you are in another person’s way, and you just get wiped … some of the interviews were quite pathetic, you could tell by the questions they asked that they weren’t really interested and just going through the motions. This was only over a four or five month period, which isn’t really a very long time, but it seemed like an eternity to me (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Laying the blame on the attitude of the young

Harry applied for a mid-level management position again dealing with industrial relations issues. In the interview, a very young female said to him, “Oh, why would you be applying for this job with your experience?” Harry responded “well why wouldn’t I?” She replied “Oh well, you know that you’d just be bored in it and you wouldn’t like it.” Harry continued:

It was obvious that she’d prejudged the situation and this was now going to be her whole ‘intransigent’ attitude, it wasn’t going to change no matter what I said. There was an older guy on the panel and I could see that her attitude also embarrassed him. I later sought feedback on the reason why I didn’t get the job and was told that it was considered that I didn’t have knowledge of the current industrial relations issues. This was rubbish because why did the young lady say that with my experience I’d be bored? And I’d actually spent so much time in IR courts dissecting legislation and law and resolving first hand IR issues at the highest level, so how could they possibly make these claims? I was dumbfounded, because why should I be put through this farce? Why should my time be wasted by these people going through the motions of procedure in what they claim to be modelled on equitable procedure and treatment? (Harry, interview notes 2009).

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Harry continued:

And then there was another interview where there was a younger guy on the panel who I’d actually recruited years before. He made the immediate assumption that my age would detract from my ability to function in the field. He assumed that I couldn’t do the job because of my age, regardless of my pretty high-fitness level, it was his perception of age being an inhibitor that, of course, stopped my advancement in this instance, and then I later read a report that this particular department was lacking people with management knowledge and knowledge of safety systems. So, it makes you wonder why they don’t wake up to themselves and stop their openly discriminative attitude when they are really hurting the organisation itself (Harry, interview notes 2009).

On Harry’s new (and still current) job, he said:

So, they held up my future and messed me around for about five months. I began to realise that I’d hit an enormous brick wall as far as work in this city was concerned, and then this job came up. Only problem was it was interstate, and neither Patricia nor I really wanted to move from our established home and lifestyle. We still had our son Mark at home and had to consider his future. I had the option of moving to try the job out, while Patricia and Mark remained behind in our home. We did this for four years and now recently, Patricia has decided to give up her job and take the plunge and come here also. So, this is now our future, and made easier because Mark had taken up a uni live-in-position and doesn’t need our support as much (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry continued:

And this job was really written for me. It was safety, security, and the environment, so combined both my skills and my conservationist mentality. So now, I’m virtually in a 2IC position again, I have 34 staff working for me, and for the first time ever, have a CEO who is totally supportive. Even in the "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Harry continued:

… although this prejudiced attitude is very much against the organisational ethos, it is still displayed by some of the younger workers. For example, some of the roles are very physical and involved manipulation of heavy equipment. The younger people might say, ‘Oh, he’s too old’, and then Dave (the CEO) will simply say ‘We all get older, and we then have to consider going about our business in a different way and that means doing things

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smart. That’s where an older person’s experience comes in …’. That keeps them quiet (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry continued that the staff mix in his new organisation is really quite exceptional. He has no doubt that this relates to the healthy organisational culture of frowning on prejudice, and all people being equal. Harry stated that he himself has been responsible for the selection of many of the new graduates, and luckily, he had mostly selected well. He admits that his major blemish was a 22 year old female who, although being very capable in the workplace, talked down to, and was very rude to people, some with 30 or even 40 years’ experience in the job, and lacked respect for just about everyone else. Harry says that she is a new graduate, but has a ‘people attitude’ you wouldn’t believe.

Our performance management system works on 360 degree feedback, which is feedback from peers, supervisors, subordinates, and others. As a result of her treatment of others, she hasn’t received any performance pay for two years. We’ve tried to put our finger on her problem and we’ve discovered that this is the way she has been brought up. She has a mother at home who displays exactly the same anti-social behaviour (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry reiterated his belief that in his new organisation, there existed a very good mix between young and old; however, as in the above case, Harry does consider it to be the young who are the biggest problem. He stated:

Many of them leave because they don’t fit into the culture. In fact, some of their criticism may indeed have some fact. We are certainly a workforce which developed before the computer age, and some of the older generation have certainly had trouble developing these new skills. The organisation initially had the vision of becoming a paperless workplace, but this didn’t eventuate because some of the older generation couldn’t readjust. So what did we do, we just readjusted the organisation and brought back hard-copy manuals and books. Nothing in this organisation is beyond the capacity to think outside the square, and that is the strength of having an older mature workforce (Harry, interview notes 2009).

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He continued:

_The beauty of this organisation is that some people have been with us for 50-55 years, and the average age would be over 45. Problem now is that many are now considering retirement, but the younger replacements are not coming through. They appear to have an attitude to work that doesn’t support the hard work ethos_ (Harry, interview notes 2009).

**Harry’s perception of youth**

Harry’s next words echoed the claims of all the interview participants. He said:

_I find young people today don’t want to do the hard yards. They don’t want to start at the bottom and work up. They want to go straight to the top without really learning the business. I think we’ve pampered them to the point that they only ever consider themselves and want everything done for them_ (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry indicated that far from visible age discrimination within this organisation, the reverse appeared to be the case, with the CEO coming down heavily on prejudice and any inkling of condescension toward the old bringing the wrath of the hierarchy to fall on those who dare to transgress. Harry’s attitude itself may appear to be a little discriminatory towards the young, as he brought this subject up many times, but given his observations and openly negative treatment at the hands of the young, this may well be justified and may well hold merit for considerable later research.

**The support of spouse and family**

Harry then discussed the support of his spouse. Patricia was also a senior executive who, until her recent move to follow her husband interstate, had held the acting CEO position of a para-medical government agency. She provided endless support to Harry in the way of advice, support, love, and care. She became the major

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breadwinner while Harry undertook part-time work and home domestic chores. She noticed when Harry was depressed and pushed him into seeking medical assistance and intervention strategies. Overall, Patricia gave Harry positive reinforcement and encouragement to fight the system and to not give up. She recognised Harry’s unique predicament and made many allowances to help him through the tough times. She said (as related by Harry’s words) “keep trying to fulfil whatever it is that you want to achieve Harry, and I am with you all the way” (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry’s perspective on all this went as follows:

I suppose the worst thing you feel is sitting around not doing anything. You know, here’s Patricia working and you’re not. So you feel pretty down. I suppose her doing her job is what I’ve always encouraged her to do. She actually had a Master’s degree before me, and I sort of kept pushing her to make the most out of it, and I’ve always encouraged her to better herself and I’ve never had any problem with her out-achieving me. But, you don’t feel good about sitting around the house, particularly when you’ve been so active and suddenly it all stops. I must admit that I did hit such a low that I did consider suicide (Harry, interview notes 2009).

**Harry’s self-coping mechanisms**

Harry related that he had used anti-depressants and that his medical practitioner, James, had placed him on some mild forms, “just enough to take the edge off” his depression. He also disclosed that self-coping mechanisms such as keeping occupied and doing any sort of fill-in jobs also helped considerably. He continued:

I went out to so many lunches with recently retired, former public servant friends all mostly my age. Some had also been pushed out of their jobs and into early retirement in very similar age-related circumstances, but their mentality mostly appeared to be total acceptance and was certainly different to mine. They kept suggesting that I just give up and retire, but they weren’t "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
me, or anything like me, and as far as I was concerned, they could handle their situation any way they liked, but I had to do it my way. This push to remove the old and replace with the young is what the public service is now calling renewal. Get out the old and bring in the new. But how could it be anything resembling renewal when they are dispensing with years of experience? (Harry, interview notes 2009).

To throw more light on these lunch meetings and the public servant executive’s willingness to lie down and retire, Harry stated that they were all at the higher levels of the service, and so had accumulated a fair amount of retirement funds; therefore, their forced retirement/redundancy had little effect on their lifestyle. Harry says:

> Basically they went without a murmur. It wasn’t life threatening to them, and so they considered the final payment not as an insult on their age and abilities, but as a reward for their years of hard work. Regardless though, they still, to a man, did consider it discriminatory behaviour. They knew that they’d been shown the door to make way for a favoured sycophant who’d play the internal political game, allow themselves to be manipulated and, at the same time, suck up to the CEO for ‘brownie points’. Anyway, these guys accepted this situation and they all actually urged me to follow suit, but of course, I was made of different stuff and I just couldn’t put up with injustice at any level or degree (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I asked Harry if he contacted the organisations to find out more about the positions prior to applying for the jobs, and whether he followed up with phone calls after rejection. He said:

> You know, prior to applying for the job, I always rang and had a discussion about the position. I’d get all this positive stuff and would always be encouraged to apply, but then they were the jobs where you’d usually not even get an interview … In regard to follow-up, I found the public service were the worst. I applied for a private sector position with a country scholarship fund and they were just so professional, it shook me up. I didn’t get the position, but I had a great interview, and positive and prompt feedback. It was "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
so different. I think the problem with the public service is that people my age are interviewed by someone half their age. The interviewers are rude and not interested in people my age. I’m left with the feeling that they already have someone for the position, probably a friend already working in the organisation, and they are just going through the motions of interviewing older people like me so that they can say that they are following the principles of diversity or EEO or whatever (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I asked Harry if he considered himself to be over-qualified. He replied:

No, I believe that I’m over-experienced. At the level I was applying for, everyone would have to have a degree in something or another, probably an irrelevant discipline, but they’d all have to be tertiary qualified, so that wasn’t it. But experience you can only get with age and this appeared to be totally resented. That I had practical knowledge and experience that they couldn’t even hope to obtain for years was certainly much closer to the point. I perceived that they couldn’t handle the older experienced, knowledgeable, runs-on-the-board, qualified, and confident older gentleman. They couldn’t match up, and with their ‘why me’ attitude and would only look bad and often stupid (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Conclusion to Harry’s story

The salaries and consequent redundancy levels in Harry’s home city are quite high and, as a consequence, a buffer is provided which, for many redundant workers, must take away the urgency of being out of work. Harry alluded to this when he stated that he was made of different stuff to the other public servants who had accepted the forced redundancies and gone without a murmur. What made Harry different was his pride and male ego, and he was a little uncomfortable playing the role of house-husband while Patricia became the sole breadwinner. It was not that Harry could not afford to retire, as his high profile work positions and affluent lifestyle could certainly have enabled retirement with ease, but why should he be forced into retirement and forced into a house-husband role?

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
It was also interesting to note that when Harry subsequently decided to seek employment at the mid/lower levels of the public service and avoid the upper echelons of senior management, it was here that he discovered age discrimination. He stated that “it was dog eat dog” (interview notes). He claimed that the system’s focus was on promoting youth and beauty, and this was undoubtedly designed to act against a man of his age.

Harry’s responses toward his interviews appeared to reveal results typical of other findings throughout this thesis. He displayed anger and frustration, uncertainty, loss of confidence, inability to cope, and withdrawal from the system. He stated that this was endemic in the public service which, he believed, had reduced his many qualifications and experience to a lesser level. He mostly blamed younger employees for this negative attitude and recognised this as a ‘new world system’. He suffered depression and did consider suicide, but was very fortunate that he had the support of a loving wife who provided significant buffering and who assisted him through the difficult moments (see Daniell, 1985; Jahoda, 1981, 1984; Kessler et al., 1998, in Creed et al., 1999; Liem & Liem 1988; Redman & Snape 2005).

There does appear, in this story, to be a number of similarities with Bill’s story above (and the other stories following). Harry immediately reacted with a range of self and alternative coping mechanisms (such as counselling). However, Harry’s new lifestyle change had suddenly brought on boredom and manhood issues, including a decline in status and prestige. There was (in Harry’s mind, and in reality) a shift in the balance of family breadwinner responsibility, although Harry stated that because of his financial security, this was never an issue. Harry did suffer from a fear of a repeat of workplace failure (legacy effect), and did ponder the relevance of the quality of his new job. In promoting his wish to remain within the workforce, Harry decided to avoid the political contest at the higher levels and apply for work at the mid-range management level where he believed his interests might be best served. He soon discovered this to be a huge mistake, as it was here that he found a different mindset and many problems which manifested themselves in the outcome of discrimination.

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Chapter 5 – The interview participants’ stories

Charles’ Story

Charles is a Lecturer in Marketing at an Australian university. He was a late starter in academia and believes he was subject to considerable discrimination due to both his late life job change and his age (61 years). Even though Charles struggled to obtain work for two long unrelated work periods in his life, he has had the constant support of a loving and devoted wife and family who helped him to readjust and cope throughout the tough times.

At the age of 19, Charles left high school to go into his family toy business, developing hands-on and first-hand marketing and business skills. When the business closed some 17 years later, Charles made his first attempt (at age 36) to obtain outside work. Charles soon discovered that the job search, even at the basic entry level, was very difficult and believed this was because organisations favoured the young. He stated that even though he still thought of himself “as a kid”, he “couldn’t understand why the younger ones were getting all the work.” He continued:

> I didn’t have any qualifications and no skill base, other than my self-taught business marketing skills, but I couldn’t even find work in the most basic of areas (Charles, interview notes 2009).

After numerous attempts, Charles finally obtained work in a quarry. He claimed that his earlier failure may have been related to his age, and that he could not be moulded, as could a younger applicant. Charles remained in his quarry job for four years until the plant closed down. This brought on a period in which Charles undertook domestic and casual employment duties “to survive and maintain feelings of self-worth” (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Education will open doors (or so he thought)

During this period of Charles’ unemployment, his wife Jane obtained work as a support staff member at the university where Charles was to later study and eventually gain employment. She came home from work one day and informed Charles that the answer to his employment dilemma was to obtain tertiary

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
qualifications. Being of a traditional, ‘old school’ mentality, both Charles and Jane stated that they were of the belief that education was commensurate with advancement. Jane told him that he was more intelligent than most of the academics at her university and would breeze through a degree course, which would then open many more doors and create many more opportunities (or so she thought).

Charles commenced his university student days in 1991 and completed a six year part-time degree in marketing while, at the same time, looking after the house and engaging in many part-time fill-in jobs, washing pots and pans, and doing door-to-door marketing work. At the completion of his undergraduate degree, Charles undertook an Honours year (also part-time) and finished in one and a half years. Charles was subsequently accepted into the same university to undertake his PhD in marketing. This took a further four years. Charles, now in his 50s, was determined to pursue a career in academia.

**Charles’ perceptions of university employment age discrimination**

While Charles had perceived the personal dilemma of age discrimination in his 30s, nothing had prepared him for life as an older applicant into the world of academia. For two years and through five interviews, Charles witnessed younger applicants (under 35) entering the university’s academic ranks with minimal qualifications comprising only undergraduate or Master’s degrees. This precipitated his belief that the university was only interested in either women or the young. Charles was then struck with a conundrum when he was informed that there could be no academic career without a PhD, “but there it was, right before my eyes, young people swarming into the ranks of academia without one” (Charles, interview notes 2009).

So Charles persisted and obtained his PhD, but then at his first post-PhD interview, he was told that he needed a publication history to obtain an academic post. He complained that this was not part of his understanding. He said:

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Why would I bother developing a publishing history when they only gave me sessional tutoring work, basically filling in the gaps for their first choice ‘younger, less qualified’ others … I was deemed suitable, capable, and competent to do the ‘dog’s body work’, but not young enough to be able to enter the real league (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Charles pondered the double standard, which was reinforced when a friend and mentor informed him that, as an older applicant, he had his back against the wall. As stated by Charles, “a wall of blatant discrimination” (Charles interview notes 2009).

Charles did relate other conversations with fellow disgruntled academics (male and female) who had also perceived ageism at this university. Charles claimed that the university appeared to have a negative attitude toward older people, and considered that older people did not have the right to stand in the way of the young who could have a much longer career path and a much higher salary range. He said cynically:

What right did I have to impede the ‘young guns’ progress? I should stand aside and accept this uneven playing field as status quo (Charles interview notes 2009).

As Charles’ frustration mounted, he bailed up the Head of School who reinforced the criterion that Charles needed to develop a research background with publications. Charles responded to the Head:

I couldn’t get a full-time job because I didn’t have a PhD, and now I can’t get a job because I don’t have research and publications? This is so wrong; this is nothing to do with capability or professionalism; you guys are discriminating against me. This is my age isn’t it? (Charles interview notes 2009).

Charles then related how this, in hindsight, turned out to be a very good move, as shortly after this, a job vacancy was advertised and he was given an interview. Charles stated that the Head of School was on the interview panel and, as Charles had raised the issue of discrimination, he believed that the Head of School was left “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
with no option but to appoint him or face more confrontation and unpleasantness. Charles stated:

\[
\text{So eventually, I think, I'd worn down his and the uni hierarchy's resolve, and probably they'd run out of younger people and other options anyway} \ (\text{Charles interview notes 2009}).
\]

Charles believed there to be a considerable difference between an entry-level academic and a higher-level senior lecturer, or Associate Professor or even higher. He claimed that, at that level, it was a closed school; a club, whereby they all covered each other’s backs (interview notes 2009). They were well established and had their jobs and careers, so they really did not care about newer entry older people. Charles said:

\[
\text{It is almost as if they see us older new entry academics as a threat. Maybe we know too much, or can't be moulded as easily as the younger ones} \ (\text{Charles interview notes 2009}).
\]

Charles believes that his persistence and tenacity posed a threat to the hierarchy, because he was able to see the injustice and would not tolerate the inequitable and unethical practices. He further stated that he was positioned in life with far less options than a younger applicant; both because of his age, and also because of his established, married, domestic family lifestyle. He said:

\[
\text{I just couldn't pack up and move on, as I had nowhere to move to, so that really did intensify my resolve} \ (\text{Charles interview notes 2009}).
\]

**Frustration resulting in self-esteem issues**

Charles stated that he always applied for jobs that he knew he was both qualified for and experienced in. However, his personal recognition of rejection fostered his frustration, and this became quite obvious when he made angry comments relating to others, such as “They haven’t had their balls crushed.” He continued:

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Chapter 5 – The interview participants’ stories

There always appeared to be a brick wall ... what have I got to do to get a job, is it the skill base? Is that it, or is it the fact that I’m too old? I still retain a bit of doubt about myself based on those things (Charles interview notes 2009).

Workplace culture: Attitude of the young

The ‘self-doubt’ expressed by Charles is a common thematic link with Bill (see Bill’s story earlier in this chapter) and certainly with my story. Additionally, Charles relates a similar workplace culture to Bill, whereby people did not talk or interact with him. He said:

I’m 20 years older than most of these people, and obviously, there is the feeling that I have nothing in common with them. It is an ‘us and them’ situation with the younger people. Either they are uncomfortable with older, more experienced people in the workplace, or their ingrained discrimination which encourages their outward manifestations relating to stereotyping, cuts in and disallows them from considering any other generation than their own. It really is very pronounced in the modern workforce, and I don’t just mean at uni. I discovered this when I was out of work in my 30s (Charles interview notes 2009).

Depression manifesting in anger (as with other participants)

In Charles’ situation, the workplace rejection brought on a range of mental health problems. Quite notable was his determination that he would not be beaten by the oppressors. He said:

I did suffer depression, and the way I beat it was by being an obstinate old bastard. I self-instilled the mental mechanism that I wouldn’t let the bastards beat me. I will fight them until the cows come home. I actually get angry seeing young people taking my work, my job, and depriving me of what I’ve

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
rightly earned. How dare they just think that it is their entitlement, that they actually have the right to displace me or step over me when they don't even have the runs on the board (Charles interview notes 2009).

The buffer of spouse and family support (as opposed to Bill)

Charles believes that his spell as a ‘house-husband’ was a buffer which helped instil harmony into his home life and assisted him in maintaining his sanity and focus. He related this as the main reason that he survived his lengthy ordeal, and counted the family and home support from his wife and his high-school aged children, as an absolute blessing which he believes carried him through, without which, he would not have been able to survive.

Charles (as did I) conceded that his most notable other coping mechanism was sleep. Charles said:

… sleep helped me overcome the depression, and restore my will to fight for justice. So, if I wasn’t conscious, and wasn’t in the land of the living, then I couldn’t feel the hurt, anger, and pain of this employment discrimination, and although sleep actually had a direct connection with the depression, it was the one major criterion that aided my survival (Charles interview notes 2009).

Conclusion to Charles’ story

Charles identified that even as a relatively young man (in his 30s), workplace age discrimination was evident. He survived this early assault on his self-worth with considerable family support and, through this support, proceeded to improve his overall circumstances with education, only to again be presented with the ugly face of discrimination at the higher level in academia. Charles eventually and tenaciously battled through the stereotypes and the workplace blockade to achieve a modicum of success. What is not yet apparent is how Charles’ future will develop. He achieved early success but what legacy has this left behind?

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
The most prominent issue that assisted Charles was the support of family. He was not alone, and his life and future were buffered by a loving family. As with all the participants, Charles did however suffer from self-esteem issues relating to his struggle to secure a future for his family (Daniell, 1985; Howe et al., 2004; Liem & Liem, 1988; Redman & Snape, 2005). Also significant was Charles withdrawing into the coping mechanism of sleep (Dim, 2009).

Notable throughout Charles interview was that he suffered considerably as a result of the lack of manifest (finance) functions, but was abundantly endowed with the latent functions of spouse, family, and workplace support (Jahoda, 1981, 1984). Charles also stated that he did not suffer manhood or power issues as a result of his wife being the main breadwinner, but did feel an obligation to eventually obtain work commensurate with his qualifications in order to repay her family commitment and contributions. I am of the same mindset with my partner, who has taken on the major breadwinner function until I can obtain a permanent position (hopefully).

"No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
**John’s Story**

John tells a very different story in relation to his response to age discrimination and provides a contrasting response to the four other participants’ stories. The intense support of family coupled with a secure financial future, are key issues that underpin John’s situation.

I have known John for 14 years, as we previously worked in close proximity in a university. He appeared to me to be a pleasant, communicative, and approachable fellow and I once had the pleasure of attending one of his short lunchtime political seminars. I was very impressed with his knowledge, communication abilities, and presentation skills, and was certainly left with the impression that he was a very well-educated and well-informed person who was very much on top of life and the academic world in which he plied his trade.

John’s story starts in 1998 when, as a senior public servant, he took a redundancy package to enable himself to complete his PhD (in politics). He told me that at that time, he had not been aware that he may have been singled out for redundancy because of his age, this only occurred to him much later. He accepted the payout which effectively gave him the financial support to undertake his PhD which, he claimed, substituted for a scholarship. Although John undertook his study in distance mode, and frequently travelled to the city location of his university, his brother lived in this city and John found it very convenient to stay for some lengthy periods and to assist in an academic capacity teaching, lecturing, and tutoring in politics at this university.

**The initial identifying of age discrimination**

In 2001, at the age of 51 and having just completed the formal requirements of his PhD (PhD elect), John applied for an internal contract lecturing position to take the place of the retiring academic with whom he was currently working. As he was familiar with, and had already been undertaking, the specific duties of the position, he was regarded by a number of his peers as being the natural replacement. He

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was shocked when a considerably younger, lesser qualified (non-completed PhD) applicant, and lesser experienced man, was given the position. John stated:

… he had never even taught the subject area and the only factor that could have influenced his appointment over me, would have been classic age discrimination. I didn’t know his exact age, but 20s or early 30s at the most. The people who originally suggested me for the job were irate, but it was over their heads and they couldn’t do anything about it. It must have been the Head of School who decided, and any short-term contract appointments were not subject to any formal requirements or process or any appeals or anything, it was just the decision of the Head of School. No-one ever talked to me about why, I just found out later. I have to assume it was age discrimination and I know other people in the place did assume that it was. But I suspected that in my failings to get other jobs, that age came into it, but I can’t say more than that. But this one, I really can’t see any other explanation (John, interview notes 2010).

