AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE AND LABOUR MARKET: THE EXPERIENCES OF

OLDER ADULTS

AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE AND LABOUR MARKET: THE EXPERIENCES OF

OLDER ADULTS

By AMANDA CHRISTINE BULL, B.A (Hons.)

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2023) Hamilton, Ontario (Health, Aging, and Society)

TITLE: Ageism in the Workplace and Labour Market: The Experiences of Older Adults

AUTHOR: Amanda Christine Bull, B.A Hons. (University of Toronto)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Nicole Dalmer

NUMBER OF PAGES: ix, 112

Lay Abstract

The only remaining socially acceptable form of discrimination is considered to be ageism; which is the discrimination against individuals for reasons based solely on their age. This form of discrimination runs rampant in popular society and can be found in the media, healthcare, technology, advertising, and nearly every other significant facet of our lives. That being said, it has been proven to be especially prevalent within the workplace and labour market. Much of the previous investigation has merely sought to estimate its prevalence using quantitative methods. In light of this gap in the scholarly literature, this thesis asks: *what are older workers' (55+) lived experiences of ageism?* Using semi-structured interviews, this thesis uncovers the nuances, contradictions, emotions, and realities that constitute the experience of ageism in the Canadian workplace. In-depth analysis of the results allows us to understand the role of age in the labour market more comprehensively and imagine the implications that this thesis has for future workplace policy.

Abstract

The traditional career arc is often organized around the assumption that the most productive "work years" are before the age of 65. As such, workplaces have the potential to engage in harmful age discrimination. As scholarly literature based in the Canadian context has been quite limited, this study aimed to gain a qualitative understanding of older Ontario workers' lived experiences of ageism. Semi-structured interviews with 10 older adults (55+) who were either currently employed, recently retired, or looking to gain re-entry into the labour market were conducted. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage framework for thematic analysis, five key themes that each mediate the varying experience of ageism in the workplace and labour market were identified. Participants highlighted the complex nature of the ageist interactions as well as the gamut of psycho-social consequences that they have faced. Participants also discussed several different types of preferred coping mechanisms. Intersections with other forms of discrimination and the degree to which COVID-19 has impacted participants were also central in shaping the experiences of ageism in the workplace. The findings from this research shed light on the lived experiences of those who have faced age-based discrimination in the labour market, an area of research that is currently lacking. Additionally, results have the ability to inform employers' equity, diversity and inclusion practices and policies that often do not include age-related issues. The findings from this thesis are positioned in terms of their implications for future research and policy. The results of this thesis contribute substantively to the current social gerontological literature. This work provides insight into the importance of age in the workplace and labour market, as well as the role that age segregation throughout the life course plays in the perpetuation of ageist attitudes and behaviours throughout one's working life.

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely acknowledge and thank those who helped me develop and achieve this research project. First, to Dr. Nicole Dalmer who has supported me every step of the way. You have held my hand throughout this entire journey, and I will be forever grateful. As well, thank you to Drs. Meridith Griffin and Stephanie Premji for serving as my committee members. Thank you all for sharing your immense knowledge and experience in order to guide me through this process.

As well, I do not have the words to adequately describe my deep gratitude for the support my friends and family have provided for me, though I hope to show my thanks each and every day. This thesis would not have been possible without the love and support I received from my parents, Dorthey and Brian. You always encouraged my love of learning and have been cheering me on for as long as I can remember. Everything I have and will have is because of you. To my dearest friends, who know who they are, you have believed in me with boundless patience. I could not be more fortunate to have you all in my life.

Finally, I am completely indebted to the participants who so generously shared their stories with me and provided such brave and rich accounts of their lived experiences. They mean more to me than they may ever know.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Academic Achievement:

      This thesis represents original research that I conducted under the supervision of Dr. Nicole Dalmer. It was developed, managed, and executed by me with guidance from Dr. Dalmer. Dr. Dalmer and committee members (Dr. Meridith Griffin and Dr. Stephanie Premji) all contributed to the editing of several drafts. Throughout data collection I was the only interviewer and conducted analysis of raw data independently. I conducted the manual transcription of all interview audio recordings.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The systemic discrimination against individuals for reasons based solely on their age is described as "ageism" (Butler, 1969). It is important to note that ageism can occur to individuals of any age, but for the purposes of this thesis, I focus on how it specifically affects older adults. In Butler's (1969) first introduction of the term, three main components of ageism were identified: (1) attitudes and beliefs, (2) behavioural discrimination, and (3) formalized policies and practices. Commonly considered to be the only remaining socially acceptable form of discrimination, ageism is highly prevalent throughout the media, healthcare, advertising, and nearly every other significant facet of our lives (Dennis & Thomas, 2007). This is reflected in Revera's (2012) report, which found that 63% of seniors (65+) said that they have been treated either differently or unfairly because of their age. As well, the report found that 79% of Canadians agreed that older adults over the age of 75 are seen as less important and are ignored more often than younger people (Revera, 2012).

As advances in healthcare and technology continue to enable the increased longevity of older adults, we must carefully consider the arenas in which ageism may manifest. The workplace is one such arena in older adults' lives: among all those who reported experiencing ageism in the aforementioned report, 20% claimed that their employer was their main source of age-based discrimination (Revera, 2012). In the workplace and labour market, older workers contend with having their contributions ignored, being left out of significant decisions, and being talked down to by co-workers and employers (Blackstone, 2013). Often, workplace cultural and organizational policies implicitly and explicitly permit, and sometimes encourage, this form of discrimination (Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013; Woolever, 2013).

The experience of ageism also has the capacity to produce several negative physical, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural consequences for its victims (Bodner et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2019; Levy et al., 2002; Lyons et al., 2018; Ng & Feldman, 2012; Robertson, 2017; Shippee et al., 2019). Given these harmful physical and social outcomes, it is important that scholars fully understand older workers' experiences of ageism in the workplace in order to develop policies and practices that are informed by older workers themselves. Therefore, it is the aim of this thesis to understand the lived experiences of older adults who face ageism in their workplace. This research is particularly important given the significant knowledge gap that remains in the literature due to the distinct lack of qualitative research methods employed with respect to this topic.

In the Canadian context, outside of merely estimating its prevalence, there is very little research that has sought to investigate ageism in the workplace. This is evident in the 2021 article by Chasteen and colleagues, who, while investigating the characteristics of ageism experiences across all generations, chose to scarcely discuss their results from older adult participants after they acknowledged that the prevalence of ageism against this population has already been well established and thus the results from this population need not be discussed or repeated. Similarly, de Blois and Lagacé (2017) attempted to understand Canadian older workers' perspectives of ageism through a survey. Their results suggested that older workers actually perceive that their younger co-workers view them positively (de Blois & Lagacé, 2017). In 2019, Lagacé and colleagues used similar quantitative methods to investigate whether a positive intergenerational climate could contribute to lower levels of perceived ageism and found that it did, in fact, lower levels of perceived ageism in the workplace. Contrastingly, Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko (2016) conducted in-depth interviews to understand how older men experience

ageism in their everyday lives but did not explore the workplace in great detail. We can see through this cursory examination of the current state of the literature, that a significant knowledge gap remains due to the exclusion of qualitative research methods. As a result, scholars have yet to fully understand the complex ways in which ageism impacts the lives of older adults in the workplace.

Given this distinct lack of research and understanding of ageism in the workplace, the main research question for this thesis is: *what are older workers' (55+) lived experiences of ageism?* Several sub-questions that aim to further develop insights into this issue include: (1) how do older workers view or understand their experiences of ageism?; (2) do older workers internalize their experiences of ageism? If so, how?; and (3) what are the intersections of ageism with other forms of discrimination in the workplace? (e.g., sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.).

In the chapters that follow, I draw on social constructionism (Durrheim, 1997) in order to contextualize the forces and relationships that operate in tandem to implicate the social, historical, and collective nature of the phenomena. The review of related literature in Chapter 2 allows me to reference relevant social gerontological works that focus on aging in modern times and on age as a significant social category through which our understanding of work and the labour market has been shaped. As well, I summarize the scholarly development of the concept of ageism and ageism in the workplace. This allows me to contextualize the findings that I will describe in later chapters.

In Chapter 3, I outline my methodology and fully explicate my approach to this research, including the development of research questions, assumptions made, the decision to use qualitative methods, and the decision to use thematic analysis to understand the data. Chapter 4 presents the research findings. These results are organized based on the significant themes that

were identified throughout the analysis. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of this data, including important considerations that draw on social constructionism, as well as the implications that the results may have for older adults and the aging labour market.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature and Research

2.1 Current State of Knowledge

2.1.1 Aging in Contemporary Society

Age is one of the foremost social organizers that exists within the world. As a social category, older age generates additional meaning when considered in relation to other ages. Socially and culturally, we continue to devalue older adults as older ages are associated with a loss of status, income, and authority (Calasanti, 2020). This is especially interesting, however, given that we are all undergoing the aging process. As a result, it is of increasing importance to understand the societal implications of aging and the consequences of the ways in which we construct meaning surrounding older age.

Throughout history, a variety of forces have been tied to older age and shape the aging process. These include politics, cultural ideals, and economic concerns. In contemporary society, we see how medicalization has become the most overwhelming factor that shapes the aging process. The term medicalization refers to the process by which typical behaviours, experiences, or feelings are transformed into issues that can be solved via medicine. In the past several decades we have seen the slow rise of medicalization. Now, virtually every stage of life can be defined by its medicalization. Brown (1995) discusses how the processes of medicalization should be continuously questioned. This is a result of how the aging experience is defined in medical terms without criticality (Brown, 1995). Through medicalization, aging has been widely framed as a medical issue that can be treated and managed, as well as a difficult and unappealing social and medical problem that must be "solved." Often, those who are perceived to require more "fixing" are those deemed frail (the "oldest old").

Through the social construction of aging as a period of biological degeneration, older adults are consistently perceived as weak, dependent, and overall, inferior to healthy (younger) bodies. The discourse surrounding aging bodies generates the expectation of deterioration. This may lead to the normalization, acceptance, and belief that the poor emotional, physical, and mental status of older adults is inevitable. In turn, older adults can be seriously devalued as they are not perceived to be contributing to society (Jackson, 1994). In particular, their rampant exclusion from the labour market forces the perception that they no longer contribute to our growing economy. The social neglect of older adults allows for those individuals perceived to possess more value to dominate within society. This common practice has resulted in discrimination against older adults – also known as ageism.

2.1.2 Ageism

Ageism was first defined by Butler (1969) as the systemic discrimination against individuals for reasons based solely on their age. Ageism is highly prevalent throughout all aspects of society and in his first description of this phenomena, Butler (1969) compared its severity to that of racism and sexism. Since Butler first introduced scholars to this concept, literature in the fields of gerontology, sociology, psychology, and communication have confirmed that ageism is, in fact, universally occurring (Malta & Doyle, 2016). As well, several important legal landmarks have been introduced in response to this recognition. It is important to consider these legislative elements when understanding the concept of ageism.