Perceptions of the recruitment attitude which favours/promotes youth and beauty

John added that he had noted attitudes at his university which, he claimed, excluded older students and indicated an underlying predisposition to youth promotion and potential consequent age discrimination. He claimed that a couple of times during his PhD, he would hear conversations in the staff room which would be similar to the following:

Oh isn’t it good, we’re getting bright young people into our PhD program now … Now, this would be said by people who were obviously oblivious of the fact that I was a mature-aged PhD student, along with a number of others, and who we thought were doing pretty well. And, in fact, they were not meant at all as comments against us, but it was just this sort of underlying attitude, ‘we want bright young people’ (John, interview notes 2010).

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
The minimal effect of age discrimination on John

John stated that the perceived discrimination had only a minor impact on him, as he had recently become financially secure and didn’t need to work to survive. He also had other pressing issues, discussed below, which took precedence over work. However, he claimed that he was not completely disaffected, as the feelings of anger and frustration were certainly there, but not (in his words) “the devastation, trepidation, fear for future, and disconsolate demeanour that one hears about and would expect in such a situation” (John, interview notes 2010). John continued:

The age discrimination that I experienced wasn’t personal, they engaged in this behaviour because that was the effect of institutionalised discrimination, and they felt they had an obligation to behave in this manner. I didn’t take it personally (John, interview notes 2010).

John described this to me with what I perceived as total calm and even compassion for the offenders (as if they were the victims). John appeared far more forgiving than me, or the other participants within this study, who did display extreme feelings of devastation and fear for the future.

The significance of other events in John’s life

John then explained that his wife was going through the trauma of breast cancer, and the fear of facing the future without his very supportive loved one had brought them considerably closer. The life-threatening illness suffered by his partner induced a calm measuring and rationalising of the situation in which John was suddenly thrust, and he balanced his values accordingly. John smiled and I could sense his mind reflecting back on the past. He nodded his head, and with a warm smile and in a very soft and compassionate voice, he explained that in realising that he was in danger of losing his “his most cherished possession”, and the life-changing impact this would have on him and his family, made “a little inconvenience like age discrimination, quite minor” (John, interview notes 2010).

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
John disclosed that 2001 was a particularly difficult year for him and his family, as at the same time as his wife’s illness, his father died. He stated that as a grieving son, this had a rather debilitating, depressing, and demoralising effect on him, but it also had a huge beneficial effect in that he received a legacy, including a property portfolio, that effectively meant that he could retire and never have to work again. Given his wife’s illness and his newly assured financial security, he obviously had other concerns and consequent considerations that displaced the need to work and the worry of age discrimination. Financial security negating the worry of work and one’s future was covered in the literature review by Kessler et al. (1988, in Creed et al., 1999), who determined that unemployed workers did not suffer the same level of unemployment stress when the consequences of financial strain were removed. Kessler et al. (1988) stated that Dutch unemployed people are less stressed by unemployment (and the prospect of such) because they have the benefit of considerable government welfare which reduces and, in some instances, takes away the burden and fear of future financial hardship. This financial consideration, coupled with John balancing the other tragic events which occurred simultaneously in his life, certainly appeared to deflect any fear of unemployment.

**Expectations not commensurate with the completion of a PhD**

Upon completion of his PhD, John stated that he did expect to obtain a work position commensurate with his new ‘doctoral’ status. He continued:

> I did apply for a number of jobs and got really nowhere on any of them. In many cases, not even an interview, and then you see who was appointed and you realise they had less qualifications than you for the job, so one certainly began to assume that age discrimination was taking place (John, interview notes 2010).

In specific application to job refusals, John stated that the fact that he did not obtain the above (previously mentioned university) position “was an insult” (John, interview notes 2010), and an attack on his self-esteem. He claimed that he needed to be able to apply his new status through work, and when he found that he was being

“*No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old*”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
rejected time and again (assuming each time, age discrimination) he found a status-compensating role in an adjunct ‘non-paid’ position at another university. For John, this was enough reward for his hard work in achieving PhD status. John stated:

*I didn’t need the money and so even though this was a non-paying position, it did provide the fuel to stimulate my ego and status* (John, interview notes 2010).

**Analysis: Is age discrimination hidden?**

It is interesting to note that when John accepted a redundancy package from the public service, he stated that he was not initially aware that he “may have been the victim of age discrimination”, as this possibility only occurred to him later. This appears to be a common occurrence, as I for a long time was also not aware that I was the victim of age discrimination, and like Bill, obtained further qualifications to make myself more competitive in the job market.

**John’s acceptance of his perception of discrimination**

Additionally, the apparent very receptive and forgiving manner in which John accepted the age discrimination phenomenon and his non-blaming and composed demeanour was contrary to my other interview participants, given the anger and frustration we all openly expressed (interview notes). It is notable that despite John having considerable wealth and family support, he still voiced aggravation that his employment status had been violated by what he assumed to be age discrimination.

John’s comment that the perpetrators of discrimination against him “felt they had an obligation to behave in this manner”, also indicated (to me) an acceptance of the phenomenon and a very forgiving nature. However, brought into the reality of caring for a sick loved one, this (in John’s mind), superseded and surpassed all other duties and obligations, and set him apart from all the other participants in this study.

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
In relation to work status (commensurate with skills), John made the statement:

> I could have almost certainly got work not commensurate with my qualifications. And I guess if I had been desperate for the money, I would have, and how that would have affected me I can't tell you. I didn't need to work, and I certainly wasn't going to take anything that wasn't commensurate with my qualifications. My loss perhaps, society's loss maybe, but you know that was how it eventuated. I'd say the main effect of age discrimination on me was to make me a discouraged job seeker who stopped looking for paid employment (John, interview notes 2010).

With his finances under control, John had no need to work, therefore offering support for the manifest functions of employment in Jahoda’s (1981, 1984) Latent Deprivation Model (viewed earlier). John said:

> I wasn't that much worried about getting a full-time tenured position because I didn't really need it, but I did think I would be able to do a series of jobs like this one and the others I had applied for. Yeah, so I was a bit disappointed and upset, and also there were the other jobs I'd applied for where I got nowhere. I'd assumed that this one was a pretty clear-cut case of age discrimination, and I can't quite say yes it was, because you never really know if there is another reason, but it made me feel that I didn't have a hope, that I wasn't going to get the jobs I wanted because I would be discriminated against on age. As a result, after a couple more attempts - I can't remember exactly how many more jobs I applied for, it would have been at least half a dozen - I stopped applying. I became I suppose, the classic discouraged job seeker. I was sick of banging my head against a brick wall and I didn't need this stress (John, interview notes 2010).

**Conclusion and summary to John’s story**

John did display anger at what he perceived was age discrimination, and he was commensurately very frustrated at the possibility that he was being barred from

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
entering a level of academia which he believed could certainly have been available through his PhD endeavours.

John’s story indicates the importance and value of other life priorities and circumstances, and which, in John’s case, shielded him from the full force of the potential impact of discrimination. That he was absolutely devoted to his loving wife meant that any significant impact of discrimination was moderated by these other factors and relegated discrimination to be virtually non-consequential in comparison. That he also received a legacy which ensured that he was totally financially independent meant that John could focus on other issues, notably his ill wife. He did subscribe to the commitment to work (even if unpaid), as it provided justification for his years of PhD study.

**Conclusion to chapter**

This chapter has highlighted the real-life perceived effects of age discrimination on four participants in this thesis. Overall, it described a decline in the participant’s status and prestige, followed by varying levels of anger, frustration, shame, and depression (and more), resulting in psychological, physical, and socio-psychological effects on family, friends, and community. Above all, the major common thread was the perception that youth were favoured in the workplace, and that youth were also predominantly responsible for negative and stereotypical attitudes towards the aged, and this had a negative impact on the employment decisions of recruiters and agencies.

This chapter also displayed the negative impact that other factors may have on one’s mental acceptance of a phenomenon, as in the case of John, whose financial legacy and other priorities reduced age discrimination, in his mind, to a mere inconvenience.

A cross-sectional matrix displaying the actual effects of age discrimination on each of the five participants is displayed at the commencement of the next chapter.

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Chapter 6 — A deeper investigation into the findings

Introduction

This chapter is a progression from, and delves deeper into the summaries from the expressed words of the interview participants in the previous chapter. It utilises the thesis conceptual framework (see Chapter 3 - method) embedded within a template (King, 2011, Template Analysis). This is cross-matched and linked to the theory expressed in the literature review and to the research questions, the themes, and the earlier claimed findings from the participants’ stories. To justify this deeper examination it will be necessary to again repeat and emphasise poignant comments from the participants’ voices and extract deeper analysis of the significant sentiments, claims and statements.

The themes emerged from the a-priori (anticipated) findings and continued to evolve and develop from the study content. I have experienced (and still do) the phenomena of age discrimination, and as such, consider that I anticipated a considerable proportion of the outcomes of the research prior to interviewing my participants. In using the incidents and voices of the participants, I have been presented with many common themes and have compiled what I believe to be a high degree of validity in relation to personal responses to the effects of age discrimination, and through this multiple voicing, have been safeguarded against what King (2011) persuasively espoused as becoming ‘blinkered’ in my projection of the outcomes. The anticipated findings on pages 103-5 have been subjectively expanded in the Matrix below to project the perceived findings of the individual impact of age discrimination on each individual participant.

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A visual Matrix displaying both the anticipated and actual findings

This matrix should be read in conjunction with the research questions (previously viewed on pages 17 and 105) on the horizontal axis; and the expected and realised findings on the vertical axis. Note the Legend after the Matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Effects of discrimination</th>
<th>Employer’s decisions</th>
<th>Effects on Family</th>
<th>Impact of positive support</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emergent themes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Displacement from organisation and non-recruitment</strong></td>
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| **Emergent themes** | **Damage to ego** | | | |
| Colin | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ ✓ |
| Bill | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | X |
| Harry | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Charles | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| John | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |

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Chapter 6 – A deeper investigation into the findings

Emergent themes

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"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
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Graph 2. Matrix – Adapted from King (2011) Template Analysis.

Legend: (Subjective and perceived. Open to individual interpretation but designed as an easy guide to facilitate understanding of the effects upon each participant and to assist and position the interpretation of the Analysis and Findings).

- X unknown, negative or not applicable
- ✓ minor impact
- ✓ ✓ major impact
- ✓ ✓ ✓ extremely debilitating impact
An early observation that emerged from the interviews is that the effects of discrimination started with the initial perception that discrimination was (or may have been) taking place (see Figure 2 below). The reaction of shock and disbelief would lead to questioning the reality, to stirring defensive and support mechanisms (survival tactics), and the weighing up of alternatives. Hopelessness, helplessness, anger, and embitterment toward the offending source would likely ensue. All this would filter through, and have an impact upon, the latent and manifest functions of life such as finances, health, and relationships, noting that the victim also has social and workplace associates (and family) who are invariably, conversely affected.

![Figure 2. A personally constructed progression line of the perceived effects of discrimination. Compiled from my perception of the material presented at interviews, which relate to, and support the personal stories of the participants.](image)

**Going even deeper into the findings**

This section analyses and discusses the words of the participants and isolates the themes related to the research questions. Embedded under the umbrella of the major themes are the layered sub-themes (Creswell, 2005), which are interconnected and support the process of outlining the individual and collective phenomena, enabling a larger picture of the impact of age discrimination to surface based on perceptions from the five stories.

The literature review introduced the work of Sluss and Ashforth (2007), whose paper on relational identity and the work connection looked at the insights on the impact of relationships on one’s own personal development, performance, and well-being.

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
They claimed that there were three levels of identity; the individual (personal), the interpersonal (group), and the collective (social), and that a person acted and reacted according to each varying setting, situation, and environment. These three levels of identity were used to analyse the data from the literature review and will now form the umbrella under which the themes gleaned from the literature review and hypothesised in the research questions will be analysed. These three constructs will form the headings of the analysis. The majority of the themes related to the individual (intrapersonal), as the major focus of the study was specifically on the range of personal damage to a particular entity (i.e. professional men), and this focus added considerably more weight to this particular construct. The themes are:

- The effects of a man’s decline in status (unemployment, under-employment, and lower-level employment). A man’s reactions to his perceptions of discrimination. Who does he blame?
- Masculinity and power; and the greater psychological effects on professionals.
- Mental health: Negative emotions (anger, despair, guilt and shame, suicide, and more). Need for counselling.
- Buffering (family and social support). Removing the financial burden.
- Financial damage. Poverty, welfare dependency, loss of assets, and retirement.

The ‘a-priori’ perceptions (anticipated themes) relate to the following. These were charted in the Methods section, and are embedded within the research questions.

- Ego (pride, achievement, success);
- Financial deprivation (present and future);
- Health (psychological and physical);
- Uncontrolled emotions (rejection, disappointment, uncertainty, damaged job search ability – hysteresis and self-screening out of a job application pool);
- Controlled emotions (resentment, anger, embitterment);
- Buffering (family and social); and
- Disgruntlement at the system (and the promotion of youth and beauty).

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
The themes in this chapter are supported by the words of the participants who attest to this lived experience. These themes primarily focus on what has happened to these professional men as victims of age discrimination. It commences with highlighting the initial shock in which the older professional man identified a sudden decline in status coupled with the perception that he may be the target of some form of discrimination. The chapter examines the participants’ feelings of rejection and displacement, and then progresses on to blaming youth, society, and employers for being complacent and accepting of a discriminating society. It further examines the older workers’ belief that younger workers, who may not have their ability, skills, or experience, have taken their job and/or promotion.

The chapter progresses from perceptions and personal feelings and examines the impact on physical and mental health and the consequent damage to both self and others (noting that others e.g., spouses, children, extended family and friends are also involved and affected). It will then explore and expand on the research presented earlier which contended that the overall impact on the professional man is greater, including his fall in status and prestige, and has consequential and serious effects on his ego and persona (Sightler et al., 1996).

Finally, this chapter will view the financial damage and the implications of unemployment and under-employment, on self, family, friends, and society. This section views the effects of poverty, welfare dependency, loss of assets, and forced retirement, and the value of buffering by means of support such as encouragement and personal and government-sponsored financial backing. As a separate issue, it will view buffering and often inappropriate actions and behaviours used in an attempt to soften the severity of the blows that the participants have experienced. The actions and behaviours include issues such as sleep, alcohol abuse, attempted suicide, medication, and the benefits of staying occupied in the pursuit of sport, as one example among others.

As a balance, this chapter will present the countering experience of one participant - John - whose attitude to his imposed situation was at variance with the others, as he appeared accepting of the discrimination imposed upon him. John considered that the impact of age discrimination did not have the damaging and debilitating effects “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
that he believed befell many other victims of age discrimination. This was identified as, and interconnected with, other factors occurring simultaneously in his life which at the time were considerably more pressing. These events, including his wife’s recent illness and his father’s recent death (with John becoming the beneficiary to his father’s estate), resulted in the positive effect of drawing the family unit closer together and facing a secure financial future, regardless of employment options, thus relegating age discrimination and its consequences to (as in John’s words) “a mere inconvenience.” It is relevant here to relate the findings of Jahoda (1981, 1984; Latent Deprivation Model - viewed throughout this thesis), where the manifest functions (financial needs) of John’s existence became quite irrelevant, as a link was apparent with John’s new-found financial legacy and his family needs. John’s manifest (financial support) functions were resolved, while his latent needs (psychological) were elevated to primacy.

**The intrapersonal effects (damage) to the professional man**

The decline in status and reactions to perceived workplace discrimination: Who to blame?

The initial theme in this chapter relates to both the mental and physical damage that professional men suffer/suffered as a result of perceived age discrimination. It initially identifies the feelings expressed about the employer organisations, and the individual people who they hold responsible. This chapter recognises that these professional men have suffered loss relating to the notion of self, finance, family, society, and workplace - and more - and may, more than likely, never be in a position of full recovery from this imposed disadvantage. A major consequence, and a lived experience, of professional men who have/are suffering age discrimination, is that they perceive an imposed decline in status resulting from their unemployment, under-employment, and employment below their actual abilities.

It was stated in the literature review that there is widely-held public contention that the basis of global age discrimination has its foundations in the promotion of youth and beauty, and the existence of stereotypes which unfairly label older workers (AHRC, 2010). It was further claimed that our society promotes “an obsession with "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
appearance and being vital and young” (p. 6). The AHRC Report (2010) claimed that age discrimination is systemic, with discriminatory practices being “absorbed into the institutions and structures of society. These practices produce general disadvantage for any particular group, such as older people” (p. 6).

The perception of employment anomalies - being overlooked and displaced

An issue with each of my participants, and a phenomenon supported by the literature review, is the older worker’s perception that he is being displaced and passed over by younger people, and the emergent and daunting feeling that something is wrong with their workplace setting. All the participants viewed the promotion and prominence of younger workers as inappropriate and manifestly wrong, as skills, abilities, and experience were not being assessed objectively, and believed that this was connected to their own vocational displacement. They frequently perceived and pointed to numerous circumstances in which younger persons appointed to positions possessed fewer skills and qualifications, and they questioned and challenged this anomaly. This perception was prominent through all conversations with the participants; an example being stories which labelled organisations as pandering to youth who considered that they should not have to start on the bottom rung of the employment ladder; thus, leading to the promotion of youth who gain a position of authority and then make judgements over others’ careers and future. This complaint had a significant impact on the mindset of the men in this study.

I asked my participants their feelings in relation to younger person favouritism and promotion. Bill said:

It's frustrating, it makes me angry, and I think that the more I start to think about it, that's part of the anguish that I feel (Bill, interview notes 2008).

It is poignant to repeat an earlier statement by Bill (p. 128) to reinforce the perceptions and themes.

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
While I was told that I didn’t have the qualifications, at the same time, within two months I was then selected as part of a panel to actually evaluate the processes of engagement with indigenous people … and evaluate shared responsibility agreements on behalf of the government. So, while I wasn’t considered as one that could do the job, I think my part as a consultant on a very select panel, puts in doubt the selection process for the previous positions (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Charles simply stated:

I was angry, very angry … They can't do this to me and get away with it (Charles, interview notes 2009).

I (Colin):

Believe this youth and beauty promotion perception is very real and that I have witnessed and experienced this phenomenon on a number of occasions. I also believe that it doesn’t matter what qualifications, skills, and experience an older worker may have, he/she will always lose out to the younger worker. Older people appear to be ignored, and openly and blatantly denied opportunities because of the promotion of youth, societal stereotype casting, and open discrimination. It is insulting that we have to go through the motions of applying for work and attending (on occasion) interviews, when it is obvious that the new politically correct notion is to have an agenda that excludes us (Colin).

John expanded on the perceived anomaly by stating that aged people should not be forced to make way for youth or to retire early. He said:

They should contribute to society. My experience has turned me off seeking paid employment. So, the age discrimination is what stopped me (John, interview notes 2010).

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Bill claimed that he felt a change in his public service workplace climate when he turned 50. He said young people with lesser qualifications, and very little real-life experience, were getting all the jobs and this disturbed him. He said:

> It just happened to be the guys over 50 who were actually offered redundancies … the recruitment that was done was bringing new people in from outside the departments … They were all younger people in their 30s, mid-30s, maybe early 40s … They had less experience … As an indigenous person and as a previous manager, I felt as though I had been insulted and I felt degraded … (Bill, interview notes 2008).

He continued that many were newly appointed graduates:

> They had the academic knowledge, but no real life experience in relation to their degrees … people say the new ones can't hit the ground running … don't have the communication ability (Bill, interview notes 2008).

He added:

> When people were being recruited to positions, I felt as though I wasn’t exactly encouraged to apply … When you're over 50, or over 45, it becomes increasingly harder to get an appointment … They won't look at you for promotion at this age … I have noticed there’s no encouragement for promotion … in this 50 bracket, you find that people have a tendency to ignore you … you find yourself ostracised, outcast, and then you’re left alone (Bill, interview notes 2008).

He believed this attitude was also present at interview:

> You can't discriminate against age, but people always want to know how old you are in the interview process and I find that totally amazing, yet it's not supposed to be taken into account (Bill, interview notes 2008).

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
As a 50 year old, John had just finished his PhD and was denied the opportunity to gain a firmer footing in the academic position in which he had been working:

-You see who was appointed and you realise they had less qualifications than you for the job, so one certainly began to assume that age discrimination was taking place … I suspected that in my failures to get jobs at other places, age came into it … But this one, I really can't see any other explanation (John, interview notes 2010).

Harry spent five months out of work after his public service lay-off. He indicated his belief that the young people were getting the jobs:

-They would have been up and comers. EL1 [executive level] positions and they were coming up from the ASO 6 [Administrative Service Officer] … they go into the public service and some of them get right up there, and they're only young people with no experience. How can they give policy and things like that when they have no experience? (Harry, interview notes 2009).

My own recent academic history was as a contract lecturer in business management. I was denied the offer of tenure (on what I believe were tenuous criteria), although at the same time, perceiving an increase in younger academics without real-life experience:

-I would see a 25 year old come in who had left high school, straight in to do an undergraduate degree. They then do their Honours year, and proceed straight in to do a PhD, and then come into the School of Management to teach people how to manage. And you think “But you’ve never been in the workforce. Where is your practical base?” And why would they prefer them to me, who’s acquired four degrees (over four decades), run my own businesses, studied when I had a wife and kids to support, had commitment, and where’s this got me? Nowhere at all, because of what – age? (Colin).

Faced with the conundrum of having the skills, but being ignored (and displaced), Bill believed that he had suddenly become invisible:

“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
I’m more obliged to raise the profile now. More so than ever, because I’m not being noticed, can’t get noticed, because they won’t look at you for promotion at this age … Between 50 and 55, I have noticed there’s been no encouragement for promotion … because people would say well, if you haven’t made it by now, you are not going to make it (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill believed that he was being deliberately excluded. He related that in the public service, he was actually excluded from management meetings which were an integral aspect of his job. He said:

The meetings that were held were not with all managers, and I was generally the only manager excluded. We would have normal staff meetings, but that was all staff, like stand up morning tea type ones, but there was nothing in that area of planning. … Looking at the exclusions, it all seemed to point towards people of certain age groups, especially managers (Bill’s, 2nd interview 2009).

Charles developed self-doubt and stated that he could not help but question himself. He said:

What do I have to do to get a job? … Is it the fact I’m too old? You are going through these questions all the time … I still retain a bit of doubt about myself based on these things (Charles, interview notes 2009).

My personal perception of a considerable workplace anomaly (which reinforced my belief of youth bias) occurred at the commencement of what I had anticipated would be my public service career leading to my retirement. Prior to my application, I had read that ‘The New Public Service’ placed people into areas and departments where they could best use their skills, experience, and qualifications. As a former school teacher (mainstream and Indigenous schools) with a post-graduate diploma in cultural studies, I expected to be quickly recruited into a relevant education and/or Indigenous area. Additionally, I also had a trade background and ran my own small "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
businesses for 16 years, so an appointment into a business area would also have been appropriate.

The placement was strange to say the least, and although I was possibly aware that things were not as their propaganda projected and promised, I only later perceived it as age discrimination and (possibly) public service mind games. I was appointed to a department totally irrelevant and very far removed from any of my skill set and qualifications. My first duty (which lasted approximately three months) was commensurate to a junior clerk, stacking service files on racks. I couldn't believe that as a former manager and respected professional, that I was commissioned to do this totally unskilled, basic, mundane, and demoralising work function. And it was equally hard to believe the logic whereby my appointed co-worker (an older lady) also had an Honours degree in literature (Colin).

The belief that the workplace and society support and promote youth to the detriment of the older worker (job seeker) is common and prominent with all the thesis participants, and is supported by research highlighted in the literature review. Further claims from the participants indicated that organisations, a range of agencies, and youth themselves hold and project stereotypes in order to deprive and exclude the older worker. The need to become more competitive and to obtain further and additional qualifications, in the belief that this may be the reason for the rejection, was also prominent.

The lie - being frequently advised that younger applicants are better qualified

My own personal experience tended to indicate that older workers were frequently denied appointment and/or promotion. While in the public service, I applied for many vacancies both within, and external to, the department and was never successful. I became very frustrated and often angry:

"I was always being told that others were better qualified or had addressed the selection criteria better than I. On one occasion, while in the Public

"No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Service, when informed that a young lady in her early 20s (with no tertiary qualifications) had obtained the position, I approached the Director in his office and requested feedback. After a brief silence, he cupped his hand under his breast and informed me that she was better qualified (Colin).

Bill said:

I kept on getting promoted - until a certain age - and then it stopped. So, what happened? Other than getting older, what was different? Because I've certainly kept my skills … I was also multi-skilled, because I had a range of diverse policies from social policy through to economic and business policy. So I had the skillset … (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Charles (as a PhD academic) related how he could not find work. He said:

I was trying to get work within the department here. There was 1, 2, 3, 4 women were put on, and I think there were 2 males … All of them probably 35 maximum age. No PhDs. Long way from finishing … they were getting jobs off me where I’d had mine submitted (Charles, interview notes 2009).

I was told that I needed to have a PhD to obtain a permanent lecturing position:

I applied, and they put me into a Master’s program. I said but I've already got a Master’s, what do I need another one for? And I'm sure it was because I was already 57 years old. Young kids were coming through and were put straight into the PhD program (Colin).

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
To improve his options, Bill completed a Master’s degree, but was still overlooked:

*I went and did my Masters. It was at that period then that I was asked to come in to do a job for the department. … However when people were being recruited to positions, I felt as though I wasn’t exactly encouraged to apply … at no stage was I actually encouraged to apply for permanency within the department* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Charles followed up on his rejections and went to the head of the department. He related the conversation whereby he was told that he needed to undertake research and develop a publication history in order to acquire ongoing or permanent tenure. He said:

*Yes, but I’ve got my PhD. I didn’t get a job because I didn’t have a PhD, now I’ve got one and I still won’t get a job. Now you’re telling me it’s got to be research and publications. To be honest, I’m not going to bloody do all that work when I’m only getting a part-time salary. And I’m only engaged for half the year, so why should I waste my time doing research? It’s not really going to stand up irrespective of how many papers I have … I feel you guys are discriminating against me with age* (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Charles persisted and believed he finally left the Head of School with no option but to recruit him. He said:

*I was very firm with them just saying that overall, I think you guys have discriminated against me with age, it’s not capability, it’s not professionalism, it’s not because I haven’t got a PhD. And he quickly avoided that of course … And I just said, it’s because of my age, isn’t it? And he didn’t say anything … And in the end, I said “Here’s the summary, I still believe you’re discriminating against me on my age.” Now, having had that conversation with him, there was a job coming up and I got an interview. And as soon as I walked into that interview and I knew he was on the panel, I knew I had got him … and I had no problem, he didn’t even ask a question and I got the job* (Charles, interview notes 2009).

*“No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”*. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
I also found that as a contract lecturer I was constantly being allocated gap-filling in the form of units that others did not want. I believed that the on-going continuous repeat units were for the permanent and young:

_Last semester, I taught International Human Resource Management (postgraduate), the previous semester it was undergraduate, before that it was Managing Pay and Performance, which is a human resource management unit. Next semester, I’m teaching International Workplace Relations. I’ve never done it before, but I’ll do it. But every semester, it’s something different. And so, they’re basically using me and the quicker I get through my PhD, the better (Colin)._

The denying of academic employment opportunities dented John’s future academic opportunities. He relates his rejections:

_I was angry about it and a bit upset … I felt this one was going to be a great opportunity to get going … It was a foot in the door, get me something to work on. I wasn’t that much worried about getting a full-time tenure position because I didn’t really need it … Yeah, so I was a bit disappointed and upset. And also I had the other jobs I’d applied for which I got nowhere on, and because I’d assumed that this one was a pretty clear-cut case of age discrimination … made me feel that I didn’t have a hope, that I wasn’t going to get the jobs I wanted because I would be discriminated against on age. As a result, after a couple more … it would have been at least half a dozen … I stopped applying for jobs. I became, I suppose, the classic discouraged job-seeker. I was sick of banging my head against a brick wall (John, interview notes 2010)._

Finally, John summed up his newly emerging self-doubt in four words. He said ‘Am I worth it’? (John, interview notes 2010).

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Chapter 6 - A deeper investigation into the findings

Summary

The literature review indicated the common instance of being advised by recruiters that youth are better qualified for positions. In practical application, this was rejected by all participants who all had problems accepting that their qualifications and years of experience amounted to very little in the modern workplace. The participants (and I) believed that we were being exposed to blatant lies, designed to promote youth and to deny the older person access to positions. This rejection had a common negative effect on the ego of all the participants and, in a number of cases, intensified one’s resolve to fight for, and obtain, positions. An example of this was that both Bill and I believed that obtaining advanced qualifications was one way that would assist us to overcome this prejudice. However, in practice, this bore little fruit when the lie continued to be perpetrated (even after graduation).

Youth (and society’s) attitude to older people

Workplace cultures are distinct from each other and dependent on the ethos of the founding fathers and the attitudes of the workers within each individual work environment (Bray, Deery, Walsh, & Waring, 2005; Robbins, Judge, Millett, & Boyle, 2011; Sappey, Burgess, Lyons, & Buultjens, 2006). A phenomenon which appeared to disturb each of my participants was their perception that there existed an entrenched culture to exclude them and older people in general. Stereotypes relating to older workers’ ability (or lack of) were believed to be significant in the general workplace culture. The belief that younger workers were also on a self-promotion drive was fostered by all the participants.

My participants stated that many younger people appeared to display an unhealthy, negative attitude to older workers and their knowledge, and that this inevitably restricted the older persons’ workplace opportunities and progress. Bill said:

… young people also viewed older people as though they were idiots … I find that, at my age, people don’t really want to bond with you to work it out like when you're in your 30s and 40s … When you're 50, they see all their ideas as better than your ideas because yours are old. … It’s always seen

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
that the good ideas are the prerogative of the young, and I don’t think that’s necessarily so … (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Harry (discussing his new workplace) stated:

I find young people today don’t want to do the hard yards. They do not want to start at the bottom and work up, they want to go straight to the top without really learning the business … The younger people I’ve had, have certainly been the bigger problem. A couple of them have since left because they didn’t really fit into the culture (Harry, interview notes 2009).

He continued:

I’ve got a few that work for me, I’ve got some fairly smart, bright ones because I went and recruited deliberately for graduates. Probably, the youngest I’ve got is 22, who’s the biggest problem … The last two years, she’s got no performance pay … not on her ability to do the work, but the way she talks and lack of respect for people (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I (Colin) also perceived that my university students’ would display a stereotyped disrespect for older workers. I would often engage in discussions and perceive youth attitudes such as:

“Oh yeah, but you’re old, you can’t use the computer” and I’d say “Well hang on, I have five children and my computer skills are better than any of them. How old is Bill Gates?” – “Oh, ah yeah, 50-something” (Colin).

In Bill’s new job, he perceived an age division. He previously stated that he believed the young excluded the old, and did not want to bond. To reiterate:

It is obvious that the young people deliberately exclude us oldies. We, in our 50s - and even 40s - aren’t encouraged to mix with the 20-somethings, and it is as if we are singled out and certainly not part of the younger in-crowd. You really aren’t made to feel like you have anything in common with them and "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
Chapter 6 - A deeper investigation into the findings

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certainly nothing to offer. The attitude of the young is that we’ve passed our ‘use-by-date’. … I’ve really noticed it more and more since I reached 50 (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Charles supported this. He said:

*Why don’t people talk to you? Am I too old because I’m 20 years older than most of these people?* (Charles, interview notes 2009).

John (as a PhD student) also noted the social disposition which favoured youth. He related earlier (p. 167) that he overheard staff room comments along the lines of:

*“Oh isn’t it good, we’re getting bright young people into our PhD program now” … it was just this sort of underlying attitude, “we want bright young people”* (John, interview notes 2010).

Bill also perceived an anomaly in youth performance and stated that the workplace should value all age groups. He spoke specifically of Generation Y:

*They’ll bring in new ideas and move on somewhere else … then how do you nurture some of that corporate culture, how do you then make sure that when the next lot come along … there’s something there, some corporate knowledge or corporate culture … synergies. … But what you can do is make sure that those that you recruit actually will fit, have an organisational fit that bring along new ideas. But that doesn’t belong only to the young; it actually belongs to anyone, any rational person* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

**Summary**

All the thesis participants perceived that youth were being promoted into positions above their expertise and skill base, but this appeared to have little effect when stereotypes and prejudice restricted older people’s entry and/or retention. A number of participants also perceived an entrenched societal and organisational focus on youth culture which excluded the older person from workplace participation.
The thesis participants revealed that they believed that they were disrespected and excluded by youth who formed elitist cliques. They also believed their personal input and value of contribution was frequently rejected and commensurately degraded. They projected that youth had an elevated estimation of their own value and this was supported by employers and the social promotion of a focus on youth and beauty. Subsequent damage was indicated by Hassell and Perrewé (1993; in literature review) who claimed that negative labelling affected one’s ability to conduct a strong and focused job search.

**Using older people as consultants and mentors**

Bill also related how he believed that he was pushed aside to make way for youth but, because of his expertise, was asked to return as a consultant. He believed that this indicated that he had the skills to do the job, but was in someone’s way. This theme of having to make way for youth is continued by Bill:

*When I came back and sat on this advisory panel … they called in their consultants to have the talk, I looked around that table and here were all these young non-indigenous people, and I looked at them and I thought “s***, where’s the indigenous people first of all, where are the ones with the experience of indigenes?” Then I thought, well I shouldn’t open my mouth because it’s … because they don’t have any experience, is why they’ve brought in consultants* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill then related how his new workplace displayed a preference for youth over experience, but used older people as mentors to promote youth development. He stated how this was different to his public service experience. He said:

*I think that there is a prejudice for young people. I’ve noticed … where I work now … they’re looking at how end-career professionals can mentor new careers, and I find that in itself is as though the person is about to be put out to pasture. However, there’s one thing … they actually will accept*

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previous professionals back as ‘Fellows’ whereby they can come and actually do experiments and do work on projects. However … within the public service, that certainly isn’t catered for (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill further claimed that his previous public service department’s director openly recruited and promoted younger people. He added:

He would have been late 30s, early 40s, and I think what he wanted to do was surround himself with upcoming, bright rising stars, but some of them turned out to be ‘mon-stars’ (Bill, interview notes 2008).

The selection/promotion of youth was viewed by Bill, setting his generalisations aside, as a short-term solution. He related his frustration by stating:

Short-term future, yes … let’s get a young up-comer … rather than maturity – maturity means death, and therefore, you only get brain-deads sort of thing … (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Charles also reacted to seeing younger applicants gain promotion without his level of qualifications. Although resilient and eventually breaking through the promotion barrier, he said:

I’ve gone through those interviews; equally as well qualified … two years struggling to find work, watching other people get work … in the meantime, I got all the sessional work (Charles, interview notes 2009).

**Summary**

The participants indicated that while they were being rejected and displaced in the workplace, they were also being asked to support, promote, and mentor younger lesser qualified workers. This brought a level of dismay to the participants who had been informed that others had better qualifications and skills, and yet needed to be supported by previous occupiers of the job (or older outsiders). This appeared to be

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a blatant display of support for youth and beauty, and questions must be asked regarding prejudices, and on what criteria the recruitment was based.

**Post-failure feedback**

It is accepted normal procedure, particularly for professional positions, to seek feedback in order to gauge one’s performance and make improvements to achieve success in future job selection processes. However, the general perception of all the participants, based on their experiences, was that feedback was often weighted, biased, and non-transparent and, in many instances, only inflamed the anger and frustration that one felt as a result of rejection.

In relation to the business development position in the government department (in Colin’s story), I repeat that I asked for feedback and was informed that the selection panel chair was on leave for 10 months. I persevered and after a number of what I perceived to be deterrence tactics, I wrote to the Departmental Minister. As a result, I did eventually receive feedback, which to say the least was pathetic, with invalid claims that I did not have a basic understanding of how to manage a business. My reaction was one of total frustration:

*Business management; I was teaching it at Uni. I had an MBA, I’d run my own businesses for 16 years. How can they make a claim like that? I may have even taught a number of their senior managers!* (Colin).

I believed the feedback to be so inaccurate, insulting, and fabricated that I was determined to take the issue further:

*I went to my solicitor and we formally requested ‘freedom of information’. We discovered folios missing out of my file. When we questioned this, they displayed such a ‘how dare you question us’ arrogance, and such a condescending attitude to my complaint, that every minute issue became extremely protracted. I eventually dropped my complaint because I couldn’t afford the legal costs* (Colin).

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Harry related a similar public service story:

I went for a job … got an interview. The guy came in and said, ‘you’ve got 30 minutes to tell us how good you are’. That was the interview … no interaction with the interview panel. So, I went through the selection criteria. He said very good … got the result that was pretty much like yours [my above paragraph] and tried to follow up, got nowhere, but I had a friend that worked there … he said “I’m pretty sure they’ve got you mixed up with somebody else.” Because at the interview, it went well, I had all the answers to what they were on about … excellent referee comments from very senior people. And then got this report back, you know, I had no understanding on this issue, none on that … (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry received feedback subsequent to another rejection. He added:

The reason why I didn’t get the job was because the panel’s view was that I didn’t have knowledge of the current industrial relations issues and just prior to that … I’d spent quite a lot of time in the IR courts … I knew it very well. So, I just thought, you just know when you walk in, that you’re wasting your time. You feel like saying “Oh, let’s not go through the farce, I’ll just go rather than waste everybody’s time.” You know, you’ve got good referee reports etc., so they just make up something (Harry, interview notes 2009).

John stated that when feedback was forthcoming, it always claimed that the successful applicant was better qualified. I asked if he had reason not to believe this. He said:

Well, I didn’t get enough not to believe it. They always say, ‘oh sorry, you were a good applicant, but we had a lot of good applicants and we chose the best’. When you look at the person they chose, you think, ‘come on, you’ve got to be kidding’ … I got despondent about it, a bit despairing … I just sort of felt, well, just as hopeless, because I’d been discriminated against, so it

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doesn’t matter what I do, I’m never going to get a job, I’m never going to get one of these jobs, so I gave up (John, interview notes 2010).

Charles said he received feedback that claimed that others ‘interviewed better than he did, and all those bulls*** responses’ (Charles, interview notes 2009).

**Summary**

All the participants (including myself) displayed dismay at the perceived anomalous employment decisions to which we were subjected. We all voiced our belief that the recruiter and agency feedback was nothing more than a cover-up for their lies, and a possible desire to hide behind the lack of transparency and lack of legislation which may have protected them.

It is important here to repeat Commissioner Ryan’s claim (see Malcolm, 2011, in the literature review) which underlined the difficulties surrounding the exposure of this topic. I will also repeat Ryan’s statement (in Kelly, 2012, in the literature review), that there has not been a single successful case brought under the age discrimination legislation.

**The uncertainty of not knowing the real reason behind workplace discrimination**

I have many times heard it offered in general discourse that obviously, the organisation is not going to tell you that they are discriminating against you. This then leaves one to determine, over time, whether in fact this was indeed a possibility and/or whether one was subject to individual biases and jealousies (and maybe someone’s misguided perception that promoting youth is a new form of political correctness)? However, with mounting evidence and unexplained workplace anomalies, doubt emerges which leads to a range of personally felt feelings and reactions and the inevitable ‘dawning’ belief that it is not simply perception, but a deeply felt and damaging reality.

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John considered that, quite possibly, he wasn’t discriminated against in the public service. He said:

*I left the public service on a voluntary redundancy … I don’t think I suffered age discrimination, as such, during my time in the public service, although looking back on it, I’m not quite sure, but at the time, I certainly was not seeing it as age discrimination … so I’m not really feeling I was discriminated against in the public service, but I don’t know, it’s a bit hard to disentangle* (John, interview notes 2010).

John further suggests doubt and confusion. He said:

*People in line departments were stuck in their ways and wouldn’t change, and you needed fresh blood. Now, at the time, I saw myself as a victim of that … I guess disentangling that from age would be difficult anyway … many of us who’d been in the department had very strong ideas about how things could be changed, but had never been asked … at the time, I saw this as the reason for being passed over, not age as such. Was age a factor in that, who knows?* (John, interview notes 2010).

Harry said:

*It’s pretty hard when you get to the more senior levels to ever, I think, pinpoint it strictly to age. I think that’s probably a 50% factor, but it’s always “Oh, we want renewal in the organisation” … you don’t know what’s in their mind. … In senior management … a lot of the skills were transferable. Some of them were quite specific to roles that I’d performed and, in most cases, you didn’t get an interview* (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry continued with the perception that it was age, but couldn’t guarantee this opinion:

*And often, it probably is, but you could never say, well, it definitely is … it’s not absolute. And I had some good friends who were probably in their 60s, “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.*
they were a few years older … and you think why? … They've done an excellent job, why have they been suddenly shoved out the door? You can never really work out why they were being got rid of, it wasn't as though they'd made a mess of their job, they'd done an excellent job and you'd say why are they being got rid of? (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I suggested it was to make space. Harry responded affirmatively:

Somebody else, and often it was a favoured sycophant or something like that. That was what you'd see a lot of. You know, they'd probably be 10 years younger or something and do what the boss wants, rather than give them honest advice. You used to see that all the time (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Charles related a similar attitude in mid-level academia. He said:

Yeah, except for senior lecturers and associate professors – or hardened old bastards, and they trade freely in them. They don't trade freely at the entry stage (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Harry related his belief than the public service had no interest in recruiting an older worker and may have already pre-selected a younger applicant. He spoke of his difficulty in finding work in his home city:

Here, you really don't have any choice for employment other than the public service. For me there wasn't. I did try an outside … [name deleted] foundation. That was the only one, and again, far more professional, good response, good interview, gave me good feedback, whereas in the public service, you're normally interviewed by somebody that's half your age, and just really rude and not interested. And you're sure that they've got somebody that they know earmarked for the job already, some friend that's already working there with them (Harry, interview notes 2009).

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Harry again on the public service:

Another one I went to ... I actually knew the guy that was interviewing; I'd employed him many years before and his whole philosophy was (he was younger than me) ... you're older and you wouldn't cope with the stress of being out there in the field ... I did all my own landscaping, manual work, was a bit of a fitness person at that stage. And they make these presumptions ... he would have known my age, not that you ever put your age on your thing [CV] ... So that was another indication I thought clearly where they just didn't want an older experienced person, and yet when you see the reports ... it says all the time, it's lacking the people with knowledge of the management system (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I related earlier (on page 187) an experience in connection to a mid-level position that I had applied for in the business development section of a federal government department:

*I ran my own businesses for 16 years; I have an MBA and teach business management at Uni. I believe I know business pretty well! They interviewed 11 people and I was graded 11th. They assessed me as E on each criterion, which is the lowest grading and totally unsuitable. And yet at interview, they asked just basic questions which I answered absolutely straight off the cuff, and so they asked if they could contact my referees. Now, there's an anomaly here. If they ask to contact your referees, they're giving you a definite indication that they want to take the application further. So what happened? (Colin).*

**Summary**

All the participants indicated experiences relating to our struggle to have achievements and attributes recognised in the workplace, but as postulated within the literature review and the stories, these often appeared to be questioned and rejected in favour of the younger and lesser qualified and experienced.

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Workplace socialisation

Social expectations relating to the work function have an indelible correlation with work and workplace socialisation, and as the earlier literature by Peretti, et al (2006), Liem and Liem (1988), Jahoda (1981-4) and Cole, et al (2009), plus others, clearly indicates, have been confirmed and supported by the participants in this thesis.

Bill believed that it was not just the organisation, but extended to society in general:

I think it is part of the thing whereby society as a whole ... seems to think that you don't have anything to contribute any longer ... and it makes you angry ... what's my self-worth? What's my contribution? ... (Bill, interview notes 2008).

He continued:

When you're sitting on the outside looking in, you realise that the whole work psyche depends on a number of requirements being met, one of which is socialisation ... and I think that is very absent from this place, and has been absent for a while. I've really noticed it more and more since I reached 50 (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Summary

The literature review revealed that although discrimination in its many forms is illegal, it becomes non-transparent when the decision is conveyed to the unsuccessful applicant. It was projected in the participants’ stories that an employer holding prejudices against any person or group would not be inclined to relate the real reason for a negative employment decision. Again, please note Ryan’s comments above (in Malcolm, 2011; and Kelly, 2012).

Factors which may impede the job search and relate to self-esteem

The emotional reactions related to the stress associated with job loss or inability to obtain suitable employment may inhibit a person’s ability to search and secure suitable future employment. It is claimed that the demoralisation and despair related "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
to work or economic problems triggers distress which has biological, physiological, and psychological correlates. It was cited in the literature review (Guindon & Smith, 2002; Peretti, 1986; Shelton, 1985; Zawada, 1980, in Shelton; plus others) that when loss of any significant magnitude is experienced, grieving is a common reaction, with job loss being no exception.

Bill said his experience debilitated him. He said:

*Counselling does help, it eases the anguish and eases the lack of self-worth, and I'm starting to re-grow my self-esteem. There's only one person, I can only do that myself. There's nothing out there, I'm constantly looking around, as to now how do I feel, my self-worth, and how and if no-one's going to recognise me for what I contribute, why should I do it? I have no doubt that would be to my own detriment because of the fact I've got the sack* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Bill questioned his self-worth. His words were:

*… you've got to get back to self and if self is not good … well then you could be up shit creek. I think that somewhere along the line, if you think you're worthy, then you've got to prove it* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

He added:

*You've got to believe it yourself because after you get kicked in the guts … you can take so much kicking and then you collapse … I get anxious now because if I'm going into a new project, my self-worth and my self-esteem have been shot so much I start getting anxious … because I think what happens if this fails? They'll sack me … and I start to panic over little things* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

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Harry also said:

> Four or five months I think I was unemployed. Probably initially, didn't want to be employed, sort of went into my shell pretty much after the experience … sort of retreated … I was sort of pretty buggered mentally from the whole experience (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry continued:

> Trying to get back into the workforce, I just hit a brick wall. … didn't sit around moping about it, but went and spoke to a lady … runs a business in sort of helping people to get re-employed … gives you positive encouragement. … Mentors you and sort of looks at jobs and sees whether you fit them or not (Harry, interview notes 2009).

> In senior management, a lot of the skills were transferable. Some of them were quite specific to roles that I'd performed and, in most cases, you didn't get an interview. Probably three within the public service and one outside. And the ones in the public service, the minute you walk in, you know you're history. You can just tell. I think also they're threatened by your experience. … So, I probably then became fairly, you know, despondent, what am I going to do, am I going to have to go back into self-employment? (Harry, interview notes 2009).

On the issue of attempting to re-enter the workforce at the wrong level, Harry said:

> When you go for the middle management level, you're just wiped …. They won't say you're overqualified, because they know if they said that, you'd have them for discrimination, but they've always got some reason. Some of the interviews were quite pathetic, the questions they asked you. They just really were just going through the motions, you could tell … (Harry, interview notes 2009).

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John added:

I guess I felt, well if I am not going to get a job because of my age, I don’t need the money, why am I banging my head against a brick wall? (John, interview notes 2010).

Summary

The thesis participants indicated an array of responses in relation to the new job search. The damage inflicted upon each of us through dislocation or rejection brought on impairment, as did the negative feedback. I have continued to attempt to acquire more qualifications and to what eventual end, I can only hypothesise. John didn’t need the money and was contented with a position which satisfied his self-esteem and ego.

Attempting to re-enter the workforce at any level appeared to create a conundrum, as the evidence viewed in the literature review revealed that one’s own perception of their possible entry level might be distorted, as might also be the perception of the recruiter (Hassell & Perrewé, 1993).