Typically, age-based discrimination can be characterized by four main categories: (1) personal ageism, (2) institutional ageism, (3) intentional ageism, and (4) unintentional ageism (Brownell & Powell, 2013). Personal ageism includes ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are biased against persons due to their older age (Brownell & Powell, 2013). Institutional ageism

can be defined as missions, rules, and practices of an organization that discriminate against individuals because of their older age (e.g., mandatory retirement policy) (Brownell & Powell, 2013). Intentional ageism includes purposefully practicing beliefs and actions that take advantage of stereotypes of aging, whereas unintentional ageism is carried out without the perpetrator's awareness (Brownell & Powell, 2013). Ageist attitudes, behaviours, and policies can arise for a variety of different reasons and in a variety of different ways. Brownell and Powell (2013) discussed that age-based discrimination can be identified in ideas, attitudes, beliefs, rules, practices, or laws. These may occur either with or without the perpetrator's awareness that they are being biased against a person or group based on age (Brownell & Powell, 2013). Cultural stereotypes of aging are especially dangerous given that, as described by Horton and colleagues (2007), older adults experience a "double-whammy." That is, ageism influences both how they are treated by society and how they treat themselves (Horton et al., 2007).

As the literature concerning this subject has grown over the past several decades due to its increased recognition, various models have been introduced that have sought to understand the mechanism(s) through which ageist attitudes and/or behaviours arise. Primarily, these are concerned with how our post-industrial society has effectively separated age groups (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). Scholars in this field tend to posit that age segregation has become intimately connected with ageist attitudes; it has been hypothesized that the clear distinctions made between the self and other have resulted in a dichotomy between "us" and "them" (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). Together, societal age segregation and ageism operate cyclically to perpetuate one another. The way in which Western societies have socially structured age has resulted in a segmented life course that assigns different social institutions to those in separate life phases (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). It is believed that the lack of contact between generations fuels

ageist attitudes and behaviours that further segments our social institutions (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). The phenomena of ageism and age segregation thus operate in tandem to ensure that age-based stereotypes and discrimination are never eliminated.

The consequences of experiencing ageism include a wide range of negative physical, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural outcomes (Bodner et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2019; Levy et al., 2002; Lyons et al., 2018; Ng & Feldman, 2012; Robertson, 2017; Shippee et al., 2019). There is a wealth of literature that speaks to this issue, but most focus on the dismal mental health outcomes as a result of ageism. Research also indicates that these stereotypes negatively influence older adults' decisions to engage in cognitive and physical activity (Horton et al., 2007). Numerous studies have reported that higher exposure to age-based discrimination is significantly associated with an increased prevalence of depressive symptoms, anxiety, or general stress (Bodner et al., 2021; Lyons et al., 2018; Shippee et al., 2019). As well, a longitudinal study in England described how participants who experienced ageism were found to be more likely to report fair or poor health, in addition to diagnoses of coronary heart disease, chronic lung disease, arthritis, and limiting long-standing illnesses (Jackson et al., 2019). As researchers monitored the participants over time, the ailments listed above were exacerbated with ageist experiences (Jackson et al., 2019). Overall, ageist stereotypes contribute to increased susceptibility to illness and the decreased ability to recover from disease (Horton et al., 2007). These results have all been replicated with a Canadian sample in Meisner's (2012) work, which found that negative age stereotyping has a much stronger influence on important behavioural outcomes such as memory, psychomotor, and physiological activities, among older adults than does positive age stereotyping. Similarly, Levy and colleagues (2002) found that those with

negative self-perceptions of aging lived, on average, 7.6 years less than older adults with positive self-perceptions of aging.

Age-based discrimination against older adults can be found in all aspects of our lives. The media landscape, in particular, is one avenue where we can begin to examine how this population is portrayed. A recent study of how Canadian news media portrays older adults and aging in a disaster context (floods, wildfires, tornadoes) found that journalistic coverage of this population often occurs on a positive-negative continuum (Oostlander et al., 2022). This means that both positive and negative stereotypes of older adults are portrayed. Considering the incredibly large audiences that newspapers, magazines, and other forms of mass media have the ability to reach, they play a significant role in perpetuating negative public opinion about later life. For example, between the years 1991 and 2000, Bonnesen and Burgess (2004) found that the phrase "senior moment" appeared 181 times in 136 distinct newspaper articles. This term is most commonly defined as a brief memory lapse, but also refers to cognitive impairment or functional incompetence (Bonnesen & Burgess, 2004). In the articles examined in this research, very rarely was this phrase used to highlight a positive event relating to older adults (Bonnesen & Burgess, 2004). Powell (2013) conducted a similar investigation of 97 newspapers that were based in the United States of America. In this study, it was reported that older adults are continually portrayed as a problem; they are often described as being stubborn, lacking respect for younger individuals, and representing a high cost to society (Powell, 2013). The results from this study echo that of Bonnesen and Burgess (2004) in that the media bias towards older adults is largely negative in nature, reflecting and fueling ageist beliefs (Powell, 2013).

Typically, negative ageism towards older adults can be characterized by assigning labels of incompetent, ill, burdensome, forgetful, and unattractive (Levy & Macdonald, 2016). Older

adults themselves have described this experience as "being seen or treated as old" and being monitored for vulnerabilities (Minichiello et al., 2000). While not exclusively overt or brutal, these negative ageist attitudes can manifest in seriously harmful behaviour towards older adults. This can include being disrespectful, avoidant, patronizing, using simplified or slow communication, physical neglect or abuse, financial neglect or abuse, and unwarranted segregated housing (Levy & Macdonald, 2016). In 2019, Hill reported that more than one-third of British people admitted that they have discriminated against older adults because of their age. While individuals aged 30-40 were found to be the most likely to perpetuate discriminatory behaviours, one in thirty people admitted that they regularly discriminated against anyone over the age of 50. We have also seen these attitudes and behaviours highlighted throughout the literature in relation to healthcare providers and professional caregivers (Lagacé et al., 2012; Shpakou et al., 2021). While exploring instances of ageist communication in Québec long-term care facilities, Lagacé and colleagues (2012) discovered that nearly 70% of residents who participated described experiencing controlling language and attitudes from health care practitioners, while 63.6% revealed the use of infantile communication patterns and some highlighted being completely ignored by numerous caregivers within the institution (Lagacé et al., 2012). Similarly, Duffy (2017) notes that while social workers are seeing a rise in their contact with older adults, many describe this work as mundane, "not real social work," and do not hold these individuals in high regard.

While the subjective experience of ageism has received little scholarly attention, some academics have attempted to fill this gap. MacRae (2020) examined older (55+) Canadian men's experiences with and perceptions of ageism during interactions with physicians. The findings from this study indicate a general lack of awareness of ageism among many of the men included

as participants (MacRae, 2020). While many participants did not believe that "ageism", specifically, was likely to occur during patient-physician interactions, they nonetheless reported during interviews that negative stereotyping on the part of the doctor was quite common (MacRae, 2020). It is overwhelmingly reported by participants, however, that there had never been any experiences of ageism during a medical encounter (MacRae, 2020). It is interesting to note that patients created a distinction between facing stereotypes and experiencing ageism (MacRae, 2020). There were several rationales provided as explanations as to why a particular participant had not experienced ageism and who was more likely a target; these were all seemingly rooted in internalized ageism and stereotypes (MacRae, 2020). Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko (2016) produced similar results to MacRae (2020) in their study aimed at examining how older men (65+) perceive, experience, and internalize ageist prejudice in their everyday lives. Here, they found that older men knew ageism existed, but reported never to have experienced it personally (Hurd Clarke & Korotchenko, 2016).

A more recent project sought to discover whether people were acquainted with the term ageism and to what extent familiarity with the term corresponded with reports of discrimination due to older age (Okun & Ayalon, 2022). When first asked to define the term "ageism" and subsequently identify if and what types of discrimination they faced, 45% of participants were not familiar with the term (Okun & Ayalon, 2022). Of this group, only 10% reported that they had faced such experiences (Okun & Ayalon, 2022). The researchers then defined and demonstrated the term "ageism" and once again asked participants to share their experiences of the phenomenon (Okun & Ayalon, 2022). At this point, 62% of all participants shared instances of ageism in their lives; of those, 31% were initially unfamiliar with the term (Okun & Ayalon, 2022). This demonstrates not only the significant association between linguistic representation

and reports of discrimination, but just how under acknowledged this phenomenon is within society, even among older adults themselves.

2.1.3 Older Adults in the Workplace

Since the mid-1990s, we have seen large gains made in older Canadians' labour force participation (Government of Canada, 2022). Of those aged 55 to 64 years of age, the participation rate increased from a mere 47.1% in 1996 to a high of 65.8% in 2016 (Government of Canada, 2022). The Government of Canada (2022) attributes this phenomenon to a variety of factors, including (but not limited to): improved health and life expectancy; relatively fewer physically demanding jobs; cultural shifts; the need for social interaction; the need to work for financial reasons (fewer private pension plans, lower savings and returns on savings, etc.); and changes to the retirement income system.

Despite the recent record-high participation rates of older Canadians, there remains room for increased participation, if individual older adults desire to continue working. This is especially apparent in comparison to the numerous countries that continue to outperform Canada on this measure. For example, Canada's participation rate of adults aged 55-64 ranks 16th among Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Government of Canada, 2022). Canada lags behind countries like Sweden, Japan, as well as Germany (Government of Canada, 2022). It is important to note, however, that participation is not necessarily an exclusively positive measure - some older adults are working simply to make ends meet or because they find themselves socially isolated.

In many occupations, the proportion of older workers (55+) is smaller for women than men (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). This reflects the more "recent" entry into the labour force for adult women (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). In 2016, the predominant occupation for

women requiring a university degree was registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). Among the women-identifying individuals within this occupation, 20% were aged 55 and over; this is double the proportion from 1996 (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). The most prevalent occupations requiring a university degree for men, contrastingly, were financial auditors and accountants (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). The share of older men in this position rose form 14% in 1996 to 31% in 2016 (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). For women, 5 of the 15 most prevalent occupations requiring a university degree were in the educational sector, compared to 4 of the top occupations for men (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019).

There were smaller than average shares of older women in occupations such as advertising, marketing, and public relations (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). For older men, there were smaller than average shares in mechanical, civil, electrical, and electronic engineering roles (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). Numerous occupations that do not require a university degree have large proportions of older workers. These include transport truck drivers, cleaners, and janitors (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). For women, the most prevalent positions include administrative and office support workers (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019). Men, on the other hand, were found to be welders, electricians, labourers, and vehicle repairmen (Ouellet-Léveillé & Milan, 2019).

While the increase in labour force participation among older adults is attributed to a variety of factors, such as improved life expectancy, evolving economic demands, or the need for social interaction, this population is nonetheless delaying retirement or even returning to work after retirement (Government of Canada, 2022). In Canada, between 1998 and 2016, the average age of retirement increased by nearly 3 years (60.9 years to 63.6 years) (Government of Canada,

2022). Interestingly, however, the current average retirement age remains *below* the levels from the 1970s and 80s, which was approximately 65 years of age (Government of Canada, 2022). This may be due to the relatively recent elimination of mandatory retirement legislation in Canada that now permits older workers to be more flexible with their plans to end their working lives. These federal and provincial policies that accompany the growing cultural shifts are explicated in more detail in section 2.1.6.

2.1.4 Ageism in the Workplace

As previously mentioned, ageism can be found in virtually all aspects of our lives. As older adults continue to work longer, the workplace has become an increasingly important space in which older adults can face age-based discrimination. Dennis and Thomas (2007) expertly articulated the importance of the workplace in examining instances of ageism when they wrote: "the workplace, as a microcosm for society, reflects the stereotypes and biases that are part of the national social environment" (p. 84). Often, discrimination that takes place in the work environment can be categorized into four main typologies, (1) covert hostility, (2) verbal hostility, (3) manipulation, and (4) physical hostility (Blackstone, 2013). Covert hostility can alternatively be described as "passive" hostility; it includes the implication of a threat but not an explicit statement (Koonin & Green, 2004). Verbal hostility consists of verbal threats, while physical hostility includes physical harm (Koonin & Green, 2004). Manipulations, on the other hand, are behaviors designed to exploit, control, or otherwise influence others (Koonin & Green, 2004). The most common ageist behaviours encountered in the workplace, however, are reported as having work contributions ignored, being left out of decisions that affect one's work, being talked down to by co-workers, and being talked down to by bosses (Blackstone, 2013).