Residual and legacy effect relating to the level and quality of the new job

It was indicated in the literature review (Peretti et al., 1986, quoting Baskin, 1975; Bennington, 2004) that those who found work subsequent to job displacement, experienced improved health and well-being as opposed to those who remained unemployed; however, the literature review predominantly asserted that poor emotional functioning subsequent to, or in the face of, unemployment significantly interfered with job search activities. The emotional recovery after re-employment required that the new job be seen at least as favourably as the previously held position (Kessler et al., 1989). This job insecurity was associated with the earlier depression and somatisation among the re-employed. It was also identified that re-employed people who held insecure jobs were significantly more depressed than the stably employed participants, suggesting that re-employment does not fully relieve unemployment-related distress if future unemployment is anticipated. Feelings of

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personal failure and doubts about the ability to perform adequately in their new jobs were particularly common among the recently re-employed (Kessler et al., 1989), and the words of a number of my participants support this hypothesis. Bill claimed that he feared a repeat of the critical judgement of his abilities, while I feel that I may have residual effects from my experiences in that I do personally hold a degree of resentment towards youth, and to employers who I feel have discriminated against me - particularly so in the public service.

Evidence cited earlier by Guindon and Smith (2002), Kessler et al. (1989), Sightler et al. (1996), and Zawada (1980, in Shelton, 1985) provided data that indicated that employment set-backs have a negative impact on both confidence and subsequent interviews, and have the potential to create a legacy effect. For example, a victim may hold negative feelings towards future potential employers and others who may be perceived as potential perpetrators of further rejection. If this were the case, there could then be the possibility that these negative effects may be perceived (spotted) by potential employers who then restrict appointment. Simply stated, when people experience ongoing rejection, it makes it difficult to exude confidence in an interview, or possibly, in workplace performance. In relation to my short re-entry into the public service (on contract in 2003), I offer the following perception:

*Unfortunately, my assessment of the correct entry level may have been very much off-beam and apart from a 12 month contract at two lower-level positions (4 and 5), I found nothing permanent. I do believe in the possibility that my supervisors in these contract positions may have felt threatened because I possessed considerably more, and higher, job relevant qualifications than them. One of my supervisors did display behaviour commensurate with this perception, and I certainly developed a degree of antipathy towards him and others within the public service who I believed were deliberately holding me back (Colin).*

Harry suggested that in order to overcome discrimination against perceptions of over-experience and being overly-qualified, one would need to reduce their skills and qualifications in a job application. He said:

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So I thought, do I put these in my application, or do I downplay my experience? That's what you start doing. You start cutting back on things (Harry, interview notes 2009).

**Summary**

The participants indicated a mixed level of reactions and expectations in their attempts to find new work. They had all experienced a degree of shock and anger and a range of fears relating to their future employment prospects together with other commitments, be it family, or finance (or other).

**Is discrimination only at certain levels?**

As reported earlier, Wright (2012, in Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing Productive Ageing Centre, June 2013) conducted a study on the salary-discrimination correlation of workers over the age of 50. This indicated that there appeared to be a greater level of discrimination at the mid-levels than at the higher levels.

As also indicated above, I discovered a major dilemma in not actually knowing what level position to apply for. Having a wide range of qualifications and wider worldly experiences, I considered that I had to be a long way ahead of a young novice fresh from school without experience and qualifications. However (particularly in the public service), apart from the perception of the promotion of youth and beauty, and the imposition of this, there also appeared to be an old-school attitude of seniority, which protected incumbents from usurpers from outside (such as myself).

Therefore, for a little surety and what I considered safety reasons, I applied at the mid-level range believing that once appointed, I would no doubt rise rapidly up the professional ladder. I relate the following:

*In my experience, having professional and tertiary qualifications also posed a problem as although I made sure that my experience and qualifications always more than related and equated to the position, I couldn't break through at any level. This created a conundrum of not knowing what level position to*

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apply for. Should I apply for higher level positions commensurate with my qualifications and experience, or should I apply for a lower level and work my way up? Problem being, I believe, is that I just wasn’t tuned in to the system and wasn’t aware of what I later perceived as old-school attitude to protect the incumbent from outsiders (Colin).

Of significant relevance to my dilemma of not knowing the correct level to apply for, Harry related the following. He said:

*I think I made the error of trying to re-enter the workforce at a lower level than what I really wanted to be at. I didn’t want to be at the higher level any more. And when you go for the middle management level, you’re just wiped* (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry’s words add weight to the above perception that discrimination is more evident at the mid-range levels. I asked him why he was unsuccessful in obtaining work at this level, when he had been very successful in the higher positions. He added:

*I think it was two-fold … over-qualified, over-experienced. Because of the battering I’d taken, I thought I don’t want to be in senior management any more. Applied for sort of lower-level jobs, most of them you don’t even get an interview. I got probably two interviews and you could tell the minute they walked in when they saw your age, you were just written off … trying to get back into the workforce. I just hit a brick wall* (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I asked him how many applications this related to. He said:

*Probably, it’d be fifteen I suppose. Often you’d never hear … I reckon probably half, you’d never get a response … which I think is extremely rude and unprofessional* (Harry, interview notes 2009).

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I asked Harry why he believed he was over-qualified and over-experienced:

... you just knew that they really weren’t interested, they were just interviewing because, on paper, you met the criteria and they had to do it (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry stated that he would usually ‘feel’ the job out first:

You’d want to see whether you were wasting your time or not, so you’d ring them up, have a bit of a discussion, they’d encourage you to apply and be really positive, and then they were normally the ones you’d never get any response from at all. A couple of times you’d ring the contact number and the person would never ring you back (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry previously related an incident which he believed indicated youth prejudice in a job interview. It is relevant to repeat it here:

I went to one job … it used to be industrial relations branch, you know that used to deal with all employment, industrial relations issues, set the policies etc. I went in there and the person … fairly young, and she said “Oh why would you be applying for this job with your experience?” and I said “Well why wouldn’t I?” She said “Oh well, you know, you’d just be bored in it, you wouldn’t like it.” And that was her whole attitude. But I know that there was a sort of an older guy on the panel and I could tell he was really embarrassed by what was being said, but it didn’t make any difference at the end of the day (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry also previously related his interview experiences. This is again repeated:

Probably got three within the public service and one outside, and the ones in the public service, the minute you walk in, you know you’re history. You can just tell (Harry, interview notes 2009).

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Harry then clarified that he believed the problem was probably due more to over-experience than to over-qualification, and added that he believed this was a naturally occurring legacy which came with age. He confirmed that all the departments and agencies had many highly-qualified people and that the discrimination related to ‘over-experience’. He stated:

To be at that level in the public service, normally you’re reasonably well qualified, they’d have at least one degree in something or other, probably something irrelevant, but they’d have a degree. I just don’t think they like people more experienced than them. And you know, because you’re older and you’ve been around, you’re naturally going to be more experienced than what they are (Harry, interview notes 2009).

As identified by Harry, an organisation is not going to indicate that they will not employ you because they consider you too old, over-qualified, or over-experienced, and certainly in my own case, it was impossible to pinpoint. I (Colin) was aware that a conundrum existed and one area that surfaced as a problem was related to the level of entry.

I had professional qualifications and considerable experience in a variety of areas, which I believe could well have positioned me into upper-level professional positions. But I did have a basic lack of understanding of public service ‘inside information’ which could only be gained through immersion in the culture of the public service. I’d heard that the public service were very insular and very protective of their own, and it wasn’t easy to enter at the higher professional levels unless the department/section were actually looking for outside blood to promote or inject a different mindset and direction. Then again, was it reasonable that I should apply for lower (school entry) levels which I might find boring and unchallenging and which quite well demand very little expertise and knowledge (Colin).

I had to consider the possibility that with my background I might, quite inadvertently, intimidate and scare a base-level supervisor. I attempted to address this conundrum by applying for mid-range positions (ASO 6 to EL1).

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old“. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
These were well within the scope of my background, and would provide a challenge and an upward focus into the Senior Executive Service if I continued to develop my academic and workplace progression (or so I thought) (Colin).

Summary

Having a personal feeling and understanding of the correct level to apply for a work position is certainly a serious conundrum and possible impediment, and well worth further research and investigation. The literature on this particular issue is sparse; however, I personally discovered a considerable dilemma, as did Harry. I explained in my story that I felt a conundrum which I believed restricted my entry into the higher levels of employment (commensurate with my qualifications and experience), as certain factors such as knowledge of certain workplace cultures and mores might affect and limit my performance. I therefore considered that it would be best if I applied below the level I believed my skills would facilitate and would, or should no doubt (I thought), be rapidly promoted to my correct level. I now recognise this as a mistake, but also recognise that, regardless, my entry may have been blocked because of workplace culture, as exemplified above. The input of Harry, who believed that age discrimination was not present at the higher levels, and only existed at the mid-levels, is relevant here, as it indicates that quite possibly, I should have attempted to gain entry at the higher level. This conundrum poses serious questions of recruiters and agencies and how they handle the qualified and experienced applicant. It must also be asked if this situation affects only the individual or has implications for organisations and wider society, who are missing out on experience and skills.

Obtaining more qualifications

Of particular relevance to all the interview participants in this thesis, is the manner in which we all approached and achieved (in varying forms) re-employment. Charles, John, Harry, Bill, and I had all been informed, subsequent to employment rejection, that others were better qualified. It therefore occurred to both Bill and I that we needed more qualifications to compete with the younger applicants. We both went

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
through a range of behaviours in order to cope, and did attempt to deal with this
dilemma head-on in a very positive manner.

In believing the claim that maybe he did not have enough qualifications, Bill (like me) enrolled in a Master’s degree. He considered that if he was not competitive in the labour market, then he would make himself more competitive. He said:

> I had to pull myself up by my bootstraps … I went and did a Masters, started
> my Masters. … I’m always trying to assess what’s my self-worth? What’s my
> contribution to this organisation? I feel that I’m more obliged to do that now
> and raise the profile now, more so than ever, because I’m not being noticed
> (Bill, interview notes 2008).

... in this 50 bracket, you find that people have a tendency to ignore you ... so what I’m looking for ... to ensure my saleability as a worker, maybe do another degree, a Masters or something. But how many times do you need to do that to prove yourself? I only had a Bachelor’s degree, and so I thought, well maybe they are right, these young kids coming through with qualifications coming out of their ears. Maybe I did need to catch up. I enrolled in my MBA and finished in record time. I thought ’now you bastards try and tell me that I’m underqualified’ ... Didn’t do me any good though, I’d expected doors to open and opportunities to come flying my way, but nothing happened. I won’t be holding my breath in anticipation (Bill, interview notes 2008).

**Summary**

The recruitment lie that others were better qualified tended to make one more aware of possible personal qualification deficiencies and created an urgent need to become more marketable and competitive.

Harry was happy to take a lower-level position, and it was here that he discovered age discrimination. Both Bill and I attempted to become more competitive, believing that, quite possibly, the feedback was true, and that others may have been better qualified. Obtaining higher and better qualifications proved fruitless and tended to indicate (or be interpreted as) false advice and misrepresentation. "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
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Hiding qualifications and experience

As perceived from the participants' words above, a workplace qualification and experience conundrum appears to exist. In furthering this perception, I related earlier (p. 123) that I was advised at a public service job application writing course to “reduce your [my] qualifications and obscure your [my] age”, as each of these factors would not assist my chances. The instructor stated that it was not in my best interests to go into the interview with better qualifications than the bosses. Other participants experienced similar issues, particularly when dropping to applications for mid-level positions (see Harry’s earlier contribution on lower-level discrimination).

Harry also related that his four degrees and experience were not an advantage, as it appeared to frighten the interviewing panel. This was a far cry from the principles of education expounded at school, whereby we were told to gain the best education possible in order to achieve. He said:

*I'm an engineer … I've got a graduate certificate in management … a graduate diploma … and a Masters of business. … So I thought, do I put those on (my resume), do I downplay my experience? That's what you start doing. You start cutting back on things* (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Summary

The above section propounds an unfortunate recruitment lie, and when balanced with the school system that informed us that education equated to success, one has to question today’s society when we have to deny and hide our merits to obtain work.

A different attitude. A healthy experience in a non-discriminatory organisation

Not all organisations discriminate and not all older persons’ experiences are negative. Harry related a contrary perspective when he moved away from his own perceived tumultuous public service experiences and finally obtained work in a

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
different state. Under the mentoring of the CEO, Harry’s new organisation promoted a culture of tolerance, and frowned on any form of age discrimination. Harry claimed that there was ongoing support of older workers. He said:

So, we're pretty mindful, we try and get a good balance between young and old. We do have an age problem. If you look at our age profile, it's very high (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry continued to relate how some young people make comments on older people's abilities, to which the CEO reacts. He said:

Younger people … [because a number of the roles are very physical] … often make the comment "Oh, he's too old", and [the CEO] will say "Well, we all get older, we've got to respect that people age and we've got to do things differently." You know, if activities are required to be done, you've got to look at the way you do them smarter, rather than just write people off (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry continued:

He certainly makes comments about not discriminating against people … he's younger than me … about eight years younger. But when people make comments about people's age, he certainly comes down on them. In the United States, age and experience are revered and seen as a positive, whereas in Australia it's not, it's seen as a negative (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Even in Harry's new organisation, he still related how younger people’s workplace attitudes had to be held in check. When I asked for clarification he said:

Oh well … computer skills, the younger ones are always throwing that at us. Because certain people in our organisation had the vision of being a paperless organisation … You'd need to be careful because the people in the workshops, the older people, couldn't use computers. They couldn't

"No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
even switch them on ... So, we had to very quickly beat a retreat and go back to having hard-copy manuals and books on the shelves. And I said, people have come from a different era. I said I can remember when I was in the public service, we never had computers. We would have been the first group that went through getting computers and having to use computers. I said that's how recent it is. I said we ... [current organisation – name deleted] have got people ... in their 70s ... we have award nights twice a year for length of service, and we've had awards at 50 and 55 years ... You don't find many organisations today that have that length of service. Most of our people would be above 45 ... which is a bit of a worry, because a lot of them are now wanting to retire. When you're 70, I don't think I'd want to be working. But they're having to carry on working, because there hasn't been the young people coming through (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Summary
The example given above relates a positive workplace experience whereby common sense prevails and merit determines that the best person for the job is recruited and employed. This example enables individuals, society, and organisations to perceive the influences of good management and to overcome the potential influences and damage that other management styles, which incorporate prejudice and discrimination, project.

Masculinity: Male identity and its connection to work
As this study is specifically about men, I will commence this section by telling a story about Japanese men and society (please note that according to Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, Japanese society is considered to be the most masculine of cultures across the globe). Although this story is about a different culture, and what might be perceived as a different mindset, it does reveal issues of despair and despondency at the extreme, and does certainly have a psychological connection with the participants in this study.

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I arrived in Japan in February 2000 to take up an English teaching position with a then prominent language school. I resided on the outskirts of Tokyo in the suburb of Karasuyama and travelled to my language school at Shinjuku every day by express train. One morning, when I approached the railway station on my way to work, I became aware of an extraordinarily large crowd and flashing lights at the railway crossing next to the station. Someone in the crowd told me that a businessman had just committed suicide by throwing himself in front of an express train. I stayed in Tokyo for three months and became aware that this was quite a common occurrence. I was informed, through a number of social discussions, that a failing Japanese businessmen had more than just lost his job, his livelihood, and his ability to look after his family, he had also ‘lost face’! I was advised that losing work (and face) was certainly dishonourable, and death thus became a far more viable option as a result.

This event repeated itself at the Karasuyama crossing a couple of weeks before I left Tokyo. The Japanese certainly had a different perspective to the West in regard to suicide, and I was informed in social discussion, that the religion of Shinto and the lifestyle of Buddhism did not display the stigma towards suicide of our Western Christian religions.

The 1997 Asian economic crisis saw many Japanese organisations suffer considerable financial loss and many Japanese executives found themselves out of work and unable to support their families. The loss of face was a considerable and significant factor in what became known as the Chuo Express (the orange cross-Tokyo express) Syndrome.

This is the true life story of a culture whose men, when suffering self-esteem issues and loss of face, take actions into their own hands and bow out of life. Although people in the western world also use this option, they are far more likely to undertake a variety of other outlets in order to cope with job loss and loss of male self-esteem. Alcohol, depression, anxiety, aggression, sadness and comorbid reactions, family life disintegration, changes in lifestyle relating to time allocation, and various levels of embitterment all too frequently follow the loss of work, and although they sometimes

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result in suicide, they condemn the man to a struggle that they have little option but to endure.

The manhood obligation (or distortion) in the Australian context was evident in the words of a number of participants. Bill was quite outspoken regarding his sudden inability to look after his family, and his words are repeated here (from p. 140) to exemplify this dilemma.

As a man and breadwinner, I had the responsibility to look after my wife and family. It might be the traditional perspective, but that is why I was put on this earth. And for ‘heaven’s sake’, that is why I’m a man. I couldn’t have this taken away from me – no-one had the right to destroy my manhood. I believe in equal opportunity and the best person for the job etc, but what is all this bulls*** about being a female, so they must have the job? Being young, so they must have the job? Being an Aboriginal, so they must have the job etc? This is bulls***. I was the best and I’d proven it time and time again. So, why didn’t I get it? Not only were my abilities being questioned, so was my manhood. How could I have a beer at the pub with my mates and not feel shame and look for the closest rock to crawl under? (Bill, 3rd interview 2010).

I (Colin) also had a manhood obligation which I have, for many years, been unable to fulfil. I cannot emphasise just how debilitating this dilemma is, and has been for me:

I found that I am unable to live anything resembling a normal life because of the financial restrictions that unemployment, under-employment, and low-paid employment have placed on me. I am lucky that I have a very loving and supportive girlfriend who takes care of many of the financial encumbrances in our lives and has also been the main provider of social outings and activities (travel, restaurants etc). As a baby-boomer man who was traditionally brought up to feel the need to be supportive of a wife and family, I am being forced to live with the feelings that I am myself being supported and using another human being for my survival. I often hold quite intense feelings of being quite useless and this does nothing for my ego and manhood. After all,

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what sort of man would allow his partner to bear the financial burden of living (and for how long)? (Colin).

Interesting concerns were raised in relation to masculinity and manhood issues earlier in this thesis (see Connell et al., 1985, 1999, 2000, 2005a, 2005b; and Komarovsky, 1973, in Wood, 2008, above). American author Sam Keen (1992), in his series ‘On Being a Man’, raised the topic of his personal examination of ‘A Spiritual Journey Into The Self’, in which he outlined his attempt to recognise and recover the elemental experience of what he believed was sacred in life. He discussed emotions such as wonder, gratitude, anxiety, joy, grief, reverence, compassion, outrage, hope, and humility. He discussed the relevance of recognising our position in life and the importance of honesty and values which question the positioning of masculinity in our modern everyday world, and which bring recognition that our lives are filled with many conundrums and obstacles which may blur our vision of, and mission in, life.

In a post-conference interview with Dr Eileen Stryker, Keen raised the issue of holding on to masculine values (Keen & Stryker, 2006), whereby he presented an interesting revelation on what males have to do to fulfil and maintain their values and integrity. He stated:

… if I am just a good adult and a good citizen, I have gone along with the policies of my government even when they meant pre-emptive (sic) war or something like that, and I haven’t really complained about that because they are the ordained authorities. And then the crisis comes at the point where I realize, “Hey, wait a minute, who am I really?” And I begin to ask those far ranging questions: “Who am I? What do I really want? What are my values? What am I willing to sacrifice for?” … (Keen & Stryker interview, 2006).

Keen et al. (2006, interview with Eileen Stryker) labelled this as the outlaw stage, and he continues by questioning the status quo and the politics underpinning manhood:

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in some sense, [it] is very selfish because I have lost myself in the body politic in being an adult and now I have to find out who I am. We go into what I call the lover's stage when we begin to ask: “How am I connected to other people? Who is the ‘we’ of I? To what community do I belong?” The answer is not that I belong to the American community. To go into the stage of compassionate love is to cease to be a patriot and to become a member of, as the Buddhists say, “the commonwealth of all sentient beings …” (Keen & Stryker interview, 2006).

The greater psychological effects on professionals (the bigger the fall)

The literature review (Peretti et al., 1986; Sightler et al., 1996; Tudor et al., 1996; Shacklock, 2005; and more) claimed that very little is known about the psychological effects of unemployment on professionals, and that the majority of the research on the damage and psychological effects has been largely based on non-professional and non-managerial employees. This thesis, however, has sampled a small group of professional men who have experienced the devastating and serious negative effects of job loss and unemployment. This research has the potential for expansion into both female unemployment, and wider afield, as a comparative study between countries.

The literature review (Redman & Snape, 2005; Shacklock, 2005; and more) indicated that current displacement from work affects older, better educated, and more qualified employees with longer job tenure than those who had previously lost their jobs. It was also revealed that the current trend is that of middle-level managers who lose their jobs at two to three times the rate of other employees, and that over 40% of all job losses during the early 1990s were white collar workers, therefore professionals, managers, and administrators. It has been further stated (Sightler et al., 1996) that as these professionals’ reactions to unemployment may differ, their adjustment to unemployment might affect their subsequent job search behaviours, coping skills, family relationships, and their personally-felt stress.

Bill related the damage to his self-esteem and credibility. He said:

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I started to feel as though I had been discriminated against. ... As a previous manager, I felt as though I had been insulted and I felt degraded. ... That certainly led me to a pretty rough patch; it actually blew a hole in my morale (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Peretti, et al (1986) claimed that the fall is greater for professional men. In relating this, Bill said:

*I fell a long way in a very short space of time. I was devastated. What had I done that was so wrong, how could this be happening?* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

He added a desperate plea for help:

*I don’t know how to get out of this hole ... I don’t know who to turn to for help?* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

**Summary**

The greater effect of professional male workplace dislocation was comprehensively discussed in the literature review by Redman and Snape (2005) and Shacklock (2005). This literature has associated the fall in status and prestige with depression, aggression, stress and despair, loss of self-esteem, and the guilt and shame of his new lower position and employment status. This literature also reiterates the relevance of the value of the construct of the manifest and latent functions of employment, as presented by Creed, Muller, and Machin (1999), Jahoda (1981, 1984); and Paul et al. (2010).

**Pride, ego and self-esteem**

The personal issues of pride and self-esteem are very important and relevant for one’s positioning within family, society, and the workplace. How we function in our

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daily interactions with others connected to us is a vital component of what make us individual and valuable as human beings.

Much was presented on this in the literature review. For example, Sluss et al. (2007) claimed that one's own development, performance, well-being, and self-esteem derive from interpersonal comparisons of traits, abilities, goals, and performance. They also claimed that self-esteem is derived from inter-group comparisons within the workplace. Woodward (2005, quoting Remly, 1991), in support, claimed that people derive self-esteem from employment and a person's locus of control has a direct bearing on the prospect of regaining employment.

This above submission is especially relevant to John who obtained an adjunct non-paid academic position. He said:

_In terms of self-esteem, it's been very important. That was my way of coping with negative feelings. I did something for which I got positive feedback and feelings of self-esteem - no money, but that wasn't an issue. ... A bigger issue here would have been feelings of self-esteem, but while I had a non-paid position, it bolstered me_ (John, interview notes 2010).

He continued:

_I could have almost certainly got work not commensurate with my qualifications. And I guess if I had been desperate for the money, I would have, and how that would have affected me, I can't tell you. What I did was, because I didn't need to work, I wasn't going to take anything that wasn't commensurate with my qualifications and ended up taking nothing. My loss perhaps, society's loss, I believe so, but you know that was how it came out. So, I'd say the main effect with age discrimination on me was to make me a discouraged job seeker who stopped looking for paid employment_ (John, interview notes 2010).

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John had only just finished his PhD and did expect to obtain a work position commensurate with his new ‘doctoral’ status. The fact that he didn’t was, he considered, an insult and an attack on his self-esteem. He said:

_I was a bit angrier, would have been a bit grumpier, was a bit moody … it does hit your self-confidence … I stopped applying for jobs. I became I suppose the classic discouraged job seeker. I was sick of banging my head against a brick wall_ (John, interview notes 2010).

### Self-efficacy, resilience and relevance of previous level (and expected level)

The literature review revealed older research on efficacy and resilience (Liem & Liem, 1988; Dooley et al., in Liem & Liem, 1988; Warr et al., in Liem & Liem, 1988). It was argued that workers do not simply experience the hardship imposed by unemployment, but actively contest the displacement and the conditions it creates. Bill said:

_One good thing about studying and making yourself more saleable, I guess, is that it updates your skills, like a lawyer, like an accountant, you have to do this continually. Lawyers do continuing legal education; accountants do their professional upgrades as well. … I guess, those of us that aren't in those professions still need to do that_ (Bill, interview notes 2008).

John said:

_Having become much less convinced that I was going to land a job, or a job I wanted, I ought to say, I do think I could have got a job if I'd needed it. I did look at one or two things, including a non-academic job, and I think there was one I could have got, but I decided I wouldn't particularly enjoy it. And I didn't see any point in doing a job that I didn't enjoy if I didn't need the money … I was still at this time applying for jobs, but much less hopeful about getting the sort of academic job I'd been looking for. At the same time, I didn't want_

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to do nothing and I guess I wanted to keep my hand in a bit (John, interview notes 2010).

Idleness and indolence

A factor which appeared to affect myself and my participants was not only the hopelessness of the situation subsequent to job loss, or job conflict, and the monumental endeavour to obtain new work, but the pain of the inactivity and indolence. I attempted to overcome this by occupying myself with endeavours to obtain more and higher qualifications (as I am now). I related the damage as such:

The damage to my very being has been quite dramatic and certainly long-term. My pride and ego have certainly taken a severe battering, with me at times actually believing and fearing that, quite possibly, I do not have the skills and abilities of others who are achieving (or why else would they be recruited and promoted and not me)? Despite on some occasions, when I experienced discrimination in my childhood, I was and have never been a person who considered that I was inferior to others. In fact, my competitive nature, which partially shaped my quite high-level sporting ability, coupled with many years of acquiring tertiary qualifications and achieving a higher level of education than most, has actually implanted totally contrary sentiments in me, a rite of passage that as a child I had been led to believe education and experience would bring and, I believe, I may have fully earned. But this was a new and devastating experience that completely took the wind out of my sails. I had no answer and knew no easy way of coping (Colin).

Bill related earlier how his confidence had been shattered and his self-esteem reduced to a new low level, he had fallen into the trap of looking for an escape outlet. The extent of damage to Bill’s ego and self-esteem is evidenced below. With Bill’s self-confidence shattered, he said:

Before, I feared nothing; I was full of confidence and approached all new projects positively and with a sense of adventure. I knew no-one else could

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do the job any better and I displayed this outward enthusiasm and positive approach to everyone. But after all this happened, well, you can only take so much kicking and then you collapse. You feel empty inside and this emptiness is with you all the time. I now get anxious because I think I'm going to fail again and get sacked again … My self-worth and self-esteem have been shot to pieces and I start to panic over little things. I feel as if I'm being watched over all the time, as if they are hoping that I'm going to fail. I feel useless and of no value or consequence to anyone. To top it all off, my health has suffered quite seriously and I now have atrial fibrillation … and I think it's all related (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Harry related how he suffered mental withdrawal after unemployment:

I was unemployed for about 4-5 months. Probably initially, I didn't want to be employed, sort of went into my shell pretty much after the experience … sort of retreated … I was pretty buggered mentally from the whole experience (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Summary
The mechanisms of how to cope subsequent to workplace dislocation is a major factor which received coverage in the literature review. It is sufficient here to say that this scenario affected all the thesis participants in different ways. Thoughts of suicide, counselling, alcohol, depression (and more), were all encompassed within this phase. I engaged myself with writing many job applications and furthering my education in the mistaken belief that this would benefit me, as my qualifications would be gratefully accepted, if not desired.

The professional man's personal drive to achieve

Personal drive and resilience in the face of perceived discrimination was prevalent with all the participants and appeared to have a connection to the above section on masculinity and power.

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When Charles was being denied opportunities that he believed were being given to younger applicants he reacted sternly. He said:

*They can’t do this to me and get away with it* (Charles, interview notes 2009).

He informed the academic hierarchy that:

*I still believe you are discriminating against me on age* (Charles, interview notes 2009).

His tenacity was quite intense. He continued:

*I was going to get that job and that was all there was to it. And because I want it, I’m going to get it* (Charles, interview notes 2009).

In my own instance, my own tenacity is evident with my academic history. I cannot get a full-time management position because I have not completed my PhD, and my chances of beating a younger person, when I do graduate, I have come to believe are quite slim. I base this on my experience in viewing younger, lesser qualified people march straight into academic positions, some on the back of undertaking a PhD, while many of course do not. As stated above, I also see younger people - in their 20s - come in with a new PhD and teach management.

*And yet I am tenacious. I am still studying (my PhD) and still hanging in there. Am I the eternal optimist? Am I wasting my time? Am I studying now so that employers and agencies can continue to lie to me that others are better qualified? How can that be so, when the academic paperwork is there in black and white for all to see, and my experience and skills jump out of my résumé? How can I possibly be less qualified and experienced than a kid fresh out of school?* (Colin).

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The need to seek counselling and intervention

Perceived workplace prejudice can manifest itself in severe psychological effects. These were covered in the literature review and reinforced through the stories related from the interview participants. A number of participants sought a range of avenues in an attempt to redress the psychological damage inflicted upon them.

Bill said:

*I spent my redundancy package on a combination of gambling and drinking and trying to work my way out, as to how I might pull myself up. But it was that niggling side, that niggling feeling of not being worthy, because of my age* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

*The anguish that I felt certainly has turned to (pause) has manifested itself in anger. The counselling that I'm getting at the moment is for the anger that I felt towards people whereby I was completely ignored for my contributions. My contributions came to nought ... So, the anger and my feelings of low self-esteem (pause), my feeling of being prejudiced against, is what I'm getting counselling for now. I think that it's the prejudice that is felt. That I didn't realise that it was so obvious ...* (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Harry had a similar experience and went to see his doctor who advised him to see a specialist. Harry said:

*My doctor said really, in the fairly emotional state I'd got into, I shouldn't deal with these issues because you don't think logically, and he got me to go and see a guy that specialised in separation, particularly from the public service (pause), has quite a raft of it, the way people are treated. You know, put under significant stress and things like that* (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry continued:

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I suppose I'm not a very patient person either, so 4 or 5 months really is a long time, particularly when all your working life you've been going 24/7, you know you work at a fairly frenetic pace in any job I'm in. … Long hours every day, so once that stops, there's something totally missing from your life … the thing that really keeps you going is gone. … So, went through that period, I had counselling from this psychologist … Felt pretty low. You lose your self-esteem to a large part. … Yeah I had depression (Harry, interview notes 2009).

He continued:

I think it still scars you, those experiences. Certainly from my perspective, scar you. And I don't think you ever forget them or get over them. Both times, I received counselling from my psychologist. … It does wear you down and certainly affects you from a psychological view and I received counselling … it's not unusual in [location deleted], they find people that are going through these sorts of issues, it's pretty prevalent … that then plays on your mind, you know, the way that they behave certainly affects you (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I related in my story how I recognise that I very personally hold a degree of resentment towards public servants and government departments. I contend that although this isn’t healthy and certainly not a condition I desire, we do react to situations which are presented to us by others, and my experiences with the public service and my perception of their lies leaves me with very poor and negative reactions and perceptions. The legacy effect is relevant here (see Redman & Snape 2005), and also significant are the findings of Pugh et al. (2003), who discovered residual psychological effects whereby an individual's contract violation by a former employer had a negative impact on their subsequent attitudes toward a potential new employer.

Summary

"No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
The literature review revealed that psychological damage in the advent of perceived discrimination and workplace rejection and dislocation can last for several years (AHRC, 2010; Peretti et al., 1986; Redman & Snape, 2005), and may have a serious negative impact on job search abilities. In other research presented earlier in this thesis, Peretti et al. (1986, quoting Baskin, 1975) and Bennington (2004) claimed that people who suffer a job loss and cannot relocate to suitable work, feel useless and inadequate, and suffer from increased physiological and psychological stress leading to increased psycho-physiological disorders.

Anger, despair, guilt, shame, stress, aggression, and more

I asked the participants how they felt about younger people advancing in the workplace with lesser qualifications and taking their jobs. Charles replied:

“Oh, I was just angry … angry, very angry. But there’s another side to me that people don’t understand. Once I set my teeth into you, you’re f**ked … They can’t do this to me and get away with it” (Charles, interview notes 2009).

The literature review indicated research which looked at anger and frustration and the many related outcomes from the fall in job status (Bennington, 2001; Guindon & Smith, 2002; Liem & Liem, 1988; Peretti et al., 1986; Wanberg, 2012). Research conducted in Germany explored the fall of high-ranking East German (DDR) businessmen and older professional workers after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. This research revealed that the employment status of the participants had dramatically fallen, with some delivering milk or driving taxis. The result was personally held embitterment, from the victims toward the system source, who they blamed for imposing this disadvantaged position upon them (Linden, 2003; Linden et al., 2008a, 2008b; Linden et al., 2009; Rotter, 2009).

The participants within this thesis have all expressed anger and frustration at their imposed predicament. Whether or not Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder is aligned with, or is a contributing factor to, these emotions is unknown, and will not be examined in this thesis. However, as the final words in the summary on the last

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section (above) suggest, I have claimed that we react to situations that we are presented with, and my experiences with certain people and organisations are not at all good.

**Mental health and consequences of negative emotions**

Poor mental health, depression, anxiety, embitterment (and more), are all negative emotions that we can all certainly live better without. However, in the light of perceived discrimination, and with the employment and/or promotion door being firmly thrust closed in our faces, it is very difficult not to be affected and very difficult not to indulge in a range of negative emotions about those we hold responsible, and about our very own futures. The Australian government reports (Ryan, 2011; Ryan, in Kelly, 2012; Ryan, in Malcolm, 2011; Ryan, in Raine, 2012; and more) have comprehensively presented the damage caused to individuals, to organisations, and to Australian society in general.

Bill’s mental health issues have also been comprehensively covered and overlap between the various sections of these findings chapters. However, mental health and anguish are in evidence here. Bill said:

> I started suffering a hell of a lot of mental anguish. … The redundancy package I spent on a combination of gambling and drinking and trying to work my way out as to how I might pull myself up. But it was that niggling side, that niggling feeling of not being worthy because of my age. … My history is one of achievements. … My health deteriorated. Because of my anguish, I then became disheartened with the whole process (Bill, interview notes 2008).

I asked Charles whether his taking on the role of 'house-husband' caused him to lose self-respect. He said:

> Oh, not really, because I didn’t have to. I wasn’t earning the money, but that didn’t matter. Some money was coming in and I’d do all these little odd jobs everywhere. I’d spend two days washing paté tins. … And that was just nice...

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Chapter 6 - A deeper investigation into the findings

little fill-ins like that … at least you were surviving. … One of my main incomes was door knocking for market research … (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Bill said:

The thing with the anguish that I felt certainly has turned to, has manifested itself in anger. The counselling that I’m getting at the moment is for some of the anger that I felt towards people, whereby I have felt as though I was completely ignored for my contributions. My contributions came to nought … So, the anger that manifested itself within me, and my feeling of low self-esteem, my feelings of being prejudiced against, is what I’m getting counselling for now (Bill, interview notes 2008).

I asked each of my participants about their depression. Charles replied:

I did have a bit of the dark dog, but I’d go to sleep for half the day, or something … I just slept, and that’s how I coped with it … what it did to me is literally changed my view of the world (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Bill said:

I think that makes it harder because that creates a fear and anguish inside. Again, I feel angry about it, but I also feel despair and I think that if I don’t watch it sometimes that idea of depression, I think that’s worrying me over this period of the next few years. So, I think that once all that happens, and you start to think about well, you know, you’ve got to get back to self and if self is not good, well then you could be, you certainly are up s*** creek. I think that somewhere along the line, if you think you’re worthy, then you’ve got to prove it (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Charles previously stated that he became conditioned to overcoming discrimination from the time his business closed. He said he developed a positive mindset:

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John stated that he needed to be able to apply his new status through work, and when he found that he was being rejected time and again (assuming age discrimination), he found a buffer in an adjunct ‘non-paid’ position at another university. He stated that he didn’t need the money, and so, even though this was a non-paying position, it did provide the fuel to stimulate his ego and status. He said:

I guess, in terms of self-esteem, it’s been very important. Because I get the impression I’ve been respected for stuff I’ve done here, you know you give seminars, you get compliments. I mean, I’m now also doing some post-graduate supervision … I felt I’ve been esteemed and respected for my activities here, and I guess that countered the negative feelings from 2002 and applying for a job and not getting it … that was my way of coping with negative feedback (John, interview notes 2010).

Like the above academic (John), Harry was very financially secure and didn’t need the work. Despite this, he still considered it his option to choose, and being denied employment did affect his psyche:

… it still scars you, those experiences. Certainly from my perspective, scar you. And I don’t think you ever forget them or get over them. Both times, I received counselling from my psychologist after both experiences (Harry, interview notes 2009).

He received workplace support, but needed professional counselling to cope:

… a lot of support from peers as well, but it just does wear you down and certainly affects you from a psychological view, and I received counselling the first time over a number of sessions from a clinical psychologist … it’s not
unusual in [location deleted] … it’s pretty prevalent (Harry, interview notes 2009).

He continued:

*I think that then plays on your mind. You know, the way that they behave certainly affects you* (Harry, interview notes 2009).

**Summary**

Reactions to workplace rejection and dislocation were covered in the literature review by Sightler, who claimed that individuals do not simply accept the conditions and imposition inflicted upon them. This has been exemplified in the above discussion in which reactions were brought into reality by the words and experiences of the participants (also see Kessler et al., 1989, in the literature review).

**Self-buffering (coping) in order to deal with depression**

Coming to terms with one’s new predicament may involve a range of mechanisms, which may assist recovery from depression and the ill-effects of discrimination and job dislocation, or they may have the reverse effect and commensurately push one further into the depths. A range of general buffering mechanisms has been viewed individually in the literature review under family and on-the-job network support, including the latent functions of employment. However, self-buffering takes the form of individual action such as alcohol, drugs, medication, additional activities (such as sport), and sleep, as well as taking on classes, training, and activities to improve one’s skills.

This thesis related how Bill dealt with his loss of employment in a very positive manner by actively seeking to complete a Masters’ degree. Bill also resorted to drinking and gambling. Harry withdrew into a shell and found that counselling helped his disposition. Charles had the support of a loving family, while John had financial security, but needed to fulfil his self-esteem, ego, and ambitions. Myself? I am writing this thesis.

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I asked Charles if he used any means of self-buffering, like counselling for example. He said: “Self-medicated. That’s the sort of person I am” (Charles, interview notes 2009).

One obvious means of buffering would be to move away from the source and location of one’s troubles. I spoke to Bill about his subsequent move from [location deleted] and how he felt now. He related that he was receiving counselling. He said:

…it eases the anguish and eases the lack of self-worth … I find though to grow my self-esteem, there’s only one person, I can only do that myself. There’s nothing out there, I’m constantly looking around, as to now how do I feel - my self-worth (Bill, interview notes 2008).

My own attendance at my GP has also greatly increased in recent years. And this is not just for physical health reasons:

… the prescribing of pain killers, sleeping tablets, and anti-depressants is now a much more regular occurrence. I also suffer both migraines and eye strain, resulting in considerably increased bed time. Most alarmingly, I have also recently been diagnosed with a heart condition, which is believed to be related to stress (Colin).

I have personally wondered where my life was heading and how I could possibly recover from the sad and debilitating financial situation that I have found myself in:

… I tend to live in the past, wondering what could have been. I wonder about the effect that my own miscalculated, misplaced, and just plain wrong employment decisions have had on me and those decisions by others that have been forced upon me. I have often felt a very strong force that suicide might be an easy option. The after-effects of these thought processes leave me quite debilitated, but then I consider how could I do this to my loved ones who have supported me throughout, those who have been as much an

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Harry conceded that he’d considered suicide. I asked if he’d thought about how to go about it. He replied that he hadn’t, and continued that he’d “just wanted out, as there just wasn’t any purpose in going on.” He related how he was placed on antidepressant medication. He expanded on this:

> You just don’t feel good about being at home, sitting around at home, particularly when you’ve been so active and then suddenly it all stops. I suppose in the early stages, there were some concerns about suicidal tendencies ... And that was really where Patricia spoke to the GP and they got me to go and see the psychologist (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Harry informed me that it was his wife’s support which got him through. He said:

> She provided positive reinforcement, not to give up ... not to sit around moping. ... I think the worst thing you feel is sitting around not doing anything. You know, here’s Patricia working and you’re not. So you feel pretty down (Harry, interview notes 2009).

Bill took the suicide inclination one step further and related the sorry details of his very serious attempt in his own story. He related that the depression and helplessness had reached such a state that he made a very serious attempt to take his life. His story related how he was in a drunken state in a Brisbane hotel room and woke the next morning with a broken curtain rod around his neck.

The forms of buffering are many and varied and may be quite impulsive. The participants all dealt with this in their own manner, and the extremity of contemplating suicide to end the pain is an illustration of the impact that perceived discrimination and loss of status and resources can induce.

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Summary of the personal section (above)

The above section has investigated the professional man’s lived experience and has specifically attempted to answer the main research question of this thesis: What is the impact of age discrimination on the professional man? In so doing, the thesis has told stories and incidents of a range of visible and/or perceived workplace rejections. It has examined the anomaly of being very well qualified, but considered lesser so than others. It viewed this conundrum through the eyes of five participants who related their perceptions that youth are favoured (appointed and promoted) and take older workers’ positions without them possessing the skills, knowledge, qualifications, and expertise of those who they are displacing.

There have been significant similarities in each participant’s own voice in the form of anger, frustration, and resentment towards the organisations, and youth, who they (we) all blame for perpetrating this anomaly, and towards wider society itself for turning a blind eye and allowing this to happen. The existence of a range of misplaced stereotypes which label older workers as less than optimal, and as workplace problems, only exacerbates this situation. This thesis has viewed considerable research on ego and self-esteem, and the consequent damage inflicted through discrimination and poorly-derived employment decisions (Ryan, 2013; AHRC, 2010). It has viewed depression, mental anguish, aggression and anger, and the greater level of impact upon the professional man (Peretti et al., 1986; Shacklock, 2005). The thesis placed high relevance on the early research by Jahoda who perceived five important functions of work and divided these into manifest (financial) and latent (social). The thesis recognised that incorporated within the latent function of employment is the need for man (and workers) to feel personally valued and respected, as Jahoda (1984) relates this to the elevation of self-esteem. This commensurately has a link and impact on interpersonal and social factors such as family and friends, and relates directly to spousal support and buffering (see Daniell, 1985; Howe et al., 2004; Liem & Liem, 1988; Redman & Snape, 2005). These issues have all been comprehensively covered.

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**Interpersonal and Social – Financial damage and buffering (family, financial and social support)**

**Value of support**

As noted in the concluding words of the previous section, there is considerable research demonstrating that the effects of age discrimination affect more than just the victim himself, as a man’s family and social networks are also victims. Research by Daniell (1985), Liem and Liem (1988), and Redman and Snape (2005) has suggested that employment provides the infrastructure for the family system and determines that work is a primary source of material, social, and psychological resources. Liem and Liem (1988) claimed that the family unit derives its routine and ordering of time and place within a social network, while social status and material well-being arise from labour force participation. The family relationship is an integral part of one’s inter-relatedness with work. When things go wrong in the work environment, this can negatively affect the marriage relationship. It is claimed that where one partner has become unwillingly unemployed, this can involve the individual and the couple in a cycle of grief reactions which are similar to those in bereavement (Daniell, 1985).

One theory called optimal distinctiveness theory (Liem & Liem, 1988) related the psychological effects of unemployment on workers and their families. This theory holds that individuals strive to balance the tension between assimilation in, and separation from, the relationship or the group, so that assimilation and/or over-identification foster a competing desire for separation. Additionally, employment/unemployment is a network in which individuals usually have multiple relational identifiers. This means that they foster relationships and synergies with people who they believe can assist them in an employment role and so, at various stages, with different people in different situations, a person’s disposition is likely to be different or to change (Liem & Liem, 1988).

The literature has identified (Redman & Snape, 2005; Shacklock, 2005) that the buffering effects of support from both the family and workplace lessens the full impact and effects of discrimination, with the result that the discrimination is not fully

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felt if there is support in the form of sounding boards (good listeners) being available. Buffering – in the form of social, family, and workplace support serves to comfort and compensate. Social support therefore functions as a coping resource because it contributes to lower levels of strain connected to a stressor, such as age discrimination, therefore significantly determining that the psychological consequences of exposure can be reduced through social support (Redman & Snape, 2005).

I mentioned in the previous section on suicide that I would not have survived without the loving support of my partner, and I honestly do not know, or even want to think about, where I would be without her. My participants, Charles, Harry, and John have also been lifted by spousal support, but unfortunately, Bill tells a different story in which lack of support led him very much into a troubled place.

I asked Charles about support from his spouse. He responded that when he could not find employment, it was his wife Jane who had encouraged him into following academic pursuits. He related the following:

*Jane said: you’re twice as intelligent as most of the lecturers, so go and study* (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Charles also stated that it was a struggle to stay financially afloat and that it was the family unit support that kept him going. He said:

*… at the same time, I had high school kids. And my wife said the other week, they’ll never know how we had to manage our affairs to survive* (Charles, interview notes 2009).

I also asked Harry how he managed without work. He firstly related how he was seriously affected by the decisions that displaced him, but then commended his wife for her family support. He said:

*… you know, the way that they behave certainly affects you, so I certainly was affected both times as my wife would tell you. Fortunately, I got really good "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.*
support from my wife. And my wife’s in a good job, so again, that was major … if I’d been the sole breadwinner, then it would have been totally different (Harry, interview notes 2009).

I asked John the same question about spousal and family support. He had already related (in his story) how in one tragic year alone (2001), he was unable to locate work, his father had died (leaving him a large property portfolio), and his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. John said:

… first of all, we might go into my wife and my marriage. There was going to be no effect from that because, and this is a funny thing, but it's what happened. I mean we'd been reasonably close anyway. There’s no question that my wife’s breast cancer improved our relationship considerably … it definitely brought us closer together. I guess, faced with the prospect of losing her, I realised how much she meant to me and I think she realised how much she depended on me for support when things were good. So, it actually brought us a lot closer together … Our marriage had been, if you like, strengthened considerably by the events of 2001. And she supported me very well through my father's death. She knew my father well as well. The events of 2001 helped, though they were tragic, helped our relationship, and I guess when 2002 came along, our relationship was in a much stronger position … we'd come out of it both I think a lot more tolerant and both more supportive of the other (John, interview notes 2010).

John stated in his story that the financial backing of the legacy from his father, together with his wife’s work, meant that the family had sufficient income to ensure that he did not need to work. As related earlier, this reduced the effect of “a little age discrimination” as “a mere inconvenience” (John, interview notes 2010).

The case of Bill’s lack of spousal support is again highlighted here. Bill stated that the consequences of age discrimination spelt the end of his marriage relationship. He said:

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My relationship with my wife began to suffer … We started having marriage problems in 2005. We tried counselling … The relationship with my wife deteriorated badly enough, and my health began to deteriorate as drinking took hold, then my health began to deteriorate … Our marriage had been in trouble for a while. We lived together, but most of what we had in the earlier years had long gone. My job loss created a situation that brought the inevitable to the fore and, to be honest, I couldn’t wait to get out of there. Not only was I terribly embarrassed at losing my job, but knowing that she really didn’t care anyway was rubbing my face in it. I took off and just got out of there as quickly as I could (Bill, interview notes 2009).

The modern man

The literature review revealed research on the recently new social phenomena of female breadwinners and house-husbands. Both mine and the participants’ stories in this thesis overwhelmingly indicated that this was an accepted aspect of our lives while looking for work (and possibly beyond) while, at the same time, putting the burden of survival and existence on the shoulders of our respective spouses. Charles related in his chapter (p. 160) how his spell as a ‘house-husband’ was a buffer which helped instil harmony into his home and assisted him in maintaining his sanity and focus. He related this spell as the main reason he survived and believed his family support was the blessing which carried him through.