Although research has proven that there is no identifiable performance difference between younger and older employees within the same organization, we know that negative attitudes about older workers persist (Malinen & Johnston, 2013). In their 2013 study, Malinen and Johnston sought to understand the malleability of explicit and implicit attitudes towards older workers. The results of this investigation showed that negative, stable implicit attitudes towards older workers remained after a mental imagery intervention, where the researchers prompted participants to imagine respected and valued older workers from their personal surroundings (Malinen & Johnston, 2013). This demonstrates the unconscious nature of ageism in the workplace. Over time, implicit messaging fed to the general population has constructed fixed (negative) understandings of the older worker (Malinen & Johnston, 2013).

Macdonald and Levy (2016) demonstrated that instances of age discrimination are negatively related to levels of job satisfaction and job commitment. As well, these scholars found that social support in the work environment was significantly related to variables that determined the longevity of one's position in the labour market (Macdonald & Levy, 2016). Similarly, Choi and colleagues (2018) discussed the concept of job resources and demands. They highlighted that age-based discrimination is a job demand that decreases work enjoyment because of the lack of workplace resources to counter its effects (Choi et al., 2018). It was hypothesized that the underreporting of ageism is due to the high threshold for what discrimination means (Macdonald & Levy, 2016). This means that folks often may not be able to recognize subtle forms of ageism as discrimination (Macdonald & Levy, 2016). In the workplace, individuals tend to associate discrimination with blatant firing due to age or explicit ageist feedback concerning job performance (Macdonald & Levy, 2016). Nelson (2002; 2009) posits that subtle forms of age discrimination tend to go unnoticed due to the institutionalization of ageism in the labour market.

In their book, *Ageism at Work*, Berger (2021) presents results from a study of employers' accounts of the hiring process and their views on managing the aging workforce. Through qualitative interviews with these individuals, Berger (2021) was able to elicit a variety of perspectives that are held in relation to older workers. While there was some evidence that employers are aware of the strengths that accompany an age-diverse organization, there were nonetheless numerous stereotypes and fears expressed regarding older workers (Berger, 2021). The majority of participants in this study noted that workers over the age of fifty-five must be "exceptional" in order to be considered for an open position (Berger, 2021). There was also significant evidence that employers perceive older workers to maintain diminished productivity and represent a need for serious training investment (Berger, 2021). These participants also echo the popular belief that older workers are inflexible and will not respond well to changes of any kind (Berger, 2021). As well, many employers described a fear surrounding increased costs associated with an aging workforce (Berger, 2021). These costs spanned areas of salary, training, as well as health benefit plans (Berger, 2021). Overall, employers described older workers as a drain on organizations whose benefits do not outweigh the downsides (Berger, 2021).

Few scholars have attempted to qualitatively study and understand ageism in the workplace. Berger (2006; 2021), however, has done so several times. In a study published in 2006, Berger found that once participants aged 45-65 had been labelled "old" by employers and society, they would begin to define themselves as old and subsequently became susceptible to identity degradation, which is the process of transforming one's total identity to an identity that is lower in status and consequently inferior (Garfinkel, 1956). Despite this, participants described being able to successfully negotiate their identities by drawing on social support, older worker programs, changing identities, maintaining key social roles, and altering their general outlook

(Berger, 2006). In a separate study, described in their 2021 book, Berger details how unemployed older workers experience ageism in the job search process. The participants here describe a variety of incidents, ranging from a general feeling that employers were stereotyping them to a more concrete confirmation that age-based discrimination was taking place (Berger, 2021). Both subtle and overt forms of ageism were discussed by participants, as well as facing both positive and negative age stereotypes (Berger, 2021). As well, the older workers highlighted the popular mechanisms through which age-based discrimination takes place; these include job advertisements, résumés, the job interview, and ageist discourse/language (Berger, 2021).

2.1.5 Current Strategies to "Manage" Ageism in the Workplace

Despite the paucity of research dedicated to the subjective experience of ageism in the workplace, some literature exists that proposes practices that have the potential to counter ageism in the workplace and its subsequent negative outcomes (Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013; Cortijo et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2018; Lagacé et al., 2019; Woolever, 2013). Lagacé and colleagues (2019) utilize the inter-group contact theory to hypothesize that a positive intergenerational workplace climate will contribute to lower levels of perceived ageism from the perspective of older workers. The results from their survey suggest that a healthy intergenerational workplace climate will exert a significant and positive influence on perceived ageism, thus increasing levels of older worker satisfaction (Lagacé et al., 2019).

Several scholars have also demonstrated how certain high-level workplace policies may similarly contribute to the elimination of age-based discrimination. For example, Davies and colleagues (2018) used a quantitative study to assess manager openness to involvement in retirement, in order to determine the degree to which social support (defined as the opposite of ageist attitudes) in the workplace impacts the longevity of an older worker's career. The results

of this investigation demonstrated that employers who practice an engaging leadership style are more likely to develop a collaborative and trusting relationship with their older employees that can compensate for ageist experiences in the workplace. As well, Ciampa and Chernesky (2013) describe the culture and environment as the responsibility of top-level organizational management. They introduce a variety of potential policies that can be put into place to offset negative ageism; these include flexible work and retirement options, lifelong learning opportunities, and new recruitment practices (Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013). These authors note how the engagement with and respect for the ideas of older employees will build morale, decrease work-related stress, improve intergenerational relations, and promote positive images of aging (Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013). Woolever (2013), on the other hand, introduces the role of the Human Resource department in enforcing the moral duties of all employees in a workplace. In this way, the organization will maintain its "moral compass" and attention will be paid not to what employees are required to do, but rather what their moral imperative indicates that they should do (Woolever, 2013).

A more thorough, detailed, and fleshed out model for addressing ageism in the workplace was developed by Cortijo and colleagues (2019). The "AGE model" draws on corporate social responsibility to create a safe and sustainable workplace for employees of all ages (Cortijo et al., 2019). The Acknowledge-Grow-Embrace (AGE) model takes advantage of thought diversity, experience, and skills of older workers in order to create a more socially responsible organization (Cortijo et al., 2019). This framework begins by acknowledging that an organization permits acts of ageism ("Acknowledge") and is followed by the increased understanding of the different ways in which ageism manifests in a workplace ("Grow"). The model concludes with an embrace of

all-aged employees and encourages the sharing of knowledge and leveraging of potential ("Embrace") (Cortijo et al., 2019).

2.1.6 Workplace & Labour Market Policies

In the year 2000, the Ontario Human Rights Commission noted that due to the perceived social utility of mandatory retirement policies and the acceptance of age discrimination within wider society, the legal and legislative response to ageism is markedly less critical than other prejudices (such as sexism or racism) and is in fact rather accepting of the practice (Gunderson, 2003; Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC], 2000). As well, prior to the introduction of age-based equality legislation in 2006, the commission highlights how age cases were objectively handled differently than other cases of discrimination (OHRC, 2000). From a human rights perspective, the commission noted, the most significant difference between ageism and other forms of discrimination is the complete lack of moral outrage that would accompany these cases (OHRC, 2000). This is especially striking if you consider public outcry on issues such as race, sex, or disability.

Prior to its abolishment, challenges to mandatory retirement policies tended to be made alleging violations of Section 15(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). Certain legislative provisions or policies that are in opposition of Section 15 are permitted to remain if these cases are found to be justified pursuant to Section 1 of the Charter, which states "The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society" (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982; Fitzgerald & Casey, 2007). The Supreme Court of Canada dealt with challenges to mandatory retirement on four occasions throughout the 1990s (Fitzgerald & Casey, 2007). The most notable of these are

McKinney v. The University of Guelph as well as Dickason v. The University of Alberta (Fitzgerald & Casey, 2007). In both of these cases, the Court recognized that any piece of legislation that permits the discrimination of individuals over the age of 65 was in direct violation of the Charter (Fitzgerald & Casey, 2007). The Court also held, however, that such age discrimination was justified as "a reasonable limit prescribed by law;" abiding by Section 1 of the Charter (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982; Fitzgerald & Casey, 2007). The rationale for this decision was based on socio-economic conditions, such as the need for employment opportunities for younger workers, the protection of the right to retire with dignity, and the need for a renewed labour market and workforce (Fitzgerald & Casey, 2007).

In 2005, as a response to "concerning" demographic changes (i.e., an aging population), Canada's federal government instructed the Policy Research Initiative (PRI) to release a report outlining various policy options that may lengthen the working lives of older adults (Cooke, 2006). This report detailed the economic implications of the aging population and proposed a rationale for ending mandatory retirement. An important caveat, however, is that up until this point, there was a distinct absence of comprehensive research analyzing the effectiveness of age discrimination legislation in Canada (Gunderson, 2003). After the PRI report was published, Canada adopted several new policies in order to increase and maintain the labour market participation of older workers (Cooke, 2006). These include anti-discrimination policies, changes to the ages at which public pensions can be claimed, policies eliminating alternative routes to retirement, active labour-market policies, and phased retirement implementation (Cooke, 2006). On December 12, 2006, Ontario officially banned mandatory retirement policies. On that date, it became law that no employment contract or collective agreement may include mandatory retirement provisions (except if it is a bona-fide occupational requirement) (Fitzgerald & Casey,

2007). As well, this legislation meant that all existing collective agreements and contracts with discriminatory clauses were no longer enforceable (Fitzgerald & Casey, 2007).

While there has clearly been some attention on workplace age discrimination in terms of human rights legislation in the past 15 years, there still seems to be a disconnect between employers, organizations, and the laws by which they are bound. Currently, all jurisdictions in Canada maintain some legislation that is meant to guarantee equality of all citizens. The provisions that prohibit age discrimination are based in Section 15(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). In Ontario, specifically, Section 5(1) of the Ontario Human Rights Code stipulates that "every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to employment without discrimination because of … age …" (OHRC, n.d-b). This means that the actions of employers are limited in three main areas: (1) they cannot refuse to hire, train, or promote, people because of their age, (2) they must not target older workers in an unfair manner when it comes to reorganization of the workforce or reducing staff, and (3) they are responsible for ensuring that their workplace is completely free from discrimination, is inclusive, and respects and supports the needs of all of its workers (OHRC, n.d-a). Additionally, employers in all Canadian jurisdictions are barred from asking for an individual's age or birthday when recruiting a potential employee (Hudson, 2017).

Since 2006, some older workers have had more flexibility regarding the timing of their retirement. It is important to note, however, that this is not the universal case, as many older adults are compelled to continue working longer than they wish due to factors like the state of the economy or their personal finances. The elimination of mandatory retirement policies and the slow increase in awareness surrounding age-based discrimination policies has allowed for individuals over the age of 65 to remain in the labour market without being forced to retire.

Messacar and Kocourek (2019) investigated the influence of this policy change on pathways to retirement, bridge employment, partial retirement, as well as general health and well-being. This study found that mandatory retirement is no longer used by employers, even in cases where it is permissible (Messacar & Kocourek, 2019). Furthermore, their analysis also illustrates how the elimination of mandatory retirement has reduced the likelihood of individuals being retired at 65 by 16%.