I related in the ‘Introductory Thesis Credits’ that my partner

... had faith in me throughout and supported me during some lean financial periods … She has been a true inspiration. Without this support, I would most certainly have fallen by the wayside long ago (Colin).

Harry was financially secure, but still felt a debilitating impact of being stranded at home for five months. He related the support that he received from his wife as being the tonic which carried him through. She provided moral and compassionate support and became the major breadwinner, while Harry undertook part-time work and home

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domestic chores. She gave Harry positive reinforcement and encouragement not to give up and made many allowances to help him through the tough times. She said (as related by Harry’s words) “keep trying to fulfil whatever it is that you want to achieve Harry and I am with you all the way” (Harry, interview notes 2009). Harry did previously relate (p. 151) the issues he had with just sitting around and that he had considered suicide.

John did not indicate whether he took on house-husband duties or not, but did state that he was thrust into the unexpected position of having to look after his sick wife. He related how this was a particularly uniting time for them (p. 165), as John was faced with losing “his most cherished possession”. He said this changed their lives forever.

Bill’s domestic situation, after job loss, never became an issue, as he left his family home in the light of domestic angst. As noted earlier (p. 140 and 217), he did state that his manhood obligations were taken away by unemployment, and that he did feel an obligation to provide for his family.

The above discussion demonstrated that all five professional participants felt an obligation to support family. A number of us increased our domesticity subsequent to job loss, and we commensurately promoted and subscribed to equality in every way. Four of the five also related our domestic contribution, as sharing and fully taking on responsibilities that ‘traditional society’ viewed as ‘women’s work’. The participants indicated complete respect for the modern woman’s workplace role and the female breadwinner reality. The possible exception (it was not an option) was Bill, who was denied the opportunity to take on the domestic role. He stated that when he lost his job, his relationship with his wife deteriorated so badly that he could not wait to leave the home setting. He did, however, also relate that his manhood roles or obligations had been denied him through the loss of his job.

However, each story has also demonstrated that although our preference would certainly be full-time work, and receiving all the advantages that employment and a fixed salary provides, the position of being a house-husband and undertaking the household chores has been forced upon us because of our inability to locate suitable "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
work, and this imposition is certainly not commensurate with a healthy mindset and self-esteem.

**Financial Stress**

Finances are an important everyday aspect of the world we live in (or why do we go to work)? And it would certainly be difficult to argue that finances do not also enable the functioning of personal and social interaction and engagement. Jahoda (1981, 1984) is credited with the early work in this field whereby she identified two parts to her ‘Latent Deprivation Model.’ These she called the manifest (financial) and the latent (psychological - social) functions of employment. Jahoda (1981, 1984) maintained that people primarily engage in paid work to attain and address primary needs, but that employment has added benefits which include the five latent functions of: time structure, social contact, common goal status, identity, and enforced activity (Jahoda 1981, 1984).

As indicated throughout this thesis, this early research has been reinforced and duplicated by many subsequent researchers and has received considerable support (see Paul et al., 2010); however, the debate on which function is the most relevant to the displaced and discriminated man, although quite loud, is actually irrelevant as each impacts upon the others. This has been discussed comprehensively in the literature review and will not be explored further here, other than to point out that Creed et al. (1999) (viewed earlier) contended that finance (manifest) is the most important of these, because it enables the social (latent) to function, but does this really matter, as a lack of finance is a lack of finance and it certainly affects everything we do and live for.

In my personal estimation, I argue that:

> Finances have been a major concern for me for over 20 years. Since selling my last business in 1994 (at age 47), I have mostly only been able to obtain poorly paid, part-time, casual, or sessional work. I have recently supported this, in part, with a small pension. However, my future is quite bleak. I have

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very little superannuation and struggle to pay my bills and to survive at any reasonably expected level of comfort. I stated earlier that one of my reasons for undertaking this thesis is to improve my employment prospects and therefore my financial situation. I also mentioned previously that I have had the support of others and this has helped me considerably (Colin).

It has already been related that when Bill lost his job, his relationship with his wife deteriorated considerably resulting in family dislocation. Charles also stated that he and his family struggled to survive financially.

From the opposite perspective, Harry and John had considerable financial security and, although the consequences of age discrimination still had a considerable impact on them, they were both supported by family and the knowledge that work was not an essential element which dictated their survival.

**Social impact: The rising social costs**

Other research (AHRC, 2010) has confirmed that the social costs of unemployment relate to not only lost productivity, but also to the cost of providing the other social services necessary to deal with the psychological problems stemming from the phenomenon of age discrimination. This has implications for the Australian government, and for Australian society, in general.

The prime and specific focus of this thesis has been on the damage to individual professional men, and although the impact of the cost to Australian society has not gained as much attention in this thesis, this is not to suggest that this is not an issue of crucial importance which has major implications for Australian society and the workplace. Comments relating to diminished future retirement options are relevant and are considered below.

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Facing an uncertain financial future

The issue of rising social costs creates considerable implications for older people facing, or living in, retirement. The literature review indicated (AHRC, 2010) that in 2009, Australia had the fourth highest old-age poverty rate among OECD countries – more than double the OECD average – with more than one in four older people living in poverty. One of the consequences of age discrimination and the failure to obtain employment (job loss, failure to gain promotion) is the cost in terms of diminishing accumulated capital and wealth (O’Brien, 1999, viewed in Lee, Probert, & Watts eds, 1999). O’Brien (1999) stated that “a lower quality retirement will ultimately result from the diminishing assets” (p. 209).

As a participant in my own study, I related (both in my story and on the previous page) the last 20 years of my life in which I have been unable to obtain full-time paid employment, and this has left me virtually living from day-to-day and with a very uncertain future.

Charles made an earlier comment relating to the difficulties of survival in a lean period of employment. He said: “… my wife said the other week, they’ll never know how we had to manage our affairs to survive” (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Bill mentioned financial reasons for not wanting to retire. He stated:

I had a superannuation scheme that I was particularly fond of because of the fact that it was for my retirement. I wasn’t in good health because of my diabetes, which is common with indigenous men, and being an Aboriginal male over 50, I found that I really needed some protection of my security in relation to my employment (Bill, interview notes 2008).

Chapter summary

This chapter has been dissected into the themes of the intrapersonal, the interpersonal, and the social. The focus, however, has primarily been on the intrapersonal as the voiced experiences of the participants were re-lived to present “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
passion and emotion so as to address and emphasise the research questions and then draw out the newly experienced and emerging themes. It should be noted, however, that due to the complexities of personal, interpersonal, and social relationships, there has been a degree of overlap between these sections.

The next chapter will again follow the three themes of the intrapersonal, the interpersonal, and the social, and will review the issues and discourse which relate to the academic literature presented in the literature review.

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Chapter 7 – Discussion

The data in this thesis has presented considerable evidence that the five participants experienced considerable and debilitating age discrimination which affected their personal well-being, social lives, and future retirement options. The wider research indicates that age discrimination in Australia is increasingly prevalent and has a negative impact on the wide demographic of males, females, skilled and unskilled workers, and professionals (AHRC, 2010). Age discrimination is not confined to Australian workplaces – it is a global problem (AHRC, 2010; Gringart et al., 2004) in which varying forms of age prejudice restrict, discourage, bar, and impede access to work and freedom within the workplace (AHRC, 2010). This research thesis, together with the interviews, and the articles cited in the literature review, has provided evidence that too many managers, recruitment agencies, HR practitioners, young people, and governments, display a propensity (despite new legislation) towards age discrimination devoid of conscience and consciousness. The literature cited in this thesis has also shown that age discrimination legislation has been ignored, not been taken seriously and appears to have been virtually forced on ‘unwilling’ governments (Bennington & Wein, 2006) and employers who appear to have displayed reluctance and/or tacit compliance.

This research is not an attempt to prove that age discrimination exists, as this was presumed and supported by the reviewed literature. The aim of the thesis was to investigate and highlight the effects and damage that perceived age discrimination has on Australian professional men. This has been undertaken using the small number of five participants - a research pool within the range suggested by Ellis (2005), and Ellis and Bochner (2000, 2004). By using these guidelines, any perceived limitations relating to the size of the participant pool are therefore considered invalid as the aim of autoethnography is for quality over quantity, with the intention of eliciting sufficient information from a small number of affected participants (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2005; Ellis & Bochner 2000, 2004).

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This chapter will align and define the research questions (presented earlier), to describe how the results, when contrasted and compared to the reviewed literature, answers the overall questions.

Australian negativity to organisational behaviour and attitudes is an ongoing problem. Given governments’ and society’s reticence and subsequent procrastination in the delivery of legislation, the evidence of discriminatory and blasé attitudes of organisations appeared through the research presented in the literature review (Ozdowski, 2002; Redman & Snape, 2005; Ryan, in Raine, 2012). The scrutiny related to this behaviour was quite apparent and repeated consistently through the participants’ own personal histories. The literature suggested that there is evidence that countries that legislated many years before Australia have experienced progress on this issue, with the United States and Canada being examples (Marshall, 2001; Kluge & Krings, 2008). This then gives hope for the Australian setting, but only time will tell.

**Intrapersonal**

**Unemployment, under-employment, and lower-level employment and the subsequent decline in status**

In discussing the sequence of the themes – the intrapersonal, the interpersonal, and the social - this chapter commences with a discussion on the sudden realisation that one is being discriminated against, resulting in dismissal, unemployment, under-employment, and/or employment at a lower level. This fall in status is recorded in the words of each of the participants’ stories, with one (me) not being able to find anything other than casual work; another has obtained an unpaid position (which fulfils his ego requirements), and two have been forced to move interstate as they were unable to find work at their commensurate level in their local region. Charles is the exception in that he is still in his university position and location.

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Chapter 7 - Discussion

Analysing the damage. Personal identity, ego, and psychological effects

This thesis has highlighted the perceived injustice and consequent damage caused by age discrimination, and has attempted to give explanations and understanding as to why people are inflamed and incensed by this prejudice and wrong-doing. The major personal issues which were introduced in the literature review, and which are conspicuously apparent in varying degrees with most of my interview participants (including myself), were damaged male ego, sleep deprivation, degradation, depression, demoralisation and frustration, shame, anger, pain, embitterment, uncertainty (about the future), loss of confidence, inability to cope, withdrawal, hopelessness and helplessness, and more (AHRC, 2010; Ryan, 2013). Further outcomes are related to life satisfaction, family dislocation and dysfunction and loss, financial deprivation, limited and reduced future prospects (including retirement options), future work commitment, and loss of face. The emotive states resulting from this damage introduced a need for coping mechanisms such as alcohol abuse, attempted suicide, medication, the benefits of staying occupied, sport as an outlet, and spousal and family (and other) support.

Overall, each participant has had the real-life felt experience that this prejudice was (and is) endemic and institutionalised in our Australian society, and all have singularly laid blame at the feet of discriminating younger managers and recruitment agencies who support young incumbents and applicants (see Amos, 2005; Büsch & Königstein, 2001; Finkelstein & Burke, 1995).

A wide range of reactions and responses were forthcoming from the analysis of the five participant stories, and in relation to the perceived or inflicted psychological and financial damage, the interviews presented the relatively extreme examples of Bill and myself who both appear to be significantly affected by age discrimination, the consequences of which have imposed quite severe life changes and the potential to have a negative impact well into our futures. Both John and Harry have considerable family and financial buffering, and neither has to rely on work, or external forces, for their future security. Charles struggled, but appears to have obtained a moderate level of employment and financial security, and it might be prudent to state that he may fall somewhere between the above two extremes.

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John’s story stood out as the exception as it brings to the evaluation some singularly significant differences which can most notably be traced to the substantial impact of buffering (Daniell, 1985; Jahoda, 1981, 1984). This is probably quite understandable in John’s case, given that he had other very pressing priorities which diminished his age discrimination experience to what he termed “a mere inconvenience”. What is interesting, and one could say surprising, is John’s forgiving nature in that he appeared to hold no malice towards the offending sources. He conceded that he was angry, but also stated that these offenders were acting in accordance with social conditioning. On the other hand, both Bill and I were quite outraged at what we perceived as lies, injustice, and prejudice, and consequently, displayed our dissatisfaction and anger at the perpetrating source. The literature relating to outrage and embitterment reactions were related earlier by Linden (2003), Linden et al. (2008a, 2008b, 2009) and Rotter (2009), who concluded a significant legacy effect in the face of perceived employment injustice.

Comments on recovery

The literature grounding this thesis made considerable comment throughout on possible on-going damage and the limited prospects of full future recovery (Kessler at al., 1989; Sightler et al., 1996; Zawada 1980, in Shelton 1985; Guindon & Smith, 2002). I have made personal comment on my probable need for financial recovery to work for life, and that my work options may appear quite limited, unless I venture overseas.

Bill also made many comments alluding to his damaging experiences and his somewhat shaky future. One such comment is repeated here as it has connotations for his recovery:

*My self-esteem has been shot so much and I start getting anxious on commencing projects because I think, what happens if this fails? They’ll sack me. What happens if this doesn’t happen, or what happens if this goes bad? And I start to panic over little things, whereas before, I would have thought*

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well that's it, let's do the learnings, the outcomes, and let's take it from there
(Bill, interview notes 2008).

Manifest and latent functions. Financial and social buffering

The manifest and latent functions, as espoused by Jahoda (1981, 1984), are
certainly personal, but also have over-riding implications for the interpersonal and
social, therefore indicating that this section could go under any of these section
headings. For the purpose of the discussion, this specific topic has been placed in
the intrapersonal (personal) section.

The research and findings of Jahoda (1981, 1984) resulting in the ‘Latent Deprivation
Model’ of unemployment, was highlighted in the literature review and has been
prominent throughout this thesis. These findings have been verified by considerable
subsequent research through Creed, Muller, & Machin (1999), Creed and Muller
(2006), Paul et al., (2010), Selenko et al. (2011), and others, and are manifestly
supported by the actions of each of the interview participants within this thesis. On a
personal level, my own inability to find adequate employment signifies the
importance of the manifest functions of employment. I have suffered severe financial
restrictions which will probably last for the rest of my life but, in addition, the
consequences of the financial restrictions have also had a negative impact on my
family and social life. I envy those who are receiving a fair wage and can purchase
goods, and can travel and go on holiday virtually at will.

As stated above, John’s inability to find paid employment was compensated by
receiving a valuable property portfolio, a legacy of his deceased father, therefore
negating the manifest needs of employment (Jahoda, 1981, 1984). He was also
fortunate in that his procurement of an unpaid adjunct academic position provided
him with the latent function requirements necessary to promote and support his ego
and pride (Jahoda, 1981, 1984); issues common to all my participants.

Charles suffered financial restrictions and was fortunate to be supported by a hard-
working, loving, and very caring wife while he studied with the intention of bettering

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his position in life. Charles eventually overcame the restrictions of financial and social limitations and obtained a paid academic position which provided both manifest and latent functions (Jahoda, 1981, 1984).

Bill’s story reads as arguably the most extreme within this thesis, as his fall from a position of elevated status was considerable. The subsequent lack of spousal support resulted in a devastating chain of life-changing events which produced an array of severe consequences, and which could have cost Bill his life. The life upheaval that Bill experienced appeared quite measurable with job loss, marriage break-up, loss of assets, and an interstate move, and possibly amounted to considerably greater life impact than the other interview participants. His future may now also appear to be less secure than the other participants, and possibly still in the balance, a point also indicating his significant fall in status (Peretti et al., 1986). His manifest and latent functions are, at best, only partially catered for in relation to his past prominent position in life (Peretti et al., 1986).

Harry, like John and Charles, had the support of a loving spouse and, like John, was financially secure. However, his initial reaction was quite severe and he did consider taking his life as an easy way out of what he stated was his depressed state. To facilitate recovery, Harry and his wife moved from his home city, and he now informs me that he is very happy with his new position in life. His finances were not at any stage a problem, but his latent functions are now also apparently fully back on track (Jahoda, 1981, 1984).

**Status, psychological capital, self-esteem and why is the professional man different?**

Research by Sightler et al. (1996) uncovered a common negative factor which resonated with my participants, through the themes of anxiety, anger, and embitterment. These were coupled with feelings and emotive states of burden, irritation, resentment, anomie, lowered self-esteem, depression, and life dissatisfaction. This study of professionals also postulated that the displayed effect of unemployment is represented as considerable shock when faced with the reality

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that they are losing their jobs to enable organisations to recruit younger workers (Sightler et al., 1996; Thornton & Luker, 2010).

Additionally, Sightler et al. (1996) provided a corroborative foundation for Shacklock’s (2005) research by claiming that people's reactions to unemployment may vary at different levels (professional as opposed to non-professional) and from people who are newly unemployed. They stated earlier (p. 219) that displacement from work now affects older, better educated employees with longer job tenure (Sightler et al., 1996). This differing reaction to professional job loss was certainly displayed with each of my interview participants, resulting in depression and a range of reactions, such as the need to acquire additional qualifications, or to alter their geographical location to compete in the labour market effectively and regain their lost position by drawing on their self-esteem, health, and well-being. The participants in this thesis were all professional men and were significantly affected by the treatment they received (or perceived). A comparison with lesser-qualified workers was not conducted or envisioned, and this leaves a degree of conjecture as to the possible differences in their reactions. A research opportunity could present itself here.

Mental health (depression) and the correlation to job search factors

The onset of depression was an issue raised by Cole et al. (2009). They stated that job loss caused loss of status and prestige, and a range of other problems, and posed considerable consequences for the mental well-being of the participants within this study. All of the participants in this research found their new unemployed/under-employed status to be a challenge, and all commented on the effects this had on their life, future, and social status. As professional men, they had expectations of achievement which were being denied them, and this had negative outcomes on their current position and their ability to obtain employment (Peretti et al., 1986; Shacklock, 2005; Sightler et al., 1996).

I stated earlier that I have given up the job search until I complete my doctorate, and will then make a decision on whether it is possible to find work in my home city’s

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restrictive and competitive market, or to relocate interstate or overseas to secure work at my commensurate level.

The literature review highlighted the difficulties associated with obtaining future employment (Guindon & Smith, 2002). All the interview participants (Charles, Harry, John, and Bill) have challenged the authorities who were denying them and, in varying degrees, have all achieved some degree of balance in their lives. However, the full cost that this period of isolation and devastation has incurred on their lives may never be measured or evaluated. This effect on future employment attitudes and prospects could be an avenue for future research.

The effects on my mental health and my attitude to future employment are more measurable. I am living this experience, and have described in detail, the effects that the damage has had on me. I have also undertaken a PhD with a primary purpose to regain status and work re-entry at a commensurate level - although personal achievement is also a factor. I believe that I have incurred a legacy effect on my persona which has affected my attitude to others in the workplace who are not being judged on age and stereotypes, and who, despite considerably lower qualifications, are riding a wave of high status with the commensurate high salary. Adopting the passionate tone associated with autoethnography (Ellis, 2005), I resent the imposition and circumstance that I am locked into, and simultaneously locked out of, in terms of employment, and I definitely perceive it as stemming from age discrimination. Resentment, the legacy effect, and embitterment are all factors discussed in the literature review and revealed as damaging factors upon the interview participants.

To reiterate the research presented in the literature review, one's personal motivation is affected by what Cole et al. (2009) termed the 'social-psychological theory of hysteresis', whereby one’s reactions to circumstances and changes is dependent on past reactions and changes. Darity and Goldsmith (1993, in Cole et al., 2009) also claimed that self-esteem, fear, depression, and a sense of learned helplessness affected an individual's motivation to keep searching for work. Helplessness and diminished cognitive efficacy sets in as one perceives that their actions will have no positive end result (Darity & Goldsmith, 1993, in Cole et al., "No sir, it's not discrimination, you're just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
2009). The lingering and residual effects of helplessness and hysteresis may result in a newly-employed person under-performing, and consequently, returning to the unemployed pool (Darity & Goldsmith, 1993, in Cole et al., 2009). This fear was certainly voiced in Bill’s story, and I will have to wait to see if the outcome of this PhD thesis is indeed commensurate with employment. I certainly won’t be holding my breath in anticipation.

**Negative labelling – stereotyping, and the attitude of the young towards older people**

Kanter (1994) and Rojo (1996, in Marshall, 2001) described a social mindset accepting of upward mobility of youth to the detriment of the older experienced worker, an acceptance which determines that older workers should move aside and make room for the younger employee.

Supporting this contention throughout this thesis is the participants’ personally held belief that younger people are causing the phenomena of this form of discrimination. The AHRC Report (2010) and Ryan (2013) both indicated that a major cause of this discrimination is youth stereotyping the old. In the participants’ personal analysis, it was asserted that youth are responsible for the demise of the elderly worker; have poor attitudes to the elderly, including being the instigators of stereotypical, negative attitudes; and tend to distance themselves and have nothing in common with them. They appear lesser qualified, but are taking the jobs of the older, more experienced and qualified older workers.

Harry related how a selection panel made excuses to exclude him from a position for which he had considerable experience. He said:

> I didn't get the job because the panel's view was that I didn't have knowledge of the current industrial relations issues, and just prior to that, I spent quite a lot of time in the IR courts … I knew it very well. So I just thought, you just know when you walk in, that you’re wasting your time. You feel like saying

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‘Oh, let’s not go through the farce, I’ll just go, rather than waste everybody’s time’ (Harry, interview notes 2009).

The literature showed that aged people had been the subject of many false claims relating to their productivity and value in the workplace (Gringart et al., 2004). The studies by Büssch and Königstein (2001), and Finkelstein and Burke (1995), supported this, as they contended that young people held stereotypical views of the aged and this had potential negative effects on aged employability. This phenomena was also supported by the findings of Amos (2005) and verified by the participants in this thesis. I stated in my story that I have frequently been disrespected by my university students who level stereotypes at me, such as telling me that I have no memory retention and I cannot use a computer. I reply that I have excellent memory retention for facts and “things that matter”, but not for irrelevant trivia. In response to the link between my age and my computer skills, I then ask “how old is Bill Gates”? My thesis participant Bill also indicated that he was discredited and disrespected by youth who levelled stereotypes relating to his age-competence correlation.

Marshall’s (2001) research in the US presented a counterview to the above point, claiming that North American attitudes to older workers are (arguably) becoming more positive over time. Marshall (2001) postulated that this was quite possibly an outcome of the much earlier introduction of age legislation in the US and Canada.

It is also noted that in the five years prior to the 2013 ABS report, Australia saw the growth of 126,000 workplace positions for older workers (Colebatch & Butt, 2013, quoting Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). However, as stated in the introduction, there is evidence that these older person workforce changes related significantly to casual, part-time, and contract employment, which Palen (2013) claimed, boosts and distorts the unemployment statistics and, at the same time, introduces new implications, threats, and challenges for the older worker.

The AHRC (2010) stated that negative stereotypes persist, and while a mature age worker may experience age discrimination, any experience including race, sex, sexual orientation, and/or disability can also go hand-in-hand with other forms of discrimination and compound the disadvantage. It is clear that all the thesis "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old": An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
participants attested to being disadvantaged on the basis of age, and all had personal stories to tell. The AHRC claimed (2010) that as mature age workers are cast as “unable to learn new skills, as too ‘dependent’, as being in decline, or as offering ‘more limited returns’ … they may be a perceived ‘disability risk’” (p. 1). The AHRC (2010) highlighted a comparable example of how stereotyping can distort the reality, and contended that the research verifies, contrary to popular belief, that “a worker with a disability has a lower number of occupational health and safety incidents compared to other workers” (p. 5). This sends a significant warning to those in Australian society who are accepting of these false stereotypes.

Woodward (2005), citing Verrall (2000) and Ozdowski (2002), claimed that in a 1999 Drake International survey, 65% of employers would retrench a worker aged 45 plus before a younger colleague; while all those surveyed would not hire a worker over the age of 50, thus representing entrenched age discrimination. In support of this, the ABS (2013) claimed that 86% of Australian managers believe that the optimum age for employment is 35 or younger.

A TMP/Hudson Global Resources survey conducted in Western Australia indicated that the majority of participants perceived the mature-age worker to be 45 and older (Macdonald, 2001), while a subsequent Hudson Global Resources survey (2003, in Woodward 2005) claimed that 61% of Australian employers still believed there to be an age bias. The survey deemed the advantages of rehiring aged workers to be life experience, work experience, and maturity, while the disadvantages were poor information technology skills, and being set in their ways.

Ageing is inevitable. Steiner et al. (1998), in Bennington (2001), claimed that ‘old’ may even be perceived at the age of 36. Bennington (2001, citing Debrah, 1996; Freriche & Naegele, 1997; Hallier, 2001; Patrickson & Hartmann, 1995; Takada, 1993; Taylor & Walker, 1994) claimed that age purportedly continues to be used in decision-making in employment, and employers use a variety of means to discriminate. Bennington (2001) claimed that this is a progression from the simple and overt job advertisements that in previous years openly stated the lower- and upper-age limits for job applicants, a practice that has since been outlawed in Australia. In a study in Great Britain, McGoldrick and Arrowsmith (1993) examined "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
the attitudes of employers in relation to age discrimination and the use of media advertising to infer age preference without actually stating an age bar. In a later study, Arrowsmith and McGoldrick (1996) found that when attention was directly focused on age discrimination, the language used in job advertisements became more subtle and age discrimination became more covert.

In placing this industry connotation in context, the AHRC (2010, p. 16) claimed that Australian productivity and economic growth are affected by unlawful age discrimination, where mature age workers are forced out of the workforce or are under-employed. They further stated that the workforce participation rate in Australia is lower than our counterparts in other OECD countries, including New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

The research within this section and in the literature review chapter indicate that although age discrimination may, in some cases, be a perception, I like the other participants, arguably have genuine concerns and grievances, as the evidence based on the research presented is clearly substantial.

**Self-efficacy, resilience and relevance of previous level (and expected level)**

Older research on efficacy and resilience (Liem & Liem, 1988) argued that workers do not simply experience the hardship imposed by unemployment, but actively challenge their displacement and the conditions it creates. My interview participants confirmed the above through their reactions and actions when they challenged the status quo, thus revealing that this research finding is still significant and current. It was identified that a relationship between the level of depression caused by unemployment and the level of reward one placed on their previous employment tended to indicate that depression was greater if the job had been intrinsically rewarding as opposed to being monotonous. In this regard, it is appropriate to consider that the professional man would suffer to a greater degree than the non-professional (Shacklock, 2005).

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It was claimed in the literature review that job loss attacks a person's identity, which then manifests in a wide range of unhealthy and health-threatening behaviours which then further affects self-esteem (Lin et al., 1985; Shamir 1986). Stokes and Cochrane (1984) related how those who have been displaced in the workplace displayed greater levels of psychophysiological symptomatology, dissatisfaction with the self, total hostility, and dissatisfaction with the degree to which they were accepted by others. They were also found to be more critical of others, and more likely to display paranoid attitudes as well as feelings of guilt. This hypothesis was validated in the examples used in this thesis whereby the participants displayed varying degrees of the above symptoms. It was also claimed that the incidence of being critical of others may be an alienated redundant workers’ only available mechanism to give expression to extra punitive feelings (Stokes & Cochrane, 1984).

**Mental anguish, despondency and the onset of depression**

Self-esteem is important to each and every human being, with the workplace setting being instrumental in one’s ability to maintain self-esteem and self-image (Bennington, 2001; Ozdowski, 2002; Redman & Snape, 2005; Sightler et al., 1996). The literature review revealed that internal attributions for failure can lower self-esteem, affect behaviour, and lead to lower perceived personal control. One’s work position status can affect one’s levels of achievement, accomplishment, and satisfaction and, in the event of job loss, increase feelings of guilt relating to failure to support other family members. This was evidenced in all the participants’ stories, and came to particular prominence in Bill’s story, in which his entire life was disrupted and took a new and different path.

The literature review indicated that people who suffer job loss and cannot relocate to suitable work, feel useless and inadequate and suffer from increased physiological and psychological stress leading to increased psycho-physiological disorders (Bennington, 2004; Peretti et al., 1986, quoting Baskin, 1975). The effects of job dislocation have been compared to the grieving process and may result in depression, withdrawal, retreat, suicide, and homicide (Daniell, 1985). Furthermore, the stress reactions associated with job loss, and the consequent emotional and

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psychological influences, may directly impede the subsequent job search and inhibit one’s ability to search for, and secure, suitable future employment.

It is claimed in the existing research that while depression is widely espoused as an effect of discrimination, it more often results in despair (Mayo Clinic, 2013). Despair is touted as being different to depression because it relates to a life-changing event rather than a chemical imbalance. The despair may lead to depression, but actually precedes it and sets the depression off when an event such as job loss suddenly occurs (Mayo Clinic, 2013).

It is apparent that there is a link between job loss and depression (Thayer & Bruce, 2006). Major depressive disorder (MDD) can be mistaken for, or masked by, reactive sadness of a comorbid condition with the effects including job loss, personality advancement failure, and a decline in functions (Thayer & Bruce, 2006). Although it is also undeniable that one does not have to lose their job to become depressed, Dragano et al. (2008) suggested that an adverse psychosocial work environment contributes to depression. Existing research shows that depression causes disability wherever it occurs, and that major depression is classified as disabling as blindness or paraplegia (Crawford, 2004). These stories of depression were confirmed within the participants’ stories and resulted in the sufferers seeking medical attention and counselling, suffering sleep disorders and, in one instance, a suicide attempt. Charles, John, Harry, and I all believed that we overcame depression through buffering mechanisms such as self-medication, sleep, and family support.

Goldsmith and Darity (1992, in Cole et al., 2009) also claimed an association between unemployment and social psychological well-being, with unemployment exposure leaving an individual with a sense of helplessness, impaired motivation, and learning and emotional consequences that, when combined, reduce personal productivity.

Price et al. (in Howe et al., 2004) claimed that secondary stressors associated with job loss, such as the need to move to cheaper accommodation, or to defer the payment of bills, can present as much mental health risk to the job seeker as the job. “No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old”. An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
loss itself, and have a commensurate impact on the mental health of the marriage partner. Howe et al. (2004) suggested that the continuation of stressors disrupts the relationship more deeply over time and may become self-maintaining to the relationship even after the stressors have been resolved, with the cycle of depression, anger, and relationship disruption continuing. Bill's case is prominent here as exemplified in his story; he left his marriage, lost his home and much of his retirement funding, moved interstate, and accepted a lower-level work position. He acknowledged that he suffered considerable physical, psychological, and financial damage as a result.

**Aggression**

It is interesting to note a German study by Fischer, Greitemeyer, and Frey (2008), which examined a 'provocation hypothesis' in the unemployed (or those on the verge of unemployment) which may indicate aggressive inclinations. It was noted that aggression is an immediate reaction to frustration, and that it is only one of the consequences of frustration (Fischer et al., 2008). This was evidenced in this study in which I stated that I am personally angry at what I perceive as workplace rejections to enable younger, lesser-qualified applicants to be appointed. Charles also voiced his anger at being rejected. After a particular workplace rejection in which he believed others were being favoured, he said:

> Oh, I was just angry … angry, very angry. But there's another side to me that people don't understand. Once I set my teeth into you, you're f**ked … They can't do this to me and get away with it (Charles, interview notes 2009).

Bill also related his anger at missing out to younger applicants; however, his major fear was the onset of depression. He said this injustice:

> ... creates a fear and anguish inside. I feel angry about it, but I also feel despair, and I think that if I don't watch it, then here comes depression. I think that is what will worry me over the period of the next few years (Bill, interview notes 2008).

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John stated:

... quite frankly, a bit of age discrimination, not getting a job when you don't need the money, is trivial ... (John, interview notes 2010).

However, during the interview, John also, on eight occasions, stated that he was angry at what he perceived as an employment injustice perpetrated upon him. He said:

Well, I was pretty angry at the time. Obviously, I was angry and a bit upset (John, interview notes 2010).

Although the above five cases represent only a small section of society, the coverage of the damage that discrimination (albeit perceived) has caused, is quite broad and presents links to the effects of, and reactions to, discrimination, anger, aggression, and depression. The section below establishes a further link between depression and sleep disorders.

**The somatisation, fatigue relationship: Sleep and depression**

Lavidor, Weller, and Babkoff (2002) studied the correlation between somatic symptoms, depression, and fatigue. Their study revealed that depression levels were significantly and positively related to all aspects of fatigue, other than the form of fatigue that responds to rest and sleep; therefore, reinforcing the claims of de Los Reyes and Guilleminault (2007) cited in the literature review, who claimed that sleep and rest results in reduced depression.

Lavidor et al. (2002) also claimed that fatigue was previously regarded as a separate issue to depression and was studied without clear connection to, and correlation with, other syndromes. Berrios (1990, in Lavidor et al., 2002, p. 68) also claimed that fatigue has emotional, behavioural, and cognitive components whose inter-relationships have not been sufficiently explored. However, Van Diest and Appels

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(1992) and Chen (1986, in Lavidor et al., 2002, p. 68) stated that chronic fatigue is associated with a number of pathological, environmental, psychological, and possibly, nutritional factors, and there does now appear to be many reports which link these phenomena.

Somatisation and fatigue appear to be significantly related, and some researchers have in fact classified fatigue as a somatic complaint. Lloyd (1989, in Lavidor et al., 2002) stated:

… somatization as a pattern of behaviour involving the presentation of psychological distress by way of somatic complaints, e.g. insomnia, fatigue, dizziness, and gastrointestinal symptoms. Under such classification, fatigue and somatic complaints clearly overlap (p. 68).

Despite the validity of arguments relating to such links (or otherwise), Gillespie, Kirk, Heath, Martin, and Hickie (1999, in Lavidor et al., 2002) conducted a factor analysis on data collected for the four phenomena of depression, anxiety, somatic distress, and sleep disturbance and determined that they were separate phenomena.

However, sleep disturbance, as highlighted in both my and Charles’ stories, indicated that we both claimed that we slept to take away the pain of the real world. In support of our belief, ‘sleep’ was introduced in the literature review as a means of coping with the stress that the unemployment scenario presented (Dim, 2009). As a personal contribution, I perceive that the sleep conundrum is a ‘catch 22’. I escaped into sleep (often during the day) in order to remove myself from the torrid reality of life. I also suffered very poor nocturnal sleep habits, I believe, as a result of both the felt stress and the need to sleep during the day. De Los Reyes and Guilleminault (2007) claimed that antidepressant medication generally results in the normalisation of sleep patterns, and I frequently use this form of medication to normalise my nocturnal functioning. I restate from my story that: “I often found myself weary and relished the opportunity to sleep and escape” (Colin).

My participants’ (and my own) acknowledgement of sleep disturbance is significant for this study, as it indicates a relationship with cognitive impairment, fatigue, and "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
other coping and mental health issues which can impair and impede work performance and lead to a snowball effect of other workplace phenomena.

In my own personal experience, I too found that when I was severely depressed and failing to cope with life, and when the impediments and obstructions appeared to be endless, and the very occasional thoughts of suicide entered my mind, then I too would feel the onset of considerable uncontrolled drowsiness and would adjourn to the bedroom (often in the early afternoon) for a nap, knowing that I couldn’t function at anywhere near my normal state of mental activity and alertness until I had recuperated (see the research by de Los Reyes & Guilleminault, 2007, p. 41). Often when I awoke (usually after 20-60 minutes of sleep), the desire to remain in the comfort and warmth of my little nest was too strong, and I would lay there for a long time until my conscience got the better of me and I would reluctantly arise to face the world, but certainly with a much improved disposition. I believe that:

... underlying the onset of the drowsiness was a consciousness that reasoned that while I slept, I would feel no pain and would awake feeling considerably better and certainly less confused about my dilemma. Although there could be considerable medical reasons for this phenomenon (see the section on hypersomnia below), my personal interpretation related to the need to escape reality (Colin).

Charles also stated in his story that he used sleep as a coping mechanism to deal with his depression, rejections, and setbacks:

Sleep helped me overcome the depression, and restore my will to fight for justice. So, if I wasn’t conscious, and wasn’t in the land of the living, then I couldn’t feel the hurt, anger, and pain of this employment discrimination, and although sleep actually had a direct connection with the depression, it was the one major criterion that aided my survival (Charles, interview notes 2009).

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He also stated:

> I’m sure in my early days in the early 80s, I did have a bit of the dark dog, but you know, I’d go to sleep for half the day … I slept, and that’s how I coped with it (Charles, interview notes 2009).

I also found considerable benefits in withdrawing from the reality of rejection and into the bedroom. I previously stated in my story:

> I have gone years without a decent night’s sleep as I lay awake thinking of ways that I can recover from my poor lowly job status (or no job) and my financial deprivation. I now work on my computer in the middle of the night so that I can complete my PhD and then compete better in the workforce (Colin).

What the future holds, I do not know. I can only hope that I will be fortunate enough to complete my PhD, obtain valuable and commensurate employment and then, quite possibly, my overactive brain will relax and allow me to experience a full night’s beneficial deep sleep. I also wish this on my suffering, sleep-deprived interview participants.

Alcohol, depression and the link to sleep

Alcoholism is a well-documented coping mechanism of job loss victims and those in a depressed state (Wilson, 2006). Similar to the case of Bill, I often too frequently used excessive alcohol as a means of coping. I could quite easily not get started with alcohol, but once I did, I would usually continue until I was quite inebriated and, on occasion, would pass out prior to going to bed. I would awake within two or three hours, and being very much aware and conditioned to the realisation that I would then probably lie awake all night, I would go to my study and read academic books till dawn in preparation for classes, courses, qualifications etc. A legacy of this insomnia and broken sleep patterns would mean that, at some stage during the day (usually mid-afternoon), my drained body would feel the need to catch up. However, often due to work commitments, this usually did not occur and my body and brain

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would ride through waves of exhaustion and near comatose mental impairment until I would suddenly snap out of it, recover, and return to what I thought was normal functioning. The effects of alcohol were evident in both Bill’s story and my own. We both knew the negative effects of alcohol could result in increased depression and the onset of other life-threatening scenarios, such as Bill’s suicide attempt.

Alcohol is seen as an escape from reality (Wilson, 2006). The Mayo Clinic stated (2013) that one’s depression may not necessarily be exacerbated by alcohol and drugs, but is a serious medical disorder that darkens thoughts, undermines personal and professional life, and places the inflicted at increased risk of other illnesses. Other reported evidence also indicates considerably negative cognitive effects of alcohol abuse. Junghanns, Horbach, Ehrenthal, Blank, and Backhaus (2009) studied two groups of abstaining alcohol-dependent patients. The short abstention group (24 individuals) had a mean abstention period of 21.9 days, while the longer abstention group (12 individuals) had a mean of 115.7 days. The resulting evidence was quite alarming in that it found that chronic and high alcohol consumption negatively affects sleep and declarative memory, but with no significant difference between the two groups.

Linking depression to mortality and suicide

Cuijpers and Smit (2002) claimed that depression is generally accepted as being related to increased mortality, and is a life-threatening disorder that can affect well-being and quality of life. Cuijpers and Smit (2002) further stated that critics may argue that the increased mortality rate in depression is caused by physical disorders brought on by depression. They conceded that this may indeed be partially true, but claimed that it is assumed that depression, in general, is caused by a complex combination of biological, social, and psychological factors, and that physical disorder alone can never cause the depression (Cuijpers & Smit, 2002).

Cuijpers and Smit (2002) qualify the above by stating that it is not exactly clear what mechanisms cause the increased rate of mortality in depressed subjects. However, they do consider that it is linked to increased hazardous health behaviour, increased

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suicide rates and higher incidence of accidental death, adverse effects of depression on endocrine, neurologic, and immune processes which interfere with the patient’s motivation toward recovery and affects compliance and treatment. They also addressed other unanswered questions by asking whether the adequate treatment of depression will result in a reduction of the increased mortality rate. I am personally extremely grateful that this thesis did not have to deal with a real instance of mortality and, as these questions are medical in nature, it is considered that they will therefore remain in the hypothetical abyss, as they are considered to be outside of the range of limitations of this thesis.

**Interpersonal (and Social)**

**Buffering – family and social support**

Existing research by Daniell (1985), Howe, Levy, and Caplan (2004), Liem and Liem (1988), Redman and Snape (2005), Targ (1983), and Yuan (2007) has highlighted the links between workplace dislocation and the effects and consequences of family and social support. This research – acknowledging the limited sample – concludes that with the support of a loving partner and/or family, an unemployed/under-employed man has access to many of the latent functions (Jahoda 1981, 1984) denied him through job loss. Such was the case with all the participants (including myself), with the exception of Bill. Buffering in the form of support reduced and negated the impact felt by the participants, and it was concluded that this is an essential factor in enabling and facilitating a healthy response to one’s new position in life.

Linn, Sandifer, and Stein (1985, in O’Brien, 1999) concluded that the unsupported unemployed person demonstrated more significant changes and elevations in cholesterol levels, illness symptoms, and affective responses than the supported unemployed. In practical application, Bill’s story highlighted that the lack of spousal and family support had a negative impact on his ego, self-esteem, and self-worth, and could have cost him his life.

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Bill’s marriage break-up and consequent interstate move, in effect, also meant that he no longer had the spousal social support necessary to enable him to cope with his new situation. As reported earlier, Bill now suffers from atrial fibrillation and believes it to be a consequence of his current stressful environment. He now also regularly attends a psychologist and believes the support offered in these sessions helps him with the development of life-coping mechanisms.

Unemployment cannot be treated as a personal event as it affects everyone in the family unit. Subsequent partner stress following job loss is particularly relevant in Bill’s instance, as the job loss was very much the catalyst for his eventual marriage breakdown. Although all cases being individual are therefore different, it is interesting to note (although on a personal level and, no doubt, totally unrepresentative of a full and comprehensive study), that of the six initial cases undertaken in my PhD study (including myself and one withdrawal), two suffered severe and total loss of spousal support and subsequent marriage breakdown after job loss. The breakdown factor has had a profound effect on Bill’s post job loss life, demise, recovery, health, and day-to-day functioning. Daniell (1985), Howe, et al. (2004), Liem and Liem (1988), O’Brien (1999), Redman and Snape (2005), Targ (1983), and Yuan (2007) all significantly emphasised the value of a range of support scenarios and mechanisms.

Social attitudes and the need for social change

The social implications emanating from the current statistics and projected future effects of age discrimination in relation to the Australian economy, labour market, and society have been comprehensively covered in the statistics presented in the literature. The reports, the Age Discrimination Commissioner interviews, and the selected articles (Australian Productivity Commission, 2005; Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing Productive Ageing Centre, June 2013; Australian Government Productivity Commission, 28 June 2011; AHRC, 2010, 2013; Kelly, 2012; Malcolm, Aug 2011; Palan, 2013; Susan Ryan, 2012 - 3 May; Susan Ryan, 2013 - all in the literature review), indicate that Australia is at serious financial and productivity risk if the issue of age discrimination is not addressed and substantially

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overcome in the near future. These above sources indicate that youth are not entering the workforce to a degree high enough to support the retiring (or soon to be retiring) demographic, and with people living longer, this has the propensity to increase this dilemma.

This raises the question of what can be done and will it ever be enough? Obviously social attitudinal change is necessary, but when will this commence in proportions to make a difference? In the effort to identify and advance societal change, my case (Colin’s story) related an (unnamed) institute’s admission that they may have erred, firstly in not following their own guidelines, and secondly, in their decision to not interview me. This, in effect, should ring alarm bells for the many other Australians who may have been affected by age discrimination. As is related within my story, I have fought hard and long (and at considerable expense) to finally achieve an admission of wrong-doing from the institute. I should never have had to go through this time-consuming, stressful, and expensive experience, and I lay considerable blame on both recruitment and government agencies who, I believe, may not be as diligent in their duties as they should be. This example indicated just how difficult it was (and is) to achieve any form of equity and justice\footnote{Please note comments on p. 114. This position was readvertised with changes to the selection criteria.}, and this has considerable implications for government agencies and for all people (see again Susan Ryan’s admission that there has never been a successful case brought under the current age legislation). I now also regret that, given the admissions of the institute, that I did not elevate my case to a higher body. It is now purely conjecture, but I may have won Australia’s first age discrimination case under the current legislation.

However, my case was not in isolation. Four participants’ related tales and incidents in their lives that supported my claims and which also reflected a sad and sorry tale of discrimination. The chances are that there are numerous others out in the wide depths of Australia, and the world, who are also feeling, and have been subjected to, this disgraceful occurrence. That this appears to be allowed to continue, despite tepid and tacit efforts to defray the damage, is quite shameful. Action must be immediate and must be serious enough to be effective.

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Chapter 8: Conclusion and future research opportunities

Summary of thesis

This thesis has considered the overall implications of the double phenomenon of growing youth unemployment and the non-entry of youth into the workforce, and the perceived desirable state of age workforce retention and recruitment. Furthermore, the former Australian Federal Treasurer, Mr Costello (2005), urged older Australians to keep working beyond normal retirement age to overcome these challenges. My personal perception, gauged from both the interviews and the associated readings, is that if this suggestion is designed to assist in solving the predicted employment dilemma, then it will require considerably more than a request for older workers to remain in, or to re-enter, the workforce. It will require, on the one hand, a considerable attitude (or paradigm) shift from HR departments and recruitment agencies and a dismantling of well-entrenched stereotypical attitudes and behaviours; and on the other hand, a change in attitudes and older worker perceptions of their predicament and future, to enable this to happen (Treasury Report, 2010).

Retirement and future lives are obviously dependent on what we make of our own lives, and what opportunities and pathways we take, and with whom. However, effective retirement is also dependent on the prejudices and biases that we experience and which may block our progress. It must be considered that when others make decisions which have a negative impact on our lives, and when these decisions relate to discrimination, stereotyping, and blatant lies, our future is seriously affected by the perpetrating source, and our attitude is invariably going to result in negative personal feelings toward this source.

Two of the thesis participants reported that finance was not a major issue, while three others (including myself) reported that it was (Jahoda’s manifest functions are relevant here; 1981, 1984). It appeared fortunate that four of the five participants had spousal, partner, and/or family support in varying degrees, and appeared very unfortunate for one that he received no support from virtually any source at all. Such "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
is the mix of representations presented within this thesis, and although we five victims have experienced common ground, we have all come out the other end with different experiences and consequences, and certainly different stories to tell.

That I cannot retire is certainly a major issue for me, and I blame, in the main, discrimination. That my interview participants may (or may soon) be in a position to retire, and are quite possibly not in as dire a position as they once were (or perceived), is quite possibly indicative that they have come through their experience and are not so badly damaged after all. But we are all different!

This thesis has used the reflexive autoethnographic method. It has aimed to place the life of men affected and impacted by the trauma of perceived age discrimination into a broader context by analysing the effects on their personal survival, coping mechanisms, environment - including the effects on family - and future. After initially presenting the widespread incidence of the practice of age discrimination, the research then focused on the effect and impact that this practice has had on professional men. It viewed issues such as masculinity, male identity, male ego, self-esteem, depression and mental health, and pondered the very issues of life that can, given the circumstances and situation, affect each and every one of us, but issues which, in a modern world, we hope to avoid.

An integral part of this study was my own personal battle with age discrimination and the forces which perpetrate this occurrence. I related my own story on how workplace age discrimination has affected me personally, and by sharing others’ experiences, have built a case which displays widespread workplace prejudice within our Australian society. By identifying the discriminating weak links in our system; therefore, employers, individuals, Australian society in general, and agencies (recruitment and specific government organisations with the responsibility to investigate a range of discriminatory irregularities) who exhibit unacceptable behaviour towards older workers, action must be brought to attract both worldwide and Australia-wide attention.

This is not an isolated one-off incident which has only affected me and my interview participants alone, and the literature review has identified this occurrence as being "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
rampant within Australia and across the globe. I have demonstrated the widespread acceptance of this occurrence by undertaking four (initially five) interviews with similarly affected professional men who have all shown immense courage in coming forward, and an absolute willingness to have their stories told. By contrasting and comparing mine with theirs and each other, I have built a credible account of a phenomenon that needs to be addressed by employers, agencies, governments, and individuals everywhere.