2.2 Gaps in the Literature

The significant literature that concerns itself with the experience of ageism in the workplace has yet to understand the full scope of the issue. The tendency of authors to utilize quantitative designs has neglected the *lived* experience of the older adults as it fails to capture the nuances, contradictions, and emotions that are linked to this topic. While this content contributes to the intellectual framework that has guided my data collection, it also demonstrates the knowledge gap that my work attempts to fill. Although a wealth of literature has sought to estimate the prevalence of ageism, this does little to illustrate the intricacies of manifestations of ageism in the workplace. This is evident in the 2021 article by Chasteen and colleagues, who, while investigating the characteristics of ageism experiences across all generations, chose to scarcely discuss their results from older adults after they acknowledged that the prevalence of ageism against this population has already been well established and thus need not be repeated. de Blois and Lagacé (2017) attempted to understand older workers' perspectives through a Canadian survey. Their results suggested that older workers actually perceive that their younger co-workers view them positively (de Blois & Lagacé, 2017). This points not only to the variability in ageism experiences, but to the limitations of survey-based investigations. That is to say, surveys are not always successful at obtaining a full picture of a phenomenon.

We can also see that a tendency towards small participant pools that are tied to specific genders, ages, or occupations has severely inhibited the insights that can be gained from current literature. For example, in 2020, McConatha and colleagues sought to investigate the impact of ageism in the workplace. They did, however, only distribute their survey to *teachers*; thus, drastically limiting the generalizability of their results (McConatha et al., 2020). As well, both MacRae (2020) and Hurd Clarke and Korotchenko (2016) limited their research to male participants only. This omits important nuances that may only be elicited when including the full gender spectrum in one's research. Some scholars have also chosen to target specific aged older workers (Berger, 2006; Horton et al., 2008). While Berger (2006) limited their study to older workers aged 45-65, Horton and colleagues (2008) chose to interview "young seniors" between the ages of 60 and 75. By doing so, the analytical implications are far narrower and important experiences may be missed.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is an important term that is often utilized when discussing matters of discrimination. It refers to the "double-jeopardy" faced when individuals are located at intersections of different marginalized groups. For example, age and gender or gender and race or age, gender, and race. There is a lack of literature focusing on the qualitative aspects of intersectionality in the workplace and labour market, specifically. In 2017, Australian scholars Taylor and McLoughlin performed quantitative data analysis on survey data to demonstrate the probability of experiencing 12 different forms of discrimination in the workplace. Results demonstrate counter-intuitive patterns of workplace discrimination across categories of gender and age group, with discrimination reported most frequently by younger men (Taylor & McLoughlin, 2017). While producing irrefutably valuable results, this study

nonetheless fails to illustrate the full scope of the issue by narrowing in on the types of workplace discrimination that may be experiences by older adults.

Gaps in the knowledge base also exist when considering the lack of investigation within a Canadian context. Even more, few researchers have looked beyond major metropolitan areas in populous provinces. There has been a striking lack of work that takes up the differences between American and Canadian workplaces. While it can be said that the similarities between our two nations is enough for results to be generalizable, differences in retirement policy, workplace law, and other important factors distinguish Canada as its own rightful research context. We can only look to a handful of investigators who have exclusively analyzed the Canadian population and workplace. Berger (2006; 2021) is most notable in this field, publishing several pieces relating to the qualitative experience of ageism in the Canadian workplace. Most of their work has been located in the Greater Toronto area, which does exclude rural and remote regions of Ontario and the rest of Canada. These workplaces possess unique characteristics that are distinct from labour markets in Toronto and its surrounding area.

Given these outlined lacunae, this thesis aims at making strides in each of the aforementioned areas. The qualitative approach (which will be discussed in-depth throughout Chapter 3) allows for subjective meanings and interpretations to be uncovered by the researcher in ways that are not often attainable through quantitative methodologies. The use of these methodologies will tell us so much more about the complexity of the experience of ageism; complexities that quantitative research simply cannot capture. As well, these research techniques can reflect the experiences of older workers who face ageism in the workplace and demonstrate the fullness of the issues they face as a result. This thesis included several provisions to address specific gaps outlined in this section. For example, not only is it located in the Canadian context,

but it includes a wide range of participant demographics and pays particular attention to the

aspects of intersectionality that are at work at work.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the theoretical framework that guided each aspect of this research. The data collection methods, as well as the data analysis technique are discussed in detail in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this research was executed.

Utilizing a social constructionist perspective, this thesis adopted qualitative research methods (semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis) in order to best answer the research questions described in Chapter 1. This position outlines the collective nature of human consciousness that is driven by social and historical contexts (Durrheim, 1997). While social constructionism problematizes the notion that knowledge is strictly derived from an objective, unbiased observation of events, it posits that there can never be one "true" account of phenomena (Burr, 2015). The main tenet of this theoretical position describes how multiple perspectives exist, which each arise out of social interactions between individuals (Burr, 2015). This framework was determined to be most appropriate for this research given its ability to demonstrate the varied ways in which older workers experience ageism in the labour market. Similarly, this position shaped the decision to carry out semi-structured interviews with participants and guided me towards thematic analysis.

3.2 Method

This research project relied on ontological and epistemological assumptions that guided the process from its inception until the writing of this thesis. First, to define the terms. Ontology seeks to understand what the form and nature of reality is, and therefore, what is there that can possibly be known about it (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Epistemology, on the other hand, asks what the nature of the relationship between the knower and the would-be knower is, and what can be

known about it (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Given that this research proposed the use of qualitative research methods, a non-positivist paradigm was necessary.

This research is placed within a critical realist ontological position. Seen as the "in-between" option when compared to realism and relativism, this position sees a real and knowable world that sites "behind" the subjective, socially determined knowledge that a researcher can access (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Moreover, this position holds that in order to produce knowledge that can "make a difference," we must claim that some form of authentic reality exists (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This ontology underpins several different qualitative approaches, most notably thematic analysis; this is discussed in section 3.6.

In addition to the ontological position of this research, this project is situated within a constructionist epistemology. This position argues that what we know about the world does not reflect the true nature of the world waiting to be discovered, but rather what we know is constructed through various systems of meaning and discourses that we reside within (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This point of view sees knowledge as social artefacts shaped by social, cultural, moral, ideological, and political contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

When combining the understandings of these positions, this research utilized a social constructionism perspective. This point of view highlights the "social, historical, and collective nature of human consciousness" (Durrheim, 1997, p. 175). Social constructionism problematizes the notion that knowledge is strictly derived from an objective, unbiased observation of events (Burr, 2015). The social constructionist case is that there can never be one "true" account of phenomena; rather, multiple perspectives exist that arise out of social life and the interactions that are had between people (Burr, 2015). This position was inferred directly from the research objectives of this project, which sought to understand how older adults make sense of their

experiences of ageism in the workplace. In relation to the other research in this field, the social

constructionist perspective presents a unique lens through which the issue will be examined. As

evident in the literature review, a majority of research and resulting discussion focuses heavily

on biological consequences of aging as well as quantifying the experiences of ageism. By

seeking to understand the role that social constructions play in shaping the experience of ageism

in the workplace, this research can contribute to furthering scholarly understanding in this arena.

3.3 Data Collection

The data collection for this project began with the recruitment of participants. Inclusion

criteria included individuals who: are above the age of 55, are currently in the labour market, or

have recently left either voluntarily or involuntarily and are trying to re-enter. The cut-off age of

55 was selected in order to remain consistent with scholarly literature that discusses ageism in

the workplace. Examples of this scholarship is highlighted in the previous section. Participants

were recruited from a variety of businesses and organizations in the Hamilton area and

throughout the province of Ontario. I, along with my faculty advisor, used personal and

professional networks to share and circulate the purpose of the study. This primarily occurred via

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and email lists. This involved posting the Recruitment Poster (see

Appendix A) as an image on these social media sites. An arrangement was also made with the

Hamilton Council on Aging in which they posted and circulated the Recruitment Poster (see

Appendix A) on their website, on social media, and in their newsletter. Additionally, the Age-

Friendly Hamilton Initiative agreed to similar recruitment activities. This group also allotted time

at two separate seminars to make my project known and to seek interest in their participants. In

the above recruitment avenues, the information about the study took the form of the Recruitment

Poster (Appendix A).

Participants were selected using convenience sampling. That is, the first 10 individuals who met the inclusion criteria and reached out to me demonstrating interest were scheduled for an interview. The remainder of potential participants were placed on a waitlist and called up on a rolling basis if a cancellation occurred or if a space became available for any other reason. This took place exclusively via email, even though a cell-phone number was provided on the recruitment poster. I was fortunate enough to have been met with overwhelming interest in this project and maintained a waitlist of nearly 15 individuals in addition to the 10 scheduled for interviews. Once the 10 participants were recruited, I conducted semi-structured interviews using the video conferencing platform Zoom. These interviews each lasted approximately one hour and were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The shortest interview was only 38 minutes long, while the longest reached 1 hour and 32 minutes.

Qualitative interview techniques were selected for this research as they are powerful tools with the ability to eloquently capture the voices of participants and can describe in rich detail the ways people make meaning of their experiences (Rabionet, 2011). Semi-structured interviews, specifically, were selected because of their central characteristics of being personal, intimate, and ability to accommodate a wide range of research goals (Galletta, 2013; Whiting, 2008). As well, this method of interview allowed for my desired topics to be covered, while allowing the participants to guide the narrative with their own stories (Rabionet, 2011). The interview guide (see Appendix B), developed based on the research questions and objectives, loosely determined the direction of each conversation. This document provided some structure to my questioning, as it ensured that discussion relating to each of my research questions was introduced. Questions were arranged so that it would follow the format originated by Galetta (2013).

The semi-structured interview was also chosen because it closely aligns with the social constructionism framework that was taken up for this research (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This ontological and epistemological view understands interviews as taking place within a social context and should not be a tool for collecting data in isolation (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Given that this perspective argues that social phenomena do not occur independently of people's understandings, the social constructionist critiques the interview as merely a pipeline for transmitting knowledge from the interviewee to the interviewer (Qu & Dumay, 2011). As well, this theoretical perspective sees the interview itself as a phenomenon that should be examined as the narrative accounts that are produced are driven by the context of the interview (Qu & Dumay, 2011). In alignment with a social constructionist perspective, the interview should be treated more as a social encounter and analyzed as such.

Throughout the interview process, it was immensely important to reflect upon the nature of the exchange between myself and the participant (Galletta, 2013; Hsiung, 2008; Probst, 2015). As I would prompt the participant, rephrase questions, and change the direction according to the participant's unique situation, it became of increasing necessity to acknowledge myself as a research instrument (Galletta, 2013). During the interview itself, the act of reflexivity between myself and the interviewee was able to contribute to the construction of new knowledge (Hsiung, 2008; Probst, 2015). By participating in reflexivity with the participant, the interview became of a co-constructed nature (Hsiung, 2008). This involved the questioning and examination of the participants', and my own, beliefs, judgements, and behaviours. It was important for us to try and work through how these may have had some effect on their experience of ageism. The interactivity between myself and the participants undoubtedly had some effect on the outcome of

the interview. It was important for me to acknowledge and understand what these effects may have been in order to develop a "true" understanding of the results.

Similarly, I had to be aware of my own assumptions and locations in relation to the research topic at hand (Hsiung, 2008). To do so, I engaged in a process of self-examination while planning, conducting, and writing about the research (Probst, 2015). This self-examination explored my research interests, personal agenda, assumptions, biography, emotional reactions, beliefs, socio-economic status, and cultural positioning through the keeping of a journal. The purpose of this was to get a clear picture of the influence I might have on the results (Hsiung, 2008; Probst, 2015). While a central challenge to this reflexive endeavour may be a lack of valuation by colleagues, funders, and journals, I am committed to its role in my research as I know it has contributed greatly to understanding how my knowledge has been constructed.

3.4 Role of the Researcher

While the discussion throughout this chapter represents a crucial element of this project's commitment to reflexivity in acknowledging the ontological and epistemological assumptions that were made throughout the course of this research, it is also important to participate in personal reflexivity on the part of myself, the researcher (Dowling, 2006). I understand how intimately involved I am in both the process and product of this research endeavour. In order to understand the implications of this on the research and its findings, I must be aware of and admit to what has influenced my internal and external responses to the process, as well as my relationship to this topic (Dowling, 2006).

As the researcher, I held a unique role during each interview with the participants. While it was my desire to make these sessions feel more like a free-flowing conversation, I fear my inexperience at the beginning of the process fueled an interrogation-like atmosphere. In the

initial stages of the data collection process, I found myself trying to overcompensate for my youth and the distinct age-gap between the participants and myself by leading conversations with my outlined questions and failing to let participants finish their entire thought before jumping in with another question. Through reflexive journaling, I was able to recognize this fault and sought to immediately shift my techniques. After these first two interviews, my interview guide still shaped my questioning, but I felt comfortable in allowing the conversation to take whichever direction the participant desired. This created a much more enjoyable and open atmosphere for the participants to introduce a variety of details that would have otherwise not been brought up. It is, however, also important to acknowledge the role that technology played in the interviews. Due to COVID-19 limitations, each interview took place over the video conferencing platform Zoom. At times, this inhibited the flow of conversation given the tendency for glitches, Wi-Fi issues, and a variety of other technological challenges. This shifted the energy of the interviews and affected continuity of conversation.

As well, my background influenced how I approached this research and the data collection process itself. Given my experiences researching the (lack of) support employers provide to older adults facing ageism in the workplace, I approached this topic skeptical of any positive experiences that one may describe to me. Also, given that the nature of this type of discrimination often leads to unreported or unacknowledged cases, I tend to assume that all older workers have experienced ageism in one form or another but have simply not admitted it to themselves or others yet. Similarly, this shaped my reactions to the data and drove the analytical process. That being said, however, throughout each interview I remained committed to working from an inductive perspective, letting the participants' revelations guide the path that this research took me on.

3.5 Data Analysis

For the purposes of this research, thematic analysis was used to construct interpretations of the semi-structured interview data. This method was selected due to its ability to describe data in rich detail by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) that have been interpreted (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The main aim of this qualitative method is to analytically examine narrative materials; it does this by breaking up the life stories into relatively small content units and subjecting them to descriptive treatment (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Due to its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis can be compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the purposes of this project, I used it from a social constructionist position. In this way, thematic analysis tells us how events, realities, meanings, and experiences can be interpreted as the effects of different discourses that operate within our society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given that I operated within this theoretical perspective, there were limits placed upon what thematic analysis allowed me to say about the data and how I theorized meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within the social constructionist framework, my research did not focus on individual psychologies but rather on the sociocultural context and structural conditions that defined the individual accounts that I received through the interview process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As well, the theoretical perspective determined the types of themes that are emphasized; within a constructionist paradigm, analysis focused on latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This means that I was compelled to investigate beyond the semantics of the data and examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and ideologies that informed the semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There are several key benefits of using this method that have made it quite desirable. First, it does not seek to quantify themes or build thematic structures, which may be daunting for

an early career researcher such as myself (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). As well, it is straightforward, flexible, highlights similarities and differences across the data set, and provides results that can be characterized as accessible to the public (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). When using this method, however, I had to be careful that I did not miss nuances, contradictions, or key language (Sparkes & Smith, 2016). I was able to do this through the immediate transcription of my interview audio-recordings. By doing so, I was able to identify key aspects of the experience that stood out to me. When transcribing subsequent interviews, I would keep a note in my reflective journal indicating important nuances and contradictions. As well, I ensured that I did not produce an unfounded analysis that contained mismatches between the data and the analytic claims that I made (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This was done through the constant and continued review of themes throughout analysis. Extracts were consistently reviewed in order to solidify my confidence that they were congruent with the assigned code and themes.

As I analyzed the transcripts, there were two main considerations to keep in mind. First, I had to seriously consider whether thematic analysis was useful to me (Evans, 2017). I came to the conclusion that it aligned well with my theoretical perspective. From a social constructionist position, thematic analysis allowed me to examine the meaning-making in relation to participants' experiences, the significance of these experiences, and how they constructed it socially (Evans, 2017). By using this analytical technique, I was able to interpret how participant's construction of their experiences were reflective of the material or social contexts in which they lived. As well, it was important that at the outset of this project, I acknowledged what counts as a theme (Evans, 2017). For this project, I determined that a theme was one which captured a significant aspect of the data in relation to the main research question and the sub-questions (e.g., the nature of the ageism interaction). The themes reported below appeared more

than once across the dataset and their importance was determined by the degree to which they spoke to my research questions and my social constructionist perspective.

The theoretical perspective that I position myself and my research within has several consequences for the way in which I conducted the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tuckett, 2005). While applying the specific analytic techniques, I asked questions such as: (1) "why do participants think, feel, and act the way they do?", (2) "under what conditions to the participants think, feel, and act the way they do?", and (3) "what are the consequences of these actions?" (Tuckett, 2005).

The specific process for conducting thematic analysis has been outlined by several authors, but the steps highlighted by Aronson (1994), Sparkes and Smith (2014), and most importantly Braun and Clarke (2006), were followed for this research. These steps are: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After data was collected, I immersed myself in the transcripts and became highly familiar with their content (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Then, initial patterns (codes) were listed for the entire data set (Aronson, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). After this early stage, codes were combined to form themes and sub-themes; these interpretations pieced together a comprehensive image of the collective experiences of the participants (Aronson, 1994; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). For example, within the theme of "Psycho-Social Consequences" I assigned the sub-theme of "mental health issues" and codes of "depression" and "anxiety." As well, within the theme of "Psycho-Social Consequences" I assigned the sub-theme of "emotional challenges" and codes of "shame,"

"anger," "frustration," and "identity loss." Themes were then reviewed to ensure that they matched each of the coded extracts; it was essential that the data extracts formed a coherent pattern, and that I was able to identify the different themes, how they fit together, and how they fit together to tell a comprehensive story about the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). After the themes were identified and reviewed, I was ready to formulate this analysis into a coherent narrative (Aronson, 1994). During the writing of this thesis, I have remained open to the emergence of new ideas and have ensured that vivid data extracts were provided in the following chapter in order to demonstrate how each theme was identified (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Participants

The sample for this research (*n*=10) included individuals who varied in age, gender, marital status, race, education, and employment status (see Appendix C). Just over half of the participants were aged 60 and above, with those who remained being aged 55-59. There were more women than men in this study, with only 30% of participants identifying as male. There was a reasonable distribution of participants' marital status, with 40% married, 30% single, 20% widowed, and 10% in a relationship. In terms of racial background, the majority of participants labelled themselves as white (*n*=7), with those who remained identifying as Black (*n*=2) and Latino (*n*=1). The sample was very well educated, with the vast majority completing a university or college degree. Only one participant named a high school diploma as their highest form of education. Three participants, on the other hand, had attained one or more Master's degree. There was also some variation in the employment status of the sample, with participants reporting that they were employed (*n*=4), retired (*n*=2), or unemployed and seeking a new position (*n*=4). The occupational background of the sample spanned numerous sectors. See Appendix C for a breakdown of the occupational categories that are represented by these participants.

Please note that the extracts provided in the subsequent sections are identified by the participants' pseudonym and age. The pseudonym was selected by the participant at the end of the interview and is intended to curtail any potential identification.

4.2 Themes

Five core themes were identified: (1) Nature of the ageist interaction; (2) Psycho-social consequences; (3) Preferred coping mechanisms; (4) Intersections with other forms of

discrimination; and (5) Degree of COVID-19 impact. In the sections that follow, I offer more details about the nature of these themes alongside verbatim participant quotations to illustrate the collective experience described by older workers.

4.2.1 Nature of the Ageist Interaction(s)

One of the main aims of this research was to discover how older workers experience ageism. With that, the interviews attempted to elicit rich description regarding what has actually happened in the workplace that would constitute age-based discrimination. The most common form of ageism in the workplace was implicit in nature – very rarely did participants report incidents that involved *explicit* discrimination. As well, participants were less interested in talking about the experience of ageism itself. When prompting them to discuss the specific interactions that they have been faced with, many participants met me with vague detail and quickly moved on. It was difficult to parse out what actually happened. This may be attributed to the largely implicit nature of the acts. That being said, we can categorize these experience as either explicit or implicit discrimination, as well as assumptions based off ageist stereotypes.

4.2.1.1 Explicit Discrimination

Despite being a less common form of ageism experienced in this sample, several participants faced explicit and direct discrimination in both the workplace and labour market. Sometimes, this came as trying to get the older adult to leave their place of employment:

> You know most of the young guys will use words that I don't understand and stuff like that. Trying to make me feel like I'm less useful in my place of work. Trying to do things that will make me seem bad at my job. (Craig, age 56)

During COVID-19, one participant faced a forced re-deployment to assist with the vaccine centres. When examining which of their co-workers were sent along with them, the individual noticed that it was only the oldest workers:

> We had a re-deployment during COVID where we were – it was not voluntary – we were mandated that we would be re-deployed to help the vaccine clinics in the city of Hamilton. Out of our whole division of which I think there were 60 people, only 6 names were submitted by our manager for re-deployment and all of those 6 people were all the oldest people. I had 3-days of notice that I was being re-deployed, and I knew I was retiring so I'd been curator of the museum – I had 2 other museums under my portfolio that I was at for 20 years. I had a lot of networks and friendships and partnerships within the community, and it felt very disrespectful. (Marion, age 67)

As well, when discussing the differences in the types of discrimination enacted by men versus women, one participant noted that it was typically their male colleagues who came outright with their true feelings regarding older workers:

> From the men it's hard. It's direct. Very explicit. Even the way they talk amongst themselves. The way they make you feel. You ask them a question they're going to question you back. You have to be so diplomatic just to survive it. (Katina, age 60)

This explicit discrimination was also found to be present in the labour market when seeking re-entry into the workplace. In one instance, a hiring manager denied a job to a participant because they wanted someone "junior" for the role:

> I applied for one job, again this is before all of this COVID new world, it was for an e-
>
> sports organization. I can't remember exactly the job it was. Some sort of a coordinator
>
> type thing. I met the person for coffee. And she happened to be the daughter of a well-
>
> known sportscaster that I used to work with. So, I'm talking to her and everything and
>
> she goes, well we're looking for someone more junior who can just step in. At this point I
>
> sort of lost it in the sense in my mind I thought okay I'm not going to get this job one
>
> way or another. (Winter, age 67-

While explicit ageism was not experienced as often as its implicit counterpart, it was equally as distressing and harmful. Participants described being intimidated within their workplace by their younger colleagues. Similarly, participants noted being directly told that they would not be placed in the mix for certain opportunities by virtue of their age and the accompanying perceptions or stereotypes. This indicates the degree to which ageist attitudes and the devaluation of older adults have permeated the collective consciousness of the labour market.