As the reflexive autoethnographic methodology allows for unstructured interviews, each individual has been able to relate their story and own details of events and personal damage in an uninterrupted manner. The attraction of this form of interview exhibited itself in the willingness (possibly cathartic effect) of the participants to tell their stories and relevant incidents in their own words and with their own recollection and inflections. This methodological approach also allowed them a respite (to free themselves) from carrying this burden which has been inflicted upon them. The empowering effect that this had was perceivable before my eyes as, one by one, each participant displayed their pent-up anger, frustration, and sometimes embitterment at the phenomena they related. Equally empowering was the belief in each that the outcomes perpetrated upon them were not of their own making and that someone (some unethical person or force), somewhere, is responsible for doing this to them.

The literature initially looked at the incidence of age discrimination (as a global phenomenon) and how it has become endemic within society. It looks at how this change in the world order has been accepted over a very short space of time, with a new focus on youth and beauty. The thesis then proceeded to look at the effects that discrimination has on the victim and his immediate family, and notes that as age discrimination affects one’s ability to function, work, think, sleep, earn, and retire (and more), then it must be viewed as a family occurrence and not just an individual’s problem. An affected person, and in this study men, experienced other hardships such as damage to their ego, depression, sleep deprivation, anger, substance abuse, and suicide (and more), thus demonstrating the seriousness that individuals – and a blinkered society – face, making it imperative that redress occurs immediately. The literature also touches on other aspects of discrimination such as "No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
the ineffectiveness of legislation and the general unethical practices of employers coupled with the negativity and obstruction of recruitment agencies.

In the backdrop of a modern world of supposed workplace equality, participative practice, and diversity; anomalies, prejudice, discrimination, and malpractice still exist in all walks of everyday life. It is clear from the workplace practices outlined in this thesis that many people and organisations still today fall behind these screens and anomalous agendas to cover for their lack of honesty and integrity. The fact that they can excuse and legitimise discriminatory and prejudicial behaviour to the detriment of others is a stain on all honest, forthright, and fair-minded people. This thesis has attempted to throw light on this behaviour and demonstrate the real-life impact and consequences of these actions in the hope that, in time, prejudice and discrimination will subside and disappear - noting the complexity of a utopian ideal.

**Thesis contribution to both individual awareness and academic knowledge**

While it is certainly acknowledged that there has been varying degrees and levels of research into the dilemma of age discrimination both globally, and in Australia (Amos, Bennington, and many others, cited in the literature review), many people, organisations, agencies, and sectors of government still appear to practice age discrimination, and are aware that it exists to an extreme level and runs through every vein and avenue of society (Ozdowski, 2002; Redman & Snape, 2005; Ryan, in Raine, 2012). However, despite increasing awareness due to research and various levels of publicity, it is a distinct possibility that many people and organisations are not yet fully aware of the true extent of the damage that is being inflicted. The question must therefore be asked, when and how much is enough research and publicity; particularly so, when this still runs rampant within our society (Ozdowski, 2002). Increased knowledge of the incidence of age discrimination, or one person’s sudden realisation that injustice is being inflicted and perpetrated (even if only one person), may be the injection or the catalyst needed. The world changes as a result of knowledge, and it is sad to say that the world produces very few (or not enough) Nelson Mandela’s, Aung San Suu Kyi’s, or Mahatma Ghandi’s, but it is the

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rise of knowledge that creates the spark to action and brings about necessary change.

Governments around the world (and certainly in Australia) all appear to be highly ‘reactive’ to the age discrimination phenomenon, and appear to be consciously pushed into establishing agencies and measures to counter the prejudice. This is certainly unproductive and ineffective. Proactivity in the form of further, deeper, and greater investigation and intervention into workplace anomalies and government agency inaction is necessary. The need for Senators to state that they are doing something about the issue, other than sweeping it “under the carpet” (Senator name withheld) is very necessary. The loosening up of the still restrictive laws and legislation, which still have not witnessed (under Australian legislation) the success of a single case of age discrimination, is immediately necessary. But organisational attitudinal change is also not enough; a pathway must be found to facilitate entry into every aspect and sector of individuals’ and the public mindset, and then have it embedded within society’s functioning that we are all responsible and we must all act. This is why this research is essential.

An additional purpose of this thesis, and one which emerged from the participant interviews, is that older people may not be aware that they are actually the subject of discrimination. A number of participants stated that they were not sure, while one participant (John) stated that people believed they had to act in this discriminatory manner and that it was not personal. Ryan (in Malcolm, Aug 2011) stated that since she became Age Discrimination Commissioner in 2011, complaints have increased by 44 per cent, indicating (she claimed) a growing awareness of the problem. Therefore, a significant purpose of this thesis is to further increase awareness in all people of what might actually be the real reason behind workplace rejection or dislocation, and to add knowledge to our society by exposing the inadequacies and inefficiencies of our so-called Australian merit-based egalitarian employment system.

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What this study expected to find

I will firstly repeat the themes that I anticipated would arise from the interview participants’ reactions, and then progress onto the themes which actually did emerge.

The expected themes were

- Reactions to being overlooked in the employment situation.
- Being denied employment opportunities by the promotion of youth.
- The perception that society (in general) is responsible.
- The workplace cultural fit. The older worker perception that youth attitude plays a significant part in their own exclusion.
- Resentment at having to make way.
- Post-failure feedback. Viewed as a waste of time.
- Being denied opportunities (and filling the gaps).
- Not knowing what level to apply for (and effects on future employability).
- Confusion as to why it happens.
- Legacy effect.
- Fighting back and obtaining more qualifications.
- Hiding qualifications and experience (do not intimidate the interviewers).
- A different attitude. A healthy job experience in a non-discriminatory organisation.

What this study discovered and possibilities for future research

When matching the a-priori (expected) themes with the research questions and the interview participants’ stated reactions, I discovered an array of emerging sub-themes and new avenues for discussion and future research. These were illustrated in table form on page 173 of this thesis, including a personal subjective legend relating to the degrees of impact of a range of actual occurrences of perceived age discrimination, using a variation of King’s (2011) template analysis. The following paragraphs represent possible pointers for future research on this issue.

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An observation from the study related to the claim that older workers, after dismissal or redundancy, were likely to be placed on contract or brought back as consultants. Bill claimed that this would then allow younger workers to move into the upper echelons of management, while being supported by the experience of the consultant.

Another of the thesis participants, Harry, claimed that he observed that the bias towards him was possibly related to over-experience and not so much to over-qualification. He claimed that many younger workers have multiple qualifications, but lack experience, and then appear to resent others who have experience. A study on the practice of retrenching older workers and using their expertise as consultants is relevant here as it demonstrates a possible form of discriminatory practice aligned with age, but requires more research and statistics, as the research literature does not appear strong on this possible dimension of age discrimination. It does appear quite anomalous that an older person can be deemed as suitable to be a consultant, but cannot secure a permanent position within the organisation.

A further difficulty uncovered by the research was not knowing at what level to re-apply for work after dislocation from a workplace position, and associated with this, where and what level the discrimination is most apparent. Is it solely mid-level age discrimination? I found that when I applied for what I considered appropriate level positions, I was put out of the eligible recruitment process for what may have been my lack of familiarity with the public service processes of corporate culture, but when I applied for positions at a lower level - at a level I considered below my level of expertise - I was then disqualified on what I perceived as very nebulous grounds, such as others being better qualified. I perceived this as age discrimination. Harry’s earlier contention that age discrimination predominantly existed at the mid-level, and that he did not believe it existed in the higher echelons, is relevant here.

**Expanded and future research potential**

The first, and probably most obvious, theme for future research in this area would be an extension of this study to investigate the effects of age discrimination on older Australian women (and professional women) who may have similar or disparate

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views of the age phenomenon. Another related area could be to investigate the views of wives and partners of the discriminated man. This could add considerable perspective and balance to the findings within this study.

While noting that the purpose of this study is to address the issue of the actual impact and effects of perceived age discrimination, the question of the delay of government action and policy implementation, and secondly, social attitudes, represents a dimension of age discrimination as a focus of added research. The impact on national productivity alone, and the costs to individuals and wider society, as outlined in the report from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing Productive Ageing Centre (June, 2013), warrant further investigation.

An issue which became quite apparent throughout the thesis, and which could most certainly be the subject of further study, is the opportunity to examine the potential for government agencies and authorities to tighten up the law with absolute non-acceptance (zero tolerance) and stringent veracity and correct implementation and application of the law, to restrict the opportunities for offenders (and accused employers) to slip through the cracks. Oft heard excuses, such as older people being untrainable need to be thrown back in the faces of these discriminating agencies. Firstly, evidence (throughout this thesis) has indicated that they can indeed be trained, and in expanding this lie further, the question must be asked, ‘do older people actually need to be retrained’? What if their skills are current and relevant and what could be the reason to disregard one’s high-level experience?

I related in my story a government agency commissioned with the portfolio to investigate various forms of workplace discrimination and prejudice, and how they appeared to be unwilling to ask both prying and divulging questions, and for (I believe) very incriminating and relevant paperwork from an employer (organisation), on the stated grounds that they did not wish to “set a precedent.” This excuse did not make any sense to me, and surely, it is totally unacceptable as it was this organisation’s key role to obtain evidence of malpractice from employers and agencies, rather than to lie down and allow them to operate outside of laws and ethics in any way they wished.

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Efficiency, effectiveness, competitive advantage, and economic gain (and more) have nothing to do with human rights, ethics, moral judgement, selection, and promotion on merit. To reinforce the point, economists deal with money rather than people, and management and HRM should recognise this divide and act accordingly when dealing with people. However, while organisations claim to recruit and promote on merit (notably the public service, although not solely in isolation) and then support a range of discriminatory practices, and while governments institute legislation that organisations do not subscribe to, the arguments promoting both of the above schools of thought will persist. Further research into HRM and recruitment practices (see Shacklock, 2005) could assist in addressing this dilemma.

At the 2006 Australian New Zealand Academy of Management (ANZAM) Conference in Yeppoon, Queensland, Dr Tui McKeown (2006) delivered her paper which investigated new university graduate employment into the Australian workforce. McKeown concluded that this sector of the workforce encountered considerably increased discrimination due to the fact that they possessed tertiary qualifications. McKeown (2006) stated that many employers rejected these new recruits on the grounds that they believed that this demography considered themselves superior and elitist, and due to having qualifications that many employers did not themselves possess, would not employ them.

The Karpin Report (1995) produced similar findings in its investigation into Australian industry, with Australia having far fewer qualified managers than other OECD countries. This phenomenon may also relate to older workers having qualifications and experience which places them above (or beyond) the skill and knowledge set of many employers. The AHRC (2010, p. 12) did find criteria relating to issues which could well fall into this category, such as statements pertaining to the overqualified worker (also see Levine, July 1993), or that the worker did not meet the absolute skill-set (predetermined bias). Another AHRC (2012) inclusion related to the employer comment that the older worker was considered loyal, but lacked potential. There is considerable potential in these above findings to warrant further study and investigation into what could quite possibly be employer (or agency) fear, or inadequacy.

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The AHRC (2010) related the story of a man who applied for over 500 jobs in eight years and received a mere four interviews. He was constantly told that he was overqualified and would find the work unsatisfying within a week. He eventually registered for the age pension. The AHRC (2010) also stated the case of an older female school-teacher who lost her job because there were “too many older school teachers in her school” (p. 18). She accepted part-time teaching, but did not reapply for full-time teaching because she could not face recurring rejection. There is opportunity here for further study on incidences in which capable people have been rejected in the workforce and disappeared from view, possibly with a loss of confidence contrasted with an abundance of unused skill. This again draws in research on the costs this represents to society due to age discrimination having a negative impact on productivity.

The AHRC (2010) claimed (earlier in this thesis) that, in 2009, more than one in four older people were living in poverty. At this time, Australia had the fourth highest old-age poverty rate among OECD countries – more than double the OECD average. This is not a new occurrence, as exemplified by the period between 1990 and 2000 - in what was a time of strong economic growth – in which the proportion of people living in poverty who were aged over 50 increased from one-quarter to one-third. I note research potential in the above, and believe that Australia’s efforts to deal with poverty should be intensified and widely disseminated to broader Australian society.

Another issue of concern to older Australians, which was outlined in the literature review, is that everyday living costs continue to increase. The National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre (NSPAC) Research Report (October, 2013) updates the costs of everyday household goods and essentials and the impact this has on the spending patterns of Australia’s 2.9 million seniors (50 years and over). The report found that between June 2006 and June 2011, electricity, gas, water, rent, and medical services all rose at more than double the inflation rate (NSPAC Report, 2013).

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Human rights issues

The AHRC (2010) stated that the Australian federal anti-discrimination laws are related to the international human rights system based on, and developed in part on, agreements developed through the United Nations with the purpose of furthering the goal of equality for all people. However, unlike other disadvantaged groups, there is no dedicated, binding international agreement which deals specifically with the rights of older people; therefore, representing a ‘void’ in international legal recognition for older people.

Shacklock and Shacklock (2005) investigated Human Resource Practitioners (HRPs) who claimed that they had been pressured into undertaking unethical practices in relation to recruiting, retaining, and promoting older workers. Part of the problem related to negative and discriminatory stereotypes being fostered against older workers - particularly from line-supervisors (Shacklock & Shacklock, 2005). These researchers also claimed that a clash between HR ethics and non-ethical practices from other managerial areas within these organisations, was rife.

At the 2005 ANZAM conference in Canberra, Shacklock and Shacklock (2005) presented their research which involved 276 interview participants aged between 31 and 50 years of age, from 155 Public Service agencies. The majority of the interviewees were HR Directors, HR Managers, and HR Senior Specialists, with most (52%) having more than 10 years HR experience and 78% with more than 6 years’ experience. In this study, these participants were presented with 15 HRM scenarios and asked whether these raised any ethical dilemmas. The potential dilemmas included staff selection, performance management, redeployment, equity/merit, performance pay, and downsizing.

The following figures were obtained (Shacklock & Shacklock, 2005):

- 69.5% of Human Resource Practitioners (HRPs) reported that they had been confronted with ethical problems “Quite Often” to “All the Time.”
- 48.9% of HRPs stated they had been confronted by problems between 3 and 20 times per week.

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- Problems had increased by 56.7% over the last five years.
- In 70.3% of these cases, the “complexity” of ethical issues had also increased in the last five years (2005, Canberra, ANZAM Conference presentation).

It was also stated (Shacklock & Shacklock, 2005 ANZAM Conference presentation) that if the HRPs did not comply with managers’ views, and actually included older workers, they would face retribution; however, if they did comply with the organisational ethics, they would face a personal ethics issue. Shacklock and Shacklock’s (2005) research adds considerable weight to the perception of participants’ views in this research, increasing the likelihood that the level of age discrimination acted against their interests on numerous occasions.

Shacklock and Shacklock (2005, ANZAM Conference) concluded that “changes are needed to employers’ negative attitudes and stereotypes about older workers, so that any pressure is removed from HRPs to take less than ideal ethical actions” and recruit on merit with objectivity. They further stated that HRM professionals need to “raise this issue to a high priority and to take proactive actions, to better equip HRPs to deal effectively and equitably with these increasingly complex and difficult ethical responsibilities.” Shacklock and Shacklock (2005) also recommended a “research watching brief” to ensure desirable outcomes for organisations as well as for older workers themselves.

It is worth noting here a comment from John’s interview that the perpetrators of discrimination against him “felt they had an obligation to behave in this manner.” This also indicates an acceptance of the phenomenon, and John’s very forgiving nature; however, brought into the reality of caring for a sick loved one, this (in John’s mind), superseded and surpassed all other duties and obligations. This personal disposition (to me) is amazing and could be further investigated.

Shacklock and Shacklock (2005) identified a future employment pool dilemma because of a number of factors. They noted that baby-boomers are reaching retirement age, and there is a significant decline in birth rates. This, together, with an increasing life expectancy, is putting a burden on the public purse (due to

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pensions and older age support), effectively ensuring that the future pool of skilled labour is likely to be insufficient. Australian society is confronting an ageing population in which children - those under 15 years of age - will be a vastly reduced percentage of the population in coming decades as opposed to people aged 65 years and older. As Australia’s population ages, the demand on taxes and costs of services will increase significantly (Australian Productivity Commission 2011; Treasury, 2010). Keeping older people in the workplace is essential for numerous reasons - fiscal, ethical, social, health, and well-being in multiple dimensions. Obviously, more research is needed on the return on investment where older people are retained or rejected as valued workers.

Many questions remain unanswered as a result of the findings from this study. Given the research presented by the AHRC (2010), Greenwood (2006), Shacklock (2005), Shacklock and Shacklock (2005), Treasury (2010), and more, further research is required into Human Resource Practitioners’ ethical motivations, lack of leadership, mismanagement, and their questionable actions on recruitment and promotion issues.

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Postscript

I would firstly like to relate the sad news that Harry’s new job (see page 150) has come to an end. He informed me that he is of the opinion that it is blatant age discrimination, and started when his very supportive CEO was undermined by a newly-appointed executive board and replaced by a younger man in his mid-40s. Harry stated that this younger CEO swears and threatens staff, behaviour which (if true) is both illegal within the Australian workplace setting, and certainly not conducive to the modern workplace.

Harry also stated that prior to his forced redundancy, the new CEO informed him that he was “old and should be replaced by your [his] younger female subordinate.” Harry also believes that the new path of the organisation is to either move older staff sideways to make way for youth or to sack them. In relation to this new move, Harry told me that a newly-appointed female was recruited on a $160,000 salary after (Harry alleges) lying about her previous salary and work conditions. Harry continued that she started complaining in her first week about work-life balance, and then applied for four weeks leave to go skiing in Canada. This was granted.

Harry mentioned that this new workplace pathway was facilitated when the organisation appointed an independent person to review performance. This (according to Harry) resulted in a range of false claims and malicious allegations. Harry states that not a single person was interviewed in relation to these claims and were either just sacked or made redundant (as was he).

Although a separate issue, there may be an avenue here for investigation and legal restitution, of which Harry is already quite familiar. Harry advised me that he may seek legal action.

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6 A note may be well in order here for Harry or interested readers to view both Dr John Clarke’s (2005) "Working with Monsters – How to identify and protect yourself from the workplace psychopath" and the Australian Institute of Management’s sponsored report by Helen Burns (Oct 2005) “Organisational psychopaths, the enemy within.” Please view the below Reference List.

"No sir, it’s not discrimination, you’re just too old". An auto-ethnography of the effects of perceived age discrimination among older Australian male professionals.
In concluding this research, I would like to again reinforce my own personal perspective of what this phenomenon has done to my life. It would certainly be an understatement for me to say that I am angry, embittered, and severely damaged by this insidious outrage against myself and my fellow human beings. Anger and embitterment are only a small part of what I feel. I have been frustrated, humiliated, and certainly treated as if I am standing in the way of some younger lesser qualified, although apparent ‘rightful heir’ to any job. I did not undertake many years of study to be told that I am not as qualified as younger people who do not have my qualifications or my extensive experience. To present this ploy is blatant deceit and I do not know how the perpetrators can reconcile their ethics and personal morals, either knowingly or unwittingly, when delivering inequity and injustice to a wide range of honest and well-experienced older Australians trying to remain in the workforce or gain promotion.

It is hardly a coincidence that every one of my interview participants cited the younger Australian’s prejudice as the reason for their own demise and residual problems, and the literature cited provides compelling support for this observation. As a young man, I recall a society in which we respected elders, and where we (the younger applicants) waited in the pecking order for our opportunity, knowing that waiting our turn was the natural progression of life. Many societies around the world still today practice recognition of the pecking order and ‘elder’ authority. However, the turn-around in Australian society has been quite swift and dramatic, and it now appears to be evident at every turn and in every job. It is essential that employment practices immediately change to stem the deleterious consequences that I and my interview participants, and many more ‘silent’ Australians, both male and female, are experiencing.

I believe that my only option for employment is either in academia, which increasingly demands PhD status and a publication record, or overseas. But then, why should I have to venture overseas to obtain employment when I should be entitled to opportunities in my own country? This is an appalling stain on the Australian workplace and on our employment policies. But I have to do what I have to do; I am in a position at age 70 of not being able to retire, as I have suffered this

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discrimination for over 20 years, therefore virtually ensuring that I have no savings, no superannuation, and limited employment opportunities.

My story told of my effort to bring attention to the injustice and hold the perpetrators to account for their wrongdoings. But my attempts, and the attempts of others, have fallen on deaf ears as our institutions, bodies, and appointed government agencies, designed and employed to stamp out discrimination, do nothing. This is supported by a range of prominent commentators in this thesis who attest to exactly this point.

I wrote to five government ministers 16 years ago, and visited a local senator, who told me that all politicians at Parliament House knew that their department’s discriminated on age, and in her exact words “sweep it under the carpet" (Senator’s name withheld). I approached a particular government ‘Justice’ discrimination agency who informed me that the organisation that I was asking to account for their (perceived) discriminatory behaviour was entitled to move the selection goalposts if they deemed it appropriate (a claim I still have a problem accepting), and then did very little, if anything, to address the poignant issues and anomalies that I raised. I approached another government-appointed commissioner (and sent a copy to many other government ministers) and was then informed (with virtually no investigation into the dilemma) that my claim lacked substance. This, in itself, was a total travesty, as the investigating officer failed to exert the pressures allowable within the portfolio, and which would have enabled deeper investigation into the allegations and anomalies. In my estimation, this un-named person was inept and adopted a protective, as opposed to a corrective, role.

In conclusion, the recommendations below from the AHRC (2010, Conclusion), call for reforms and changes, including urging people to write to politicians. I have done this and yet my efforts, protests, and representations have gone unheeded, but I am only one person and there is obviously the potential that added numbers may have a greater impact on the agencies and politicians.

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The AHRC Report (2010, p. 5) stated:

_When the Federal Age Discrimination Act was passed in 2004, it sent a clear message to our community that, in certain areas of public life, discrimination on the basis of age was not only unacceptable, but unlawful_ (p. 5).

The conclusion in the AHRC Report (2010, p. 19) stated:

_But these problems are not unsolvable. Societies that experience these problems can change, adapt, and evolve. Solutions to the problems of unlawful age discrimination and the treatment of mature age workers can be found in the groundswell of a social movement of the kind that has built awareness of other forms of discrimination in our society_ (AHRC, 2010 Conclusion, p. 19).

_It can be changed through a greater awareness of our rights. Strengthening and reform of laws and policies, much-needed further research, and awareness-raising education campaigns must be core initiatives if we are to confront systemic age discrimination. However, individual action is also important. We must start outing age discrimination whenever we see and experience it – whether it be by pointing it out to friends, family, co-workers, and managers, by lobbying members of Parliament or by making a complaint either to management, to state and territory equal opportunity agencies, or to the Australian Human Rights Commission. These are all actions that can assist in creating change_ (AHRC, 2010 Conclusion, p. 19).

_Through these kinds of actions, a necessary level of choice and control can be returned to the lives of mature age workers – which is essential to ensuring dignity and respect. We can take real steps to eradicate age discrimination in our workplaces and to eradicate the acceptability of ageism in all spheres of life. With age equality as our goal, we will also be taking steps to ensure that human rights are respected and protected equally in a society that is truly inclusive of us all_ (AHRC, 2010 Conclusion, p. 19).

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Finally, a major concern in these contemporary times is that Australian governments, on varying positions of the political spectrum, have largely disregarded the effects of age discrimination on an ageing Australia. This has major concerns for the Australian economy and Australia’s future. The Australian population is ageing, we are living longer and healthier lives, the birth rate is declining, and workplace participation is diminishing with a lessening proportion of taxpayers. Concerted action is well overdue and is now crucial. Government policy is theoretically intended to maximise benefits to the majority of the people. On the issue of age discrimination, the vacuum is indeed breathtaking.

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