4.2.1.2 Implicit Discrimination

Nearly every participant reported some experience of implicit discrimination in their respective workplaces or when seeking to re-enter the labour market. This came in a variety of different actions, words, and policies. Some participants noted that they found that certain work and projects had been taken away from them in favour of their younger colleagues. For example:

> There was a time a project was supposed to be assigned to me. It was due for me to
>
> handle that kind of project but because of my age it was thought that I wouldn't be able to
>
> handle it and they gave it to a younger person. It was depressing but I had to accept that
>
> things were like that. (Lacy, age 56)

Several other participants described how social groups that exist within their workplace have systematically excluded older workers and has begun to impact their job performance. Some examples of this include:

Except if there's a conversation that comes up that I probably should have known something about and I don't know anything about it because it's a side conversation that happened over lunch. Then that's troublesome if it impacts my job. I can't think of a specific example, but I know that it has happened many times. It's like when I should have known something was going on and I didn't and they say maybe I forgot to tell you because they discussed it somewhere else. (Janice, age 56)

What it looks like is, if you are a young woman and half decent at your job the men will flirt with you, will be buddy-buddy with you, but will cut you corners, you know? If you are an older woman and they see that, and I look pretty good and I'm pretty fit, they instantly cop an attitude that is not based on anything logical. They will – if you make one small mistake, they will use it against you and will pass it on from person to person, which they would not do with a younger female. (Katina, age 60)

Implicit discrimination was widely experienced among those participants who are currently in the search for employment. Numerous individuals found that, despite their experience and interview skills, they have simply been unable to find work. Most participants describe not being asked for a single interview from the dozens of applications they sent in:

And I mean, I had a real series of really fabulous jobs. I was well known in the field and I could not get another job. This was 8 years ago. I was about 57. It was impossible. I just could not get a job or even an interview. (Denise, age 64)

Other individuals discussed how they feel as though the artificial intelligence that companies employ for résumé screening similarly discriminates against older applicants based on the many years of experience they highlight:

I've seen ads out there where they only ask for 2 or 3 years of experience. Okay. And, you know, I can apply, and I don't even give my full years of experience in [field of work] anymore. Because it won't get past the AI. Even though I've been told I shouldn't do that. They can see how ever many years of experience I have. (MatureMan, age 63)

As well, one participant eloquently summarizes the issues that older workers face when trying to re-enter the labour market – they are no longer on anyone's list of target markets:

Let's face it, some company that wants a part-time employee. Some of them want a part-time receptionist. Awesome, I would love that. But they're looking for somebody right out of the school. That's what I'm finding. A lot of the part-time decent jobs are looking for twenty-somethings that are right out of school. I don't know why. I don't know whether it's their employment coach, whatever you call them. Are they saying, you know this is your target market? And I'm not in a lot of companies target markets. (TAS, age 68)

Implicit discrimination was reported to have been experienced by every participant included in this investigation. It was vast and consisted of a variety of interactions between the participants and their workplace or the labour market. While not as easily identifiable as explicit discrimination, this form tended to be felt rather than seen.

Upon further analysis of the excerpts highlighted above, participants' understandings of their ageism experiences were evidently shaped by the industry in which they operate. Individuals who work in more (manual) labour intensive sectors were faced with explicit instances of ageism concerned with physical and cognitive abilities. Participants equated these concerns with the danger associated with the "decline" of aging. While it was admitted that these were baseless accusations, this group was quicker to come to the defence of their co-workers when their intentions (positive or negative) were challenged during the interview. Participants who worked "office" or "desk" jobs, comparatively, encountered a different kind of ageism, a more subtle and implicit ageism. The nature of this kind of discrimination made it more difficult for them to parse out specific experiences of ageism. In turn, this made them question whether they had experienced ageism at all.

4.2.1.3 Assumptions Based on Stereotypes

In conjunction with the implicit and explicit acts of discrimination, the participants discussed at length the assumptions that were made regarding them based on ageist stereotypes. Numerous participants highlight the fact that their co-workers, peers, and employers tended to make negative assumptions about their abilities in the workplace. For example:

Sometimes they worry that I'm going to do the wrong thing. They think that because I'm older I forget how it's done. Sometimes when I am talking to a workmate at a break, they plan to cut me off from a meeting. They tell me that they will give me a break and so I

am not going to be present tomorrow at the meeting. I know what they're expecting of

me, I am not a fool. I don't like it. (Scott, age 55)

For those participants seeking to re-enter the workplace, participants noted that there are

assumptions you will be unable to perform basic tasks due to non-existent age-related concerns:

Every company that I've been in I always have seen a variety of ages. But it's as soon as

you step outside. Whether it's a couple years away, they think that you have nothing to

offer. It's as if they think I can't do anything because I'm older. (Winter, age 67)

As well, hiring managers or recruitment staff would use buzzwords that connoted youth in order

to excuse the dismissal of an older candidate. This was described by one individual:

Part of the challenge I think in ageism is the way that certain companies do their hiring

practices. By that I mean, when you look at the job ads on a site like Indeed or Monster

or any of the other ones that are out there, one of the ways that they can – I don't want to

say discriminate because that's not really fair – as a means of weeding out workers of a

certain age is they'll use such phrases as "fast-paced environment," "multi-tasking," or

that you need to know all these different software. Which most of the people of my

generation don't, the new ones at least, but we can be trained! Things like that, it's like,

the ideal employee it seems like for a lot of companies is 23 with 40 years of experience.

(MatureMan, age 63)

Several individuals further discussed the assumptions that have been made about their

experience. These tended to be quite varied but included stereotypes about the value of their

experience as well as the amount of experience they have based on their age. Some participants note how their experience was considerably devalued by their superiors and co-workers because it was not seen as the "right" experience. While preference was often given to younger employees because they could check all the boxes, people were unable to understand the importance of their years of experience and the insights gained over that time. For example:

> I think that they shouldn't dismiss people because they have more experience but are willing to apply for certain roles. They wouldn't have applied for the role if they didn't know what they were getting themselves into, you know? Why not take a chance on them. It's not even take a chance, that's not it. Why not put them in the mix in the interview? You need variety, you need diversity. They can bring all different things. When you're getting interviewed you can feel they are going through, they have this skill, this skill, oh but they don't have this. It's like pros and cons. Who is going to add more here. What is it that the company is afraid of? Are you afraid that they are going to leave? Because that's not necessarily the case. (Winter, age 67)

> Especially with the most recent management, that's one of the reasons I chose to leave; there was a dramatic change just before COVID started. I felt that the experience of people for many years previous to that manager arriving were not acknowledged or respected and I felt that there was a lot of people brought in from outside that were very young and preference was given to them. Disregarding the knowledge and also the skills that one acquires with experience. I felt there wasn't even a willingness to learn or respect that. (Marion, age 67)

As well, one individual remarked on the intergenerational tension that existed in their workplace. Their younger peers consistently disregarded their knowledge, creating an "us" versus "them" environment:

> And then you get all these younger people around you who have no clue how in-depth your knowledge is and they're just going on stereotypes. You know? A lot of stereotypical – I find the younger people the most ageist and I've particularly found the group from 20-40/45 the most ageist people I encounter. Horrible. Absolutely horrible. And maybe it's because they feel the need to fight for their jobs. (Katina, age 60)

On the other hand, one participant had an opposite experience. Given that they are an older worker, their younger counterparts assume that they have amassed a wealth of knowledge over what they believe to be a long career in their workplace. This is not the case, however. This individual also noted that because of this assumption, more value is placed upon their opinions:

> I think there's also an assumption – I haven't been with [company] forever and there is also an assumption that I have been with [company] forever because of my age. There's an assumption that I've got this ingrained old school knowledge about [company] because they just assume that because the rest of my team has been there 35 years that I have as well. (Janice, age 56)

Participants also described how certain actors within the labour market would make assumptions about their career desires, based on stereotypes surrounding their age, and use it against them in various ways. This is particularly notable when considering those who are

currently seeking re-entry to the workplace and must encounter these assumptions in a hiring situation. For example:

> I would even change my cover letters and some things saying look, I know you'll think I'm over experienced, even though I have taken all my titles out and reduced everything in my resume, right? Because if you look at my life history and all the things I've done, somebody will say well she should be a VP or something. But I don't want to do that! It was even though I did all of that stuff you're still being told that you're overqualified or you know what, you're not going to last long. You won't stay long enough because you want to jump and do something else. I'm thinking, on the contrary I want to be in this role for a period of time, for a longer period of time. It's as if they were making the decision for me, yet I already told them, look I would not have applied to this role if I didn't know exactly what I was getting myself into. (Winter, age 67)

Participants' past experiences were reported to be used against them. Hiring managers would assume that because of their wealth of experience, participants do not actually want the job that they are applying for but instead want to be "in charge." As I heard from participants, however, this is not the case:

> I want to work with somebody, contribute, but I don't want to run the show anymore. And I don't have to! I don't – I don't mind being managed by somebody younger. I don't even – I don't even get in the door because people say, "oh she's got too much experience" or they say no. (Denise, age 64)

Participants further described their experience of individuals in the workplace making ageist assumptions about their personalities. Often, these took the form of popular tropes that we see throughout media and popular culture. The first, being that of the "grumpy old man":

I always feel like I need to go home because these guys keep making these jokes about me being the grumpy old man. I have an introverted personality. There's nothing I can do to change that. (Scott, age 55)

Several other participants discussed how they were made to feel as though they were less "flexible" than their younger counterparts. For example:

I think [my boss'] assumption is that I'm the one that had the restriction [on how things must be done] because of my age. He didn't automatically assume that the twenty-year-old was the one that put that restriction in place. I think there's always the assumption that if there's a stopper, or if somebody is stuck in their ways, it's the older person. There's the assumption that we're inflexible in how we work. And that the younger people are flexible, but that's not always true. (Janice, age 56)

Finally, it was assumed that similar to the grumpy old man trope, these older workers would be somehow uncomfortable or unwilling to work with individuals who are younger than them or have less experience in a given field. One participant described such an encounter:

They called me in for an interview and I had women, in their 30s, ask me if I was comfortable working with younger people. Like, that they would even ask me that. I have applied for so many – there was a few other jobs I applied for, had interviews. Always it

comes up. People carefully tread and ask me how I feel about working with younger

people. And, I mean, is it really a question? (Denise, age 64)

Stereotypes of aging and older adults can be found throughout all aspects of our lives.

Participants reported that assumptions were made about personality, ability, experience, and

career desires. These each drew on negative archetypes that generated the unfair treatment of

older workers in the labour market.

4.2.2 Psycho-Social Consequences

When considering the varied ageist experiences described in the section above, it is

natural to assume that the participants have also dealt with a myriad of psychological and social

consequences. This ranged from mental health diagnoses such as depression and anxiety, to more

emotional responses like anger, shame, fear, and more. What was most surprising, however, is

that they now face existential considerations that have been directly onset by their experiences of

ageism.

4.2.2.1 Mental Health Issues

One of the more common diagnoses self-reported within the participant pool was that of

depression. While not every individual received a medical diagnosis from a physician, they

nonetheless described unique instances of serious depression. For example:

It makes me feel really depressed and bothered. I think it has really affected me as a

person. (Craig, age 56)

There are times where despite my trying to be positive and professional and realize

there's a lot of people who did respect what I did, it did at times there were moments

> where you feel a little depressed that you're being passed by younger people, and you're
>
> not seen as having anything valid to offer. I think that's partly our society which is a
>
> youth worshipping society, which is depressing in and of itself. (Marion, age 67)

Another individual was thrown into a bout of depression not only because of the experiences of
ageism, but also upon realizing that it *only* had to do with her age:

> When I started seeing definitely the glass ceiling that was happening and how they had
>
> not let me get – although they all knew how talented I was they wouldn't let me advance
>
> because of my damn age. Once I started understanding that I got very depressed and very
>
> angry. (Katina, age 60)

In addition to serious depressive episodes, one participant identified the debilitating
anxiety that they are faced with as a direct result of the ageism they have experienced in both the
workplace and labour market:

> The last couple of weeks have been really tough. When you talk about anxiety, it's been
>
> really tough because you ask what it's done to me personally, it has – I don't want to give
>
> into it – but it has aged me more. I am anxious all the time. Now even with stuff that isn't
>
> work related. (Winter, age 67)

4.2.2.2 Emotional Challenges

Emotional challenges, such as anger, fear, shame, etc. compounded the mental health
issues that participants faced in light of their discriminatory experiences. This is only natural,
given the hardships that each individual incurred in the workplace or the labour market due to

their age. One participant, who was replaced by a younger co-worker and was subsequently let

go from the company, expressed that their anger was not towards the man who replaced them or

even the co-workers who watched this happen, but at the company itself:

> I had been asked this a number of times, am I angry at my boss? No, this was a decision
>
> that was forced upon him by the powers that be. Am I angry at my successor? No, he
>
> didn't know what he was walking into. Am I angry at the rest of my colleagues? No. Am
>
> I angry at the company? Yes, you're damn right I am. It took me a long time to get over
>
> this. (MatureMan, age 63)

Other participants expressed anger towards the financial, emotional, and working situations that

have been forced upon them. This is primarily due to their frustration surrounding what appears

to them as others' problems with something as trivial as age. For example:

> I'm starting to feel like, "screw you!" … I think there's something wrong if you've spent
>
> 30 years of your life doing something and then you have to give it up to make less
>
> money, just to be at peace. There's something ridiculously infuriating about that. (Katina,
>
> age 60)

> The workforce issue though is a big one. It really pisses me off. I think, you know part of
>
> me just – every once in a while I'll start applying to jobs again and then I'll stop because
>
> it's all crap. I'm particularly angry about [Ontario university] if they're an age-friendly
>
> university because that's where I see myself working now. It's still all lip service.
>
> (Denise, age 64)

One individual expressed that because of their new boss' ageist attitude, they were now unable to fulfill their duties to the level of excellence that they once were. This was angering, given the pride that participants take in their work:

> I had built up a lot of rapport in the community, partnerships. The community looked to me to represent their culture and heritage and I no longer had the ability to do that because I had lost all autonomy to act on my own or have any vision of my own or make decisions. It made me so angry and upset. (Marion, age 67)

As well, one participant noted how much shame they have felt as a result of these interactions. Being in the situation they are now in, due to the ageist labour market, the following participant was unable to even tell their friends where they work for fear of embarrassment. Instead of being open about where they are employed, they took a job quite far away in order to lower the chances of seeing people they know:

> I was so beyond ashamed to work for minimum wage. You have no idea how hard that was. And I picked a place that no one would know me because I was so afraid to be seen. I was forced to take this job. I was so embarrassed. So ashamed. (Winter, age 67)

Stress has similarly affected the participants' lives as a result of the ageism and discrimination they have faced in the workplace and labour market. Primarily this stress revolves around the financial instability that has developed since losing work. For example:

> I actually need to work. I don't have a pension. I kept moving around jobs. So, I have savings, but I don't have a pension. And I'm not poor but I'm hoping and hoping I'm

going to live another 30 years and I don't know if I have enough money! I need to work.

So that's a big stressor. (Denise, age 64)

Financial instability. That would be the overriding thing in my life. I remember when I

turned 50 and started looking back and seeing that I could have made much more money

working overseas. It's insanity. But now I am stressed about money on top of everything

else. (Katina, age 60)

Participants also demonstrated the reluctance to work that has resulted from their

experiences of ageism. One participant was now hesitant to go to work due to the discrimination

faced:

I always try to forget about going to work because I don't like to remember. When they

make jokes about my age, they tell me that I need to go home. They make me dread it. I

don't want to have these negative emotions about work, but I just don't want to be there.

(Scott, age 55)

As well, these experiences made one participant fearful that they would never find work again:

It really scares me. With what we're dealing with today with the pandemic has made it

even more so. (Winter, age 67)

Participants also grappled with the fact that they have now lost an integral piece of their

identity. One individual highlighted how they must "become a different person" when they are in

a hiring situation and in the workplace. This was described as a deliberate act to conceal their

true age. This was incredibly emotionally difficult and labour intensive, as they are being forced

to be someone they are not:

> I kept looking in the mirror and thinking I don't look that old. I kept on thinking at least I
>
> don't look my age. Here's the trick, you make sure that you don't date yourself in
>
> anything that you say. If people are talking about TV shows, I'm not going to bring up
>
> things I may recall from way back when. Not that it's bad but you have to be careful to
>
> not flag your age because if you can get away with it physically while you're in the
>
> office, that's okay. I mean, I don't like having to hide these personal aspects of myself. I
>
> don't want to lose myself in trying to find a job but in this sense, I am becoming a
>
> different person. It's a different identity. (Winter, age 67)

It was similarly difficult for participants to lose the way by which they create meanings

associated with their identity as a worker. For example:

> It was very demotivating. Everything that we tried to do, there was a need for control
>
> from him. It had to come from the top or it wasn't going to be done. A lot of control was
>
> taken away from the front line and from the grass roots. It was all centralized, which
>
> demotivates people. It was just like I'll put in my hours and get my paycheck. It was hard
>
> to find meaning in that anymore. Especially because so much of my sense of self was tied
>
> up in what I got to do for the community (Marion, age 67)

Experiences of ageism were very influential on the emotions of all participants. The

discrimination that they faced drove feelings of anger, shame, stress, and fear. This affected how

they felt about their workplace and, in turn, how they imagined their place within it. By being

forced to deal with new emotional challenges, participants were taking their focus away from important matters that are central to their continued or renewed employment.

4.2.2.3 Existential Considerations

Participants also were having more existential "crises" and thoughts. Existential crises can typically be characterized by the feeling that life lacks meaning coupled with confusion surrounding personal identity. Most of the discussion with participants revolved around the fact that they now believe that they are at the "end." The end of what, however, can be placed into two categories. The first is the end of their working lives. When faced with workplace discrimination, the participants found themselves grappling with feelings that are typically reserved for moments of incredible tension and turmoil. One participant, who worked in the medical field, discussed that because their co-workers see them as so old, it must be time for them to end their career:

> I always feel like I need to put away my tools and go back home because these people are trying to treat me like I am nothing and cannot do anything anymore. It is so sad. It makes me feel like I want to stop working and maybe retire. (Scott, age 55)

The second type of existential consideration that was encountered by participants was that which made them fear that the end of their lives was near. As significant individuals (colleagues, managers, etc.) in their working lives saw them as old, out-of-touch, or useless, they began to believe that about themselves *outside* of their working life. For example:

> And the more they keep telling you this stuff about yourself, I look in the mirror and think oh my god, is my life over. And then you have the regrets. Sorry. I know this sounds stupid or bizarre or crazy, but I never believed that I, personally, was going to die.

I know this is – but I never really thought about that. And now it's all I think about.

(Winter, age 67)

People I know are starting to die. My husband died at 57 from cancer and he's not the

only one. And so, there's part of it for all of us there's a sense that life doesn't go on

forever. The thing about mortality is it's a balancing act. I'm very aware of it. I've been

through that, and I've known a lot of people who've passed away. I'm talking about my

friends and family and my husband. And so, that perspective of being older and knowing

that we're not here forever. When you're young you don't really think, you hear about

your parent's friends dying – I'm in that demographic. I've had close friends die and my

husband died. (Denise, age 64)

In this section, the striking psycho-social impacts of experiences of ageism have been

described in rich detail through interview excerpts and direct participant quotes. These

demonstrate the incredibly challenging consequences that older workers must grapple with. It is

especially distressing when considering that these are combined with already present challenges

that occur in their day-to-day lives. Despite this, participants have found ways that help them

deal with these new mental health concerns, emotional challenges, and existential considerations.

4.2.3 Preferred Coping Mechanisms

As discussed in the previous section, participants highlighted a variety of psycho-social

consequences that they have faced as a result of experiencing instances of age-based

discrimination. It was also revealed that they have developed specific coping mechanisms to

manage these experiences and the subsequent challenges that accompany ageism in the

workplace. These mechanisms were quite varied between participants but have been categorized into ways they cope: (1) by themselves; (2) via external relationships; and (3) via actions.

4.2.3.1 Coping By Oneself

One of the most prevalent coping techniques that became clear throughout analysis was the gaining of perspective. By placing these hurtful events into perspective, doing their own reading, and conducting some general research, participants were able to efficiently manage their priorities. In other words, what happened in the labour market no longer affected them as deeply when they considered the "bigger picture." For example:

> I have perspective, I guess that's what it is. I have perspective that, yeah I may not be able to go on a vacation every year but – I think that's really important. I'm not in the same position as somebody who's financially struggling but I feel like I could contribute for a sense of satisfaction in my work. That's what is missing. There are other things that are good. (Denise, age 64)

Other participants noted that they were able to find perspective on their respective situations by seeking internal validation. For one individual, this came in the form of their co-workers and the community that they served:

> I got a lot of validation from the community itself so I would concentrate – if I started to feel down – I could focus on and bring myself back to doing the best job that I could possibly do and receive my validation from where I received it from. I got a lot of positive feedback and accolades when I retired. When the COVID-19 restrictions lifted they gave me an outdoor picnic. I got so many letters and they put together a book with

people's letters and images through the years. I keep myself mentally healthy by realizing

that that's only one person and not everyone thinks that way. (Marion, age 67)

Another participant described that they find this validation through helping others. By helping

these young professionals, they feel as though they are participating in a larger purpose:

> If one of my accomplishments in this life is that I've helped someone or helped people
>
> progress along, whether in the supply chain field or in other fields, even just as a friend or
>
> support. To help them along. That's what I would like to be remembered for. I'm there to
>
> help. I want to help. I want to support people. I want to use my network. (MatureMan,
>
> age 63)

One individual also discussed that by going back to school and working towards a certificate at

Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University), they were able to receive

positive feedback that they were sorely lacking in the workplace:

> I started thinking about what else to do. That's how I cope. How to pivot into something
>
> else instead of using all my talent with pictures. What was good was when I decided to do
>
> the certificate at Ryerson. It started off because that seemed like a good point to start
>
> with. It just seemed like, you know, might as well start there and then get the certificate
>
> and see if I can do this. I've got an A+ average on everything so far so fuck you to them!
>
> But that says a lot. It's been so good to separate my identity from working in the film
>
> industry. Very important. That was a big, big, big, big thing because I always identified
>
> myself as a [occupation] and as someone who worked in the film industry but I'm so
>
> much more and I always have been so much more. (Katina, age 60)

While many participants were able to generate some perspective on the subject, several individuals indicate that they simply internalize their experiences of ageism in the workplace. Male participants were far less likely to admit to how they dealt with negative experiences and emotions and more often could be characterized as demonstrating an "internalization" of their experiences. These individuals often described themselves as "fighting" the emotions, dealing with them on their own, and ignoring the feelings. This may demonstrate popular gender roles in that men must be "tough" and do not let more affective matters affect them (Levant & Richmond, 2008). For example:

> I try and keep them inside of me and not let anyone know how I'm really feeling inside. It is something that I am combatting inside. I think I am able to cope with it that way. So I don't bother them with the feelings and I just keep it all to myself. (Craig, age 56)

> I just kind of take it all in stride. I just look at it. [Being discriminated against] has happened so many times I've become quite philosophical about it. Obviously, I wasn't what [hiring managers] were looking for now that they've met me in person so that's that. (MatureMan, age 63)

One participant, on the other hand, noted that their age and social position have allowed them to simply no longer care about these experiences. They have found that they have become impenetrable when contending with ageism in the workplace:

> It doesn't really bother me, but I think I've just learned to let it roll off my back because they're all – I think I just don't care anymore! Like whatever, I get a paycheck every

second Friday and I'm not looking to be a VP or whatever so say what you want I'm just

going to come and do my job. But I turn it off at 5. I think they're all in a different world.

They're looking to become a VP and it's a different world now. They have to keep their

jobs because rent is so high. I'm just in a different place and just don't care anymore. It is

what it is, right? (Janice, age 56)

One individual sought solace through spiritual practices and more specifically, by

turning to prayer. This participant found that by having conversations with God in private, they

were able to work through the negative experiences that they face:

But the main thing that helps me cope is prayer. Prayer is the number one thing. Most

times when I feel left out, I pray. I feel that communicating with God is really helpful.

When I pray to God, I feel he's hearing me directly and it gives me the satisfaction that I

want. I feel comfortable and happy communicating with God. I love him so much. No

one gives me that kind of contentment. Whenever I am hurt or I am feeling bad, just to

call through to him, I'm good. He gives me reassurance. (Lacy, age 56)

Despite being faced with incredibly difficult challenges, participants found various way

to manage their experiences. Some only needed themselves and their own perspectives to cope.

This came in the form of gaining perspective, developing a system of internal validation, and

turning to prayer. While some participants simply internalized the messages of ageism, they

found themselves silently coping with no discernable "strategy."

4.2.3.2 Coping Via External Relationships

Participants also drew on individuals external to themselves to assist in the negotiation of their negative experiences. In particular, the reliance on friends and community (in general) was a major contributor to coping with ageism in the workplace. For example:

I have a community that helps me to find the best solution for myself. I brought up this issue on my community social media and they gave me this option that I should try and should try to learn. They would help teach me how to work and handle technology. They are the ones who really convinced me and helped make my mind. They really told me. In my group we always try to give each other advice on working. So, I always bring up this issue. They are the guys that I open up to and they really help me to open up. When I open up, I let go of my emotions, so it really helps me to work on it and maybe try to fight some of the emotions that I keep inside. They are my closest friends. I open up about my issues that have broken my heart. It really helps me to get the advice that I need from those guys. (Scott, age 55)

As well, maintaining a community and group of friends who are separate from the workplace was very important. By being on the outside, looking in, these folks were able to provide validation, perspective, and support to their loved one:

I had a whole community of friends that was totally separate from my job, from whom I got validation. I stayed in touch with my volunteers and staff. I actually planned a reunion, a museum I worked at in the early days, we had a core group because it was a small museum that we really got along. So, when I retired, one of the things I had always talked about having a reunion and I finally did it. We had a reunion and now we're going

to have a follow-up reunion. I got my positive feedback from other sources. I had a whole

social community outside of work that I could talk to about what I was going through. It

helped to talk to people who weren't directly involved in the situation. (Marion, age 67)

One individual, on the other hand, noted the importance of having a community that deeply

understood what they are going through. This group will be able to provide some balance to the

otherwise hurtful experience of discussing their ageism experiences. For example:

Well, there's a lot of talk among my peer group, you know? About this whole ageism

thing. It's well understood. (Denise, age 64)

Other participants described how much they enjoy social groups that specifically cater to

older workers and older adults. These networks come with built-in supports for the older worker.

By becoming active members of these groups, participants not only were able to trade strategies

for job searches, but they found people who can truly empathize with what is going on in their

lives. As well, these groups consist of incredibly valuable social connections that don't

necessarily need to revolve around the issue of older adults in the workplace:

I belong to a couple of seniors groups. We really help each other out with those barriers

that we are all facing in the job search. We are going through the exact same thing. They

help me with the negative stuff. Even just the general chat groups. I'm in so many. One

through the PROBUS club, not sure if you're familiar but it's a short form for

Professional Business. It's all retired, professional, businesspeople. I know I can deal

with a lot of this by myself and I mean, a lot of the things that I go to a group for I could

probably do myself, but I want the social experience. (TAS, age 68)

Another individual, while appreciating the support these groups (held both virtual and in-person) give them, described how they can also be seen as a networking opportunity. Instead of relying of traditional networking and self-marketing techniques, attendance within these groups allows a different cohort to gain access to their résumé:

> Well, I belong to a number of groups out there. My social media is limited basically to LinkedIn, but I belong to a number of groups that we sometimes socialize and we have Zoom meetings, things like that. Usually on a monthly basis. I participate in those meetings. I have been asked to, or I volunteer to lead the discussion in a couple of them where we go into breakout rooms. I thoroughly enjoyed myself doing that. I mean, you know, I'm trying to market myself. That's one of the things that I've learned here. I'm trying to market myself and situate – I've worked with several employment coaches, and they just say that we have to find me the right employer who will value my knowledge and experience. (MatureMan, age 63)

While being able to share these difficult experiences with those closest to them is clearly very helpful, some participants discussed the importance of a reliable therapist or counsellor. These professionals are able to offer trusted advice and are trained on how to assist with psychological challenges. Participants appreciated their privilege in being able to access this form of support through workplace insurance benefits:

> I have access to a family therapist and a counsellor through work that is able to help me through these negative things. (Craig, age 56)

A good CBT counsellor! Cognitive behavioural therapy. That's really helped me.

Especially with the depressive thoughts and anger that I had. (Katina, age 60)

Overall, participants found that by drawing on their external relationships and maintaining social connections they were able to be stronger in the face of ageism in the workplace and labour market. Friends and community, with or without understanding of the experience of discrimination, were key to supporting older workers. The assistance of a trusted therapist or counsellor was highlighted, but this was described in cases with severe mental and emotional distress.

4.2.3.3 Coping Through Actions

Participants also reported that they were able to take specific actions that allowed them to negotiate the negative ageism experience. Physical activity was described as one of the more helpful things that can be done. This allowed participants to release anger, generate endorphins, and create that are goals external to their professional lives. For example:

I've always been very physically active and if it wasn't for, before COVID, I went to a boxercise class where we're hitting a bag. Which, boy, that really helped. I miss that big time. But I don't think I'm quite ready to get back into something like that. I walk a lot. I walk every day. I speed walk, there's no ginger walk, it's some heavy walking not leisure. And then in the morning in the summertime now I go out to the schoolyard across my street, and I bring my weights and I do a few things and I've even affixed a little pad to a fence, and I hit that. It's not quite the same as a boxing bag but it gets the job done. It allows me to get my anger out. I used to do that in the boxing class. There were times where that boxing bag was somebody else's face from [previous job] or something. It

> makes me feel invigorated, young. I felt like who I really was, not what people think I
>
> am. (Winter, age 67)

These physical activities also generate social groups that contribute to the coping skills described above:

> Also, from my personal interests. I was doing a lot of running, I used to run the *Around*
>
> *the Bay* road race every year, a couple of marathons, so I have a whole group of friends
>
> with that. That also kept me mentally healthy, doing that physical exercise. I still do, I
>
> cycle, and I hike. (Marion, age 67)

The idea of creating theoretical and physical space between themselves and work was important to participants. By creating this space, they are able to leave the harmful ageist experiences behind:

> I just leave. My office is upstairs, and I just close the door and go downstairs. Usually, I
>
> go for a walk after work. Now it's up and down a set of stairs. I try and make it more of a
>
> final thing. My job isn't really that stressful so it's not too bad. Some people have their
>
> computer in their bedroom or living room, it's a different workspace for me. Like this
>
> one room is my office and then I close the door at the end of the day. That makes it a bit
>
> easier. (Janice, age 56)

A couple participants noted how they practice escapism in order to remove themselves entirely from the negative experiences they face in the workplace and labour market. This allowed them to enter a new world that was not able to hurt them:

Every once in a while, I will escape into watching things on Netflix. Escapism has

helped. It gets me out of the doldrums if I watch something that is happy or will transport

me to another place. For a brief moment, that helps. (Winter, age 67)

With COVID there's no – before it used to be the long bus ride home to kind of read and

relax before I got home. I like reading. I miss it now that I don't commute. Especially a

good book. It will totally take you somewhere else. (Janice, age 56)

As evidenced by the excepts provided above, participants also took several actions to

manage their ageism experiences. While this primarily came in the form of physical exercise,

some discussed the importance of practicing escapism to remove themselves from the space

(physical and theoretical) in which they were facing ageism.

4.2.4 Intersections with Other Forms of Discrimination

Throughout the data collection process, it was vital to understand the circumstances

through which the experience of ageism is compounded or made worse. These intersections are

significant to the development of knowledge in this research area due to the extensive work of

social identities to create unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers for each individual.

There were several different social locations discussed by participants. Through the analytic

process, I categorized these experiences as: (dis)ability, gender, and racial.

4.2.4.1 (Dis)Ability

Interviews with participants highlighted that the degree to which their differently

abledness has modified their experience of ageism in the workplace. One individual in particular

noted how their disability has become an increasing issue:

I am partially disabled so this has been a big problem in my career. That's another reason that I am abused at my workplace. They wouldn't do this if it didn't come from the angle of age. (Craig, age 56)

When probed further, the participant described how this makes them feel. It is particularly interesting to note that, according to participants, it is no worse or better than when discriminated against due to race or age in isolation:

I feel that it's the same. I am always disappointed when someone says something bad about you. It makes you feel sad. It's the same if I'm discriminated against my race and age. It's the same feeling. (Craig, age 56)

Disability also was shown to play a role in the rationale given for the "forced" retirement of another participant:

I had a stroke 7 years ago. I was off work for almost 2 months. They continued to pay me through their disability program anyways. Which was fine. They took me back and I worked after that for, I guess 4 years. I hit 65, so 3 years ago, and they basically told me "Okay you're 65 you can now qualify for all the government benefits, we think you should retire". So basically, a forced retirement. Their logic was well since you had your stroke you weren't performing up to what you were when we hired you. Yeah, you don't get to fire me or let me go for that reason. (TAS, age 68)

Given the experiences described above, the intersection of ageism and (dis)ability is perhaps best understood when considering the medical- and problematization of aging. As

discussed in section 2.1.1, individuals tend to associate older adults with physical and mental decline. This may indicate that the pre-existing disabilities of participants were simply linked with their older age and those who discriminated against them were doing so unwittingly.

4.2.4.2 Gender

The cultural value of men is derived only from their social and physical accomplishments, whereas women are valued for their appearance and their ability to embody the beauty ideal of a young, slim, toned, and voluptuous body (Hurd Clarke, 2018). Given that our society possesses such a narrow definition of beauty that favours youthfulness, women are perceived as less attractive and valuable as they begin to age (Hurd Clarke, 2018). Older men, on the other hand, are held in high regard well into their senior years; this is especially true for those who are productive and wealthy (Hurd Clarke, 2018). This double standard increasingly devalues and erases older female bodies as they age.

Throughout the interviews, one of the most significant social locations that intersected with age-based discrimination in the workplace was, in fact, reported to be gender. Nearly each female participant described the ways in which their gender has been a factor in the labour market. The interrelations between sexism and ageism were proven to be quite extensive. These different oppressions are simultaneously dependant on and shape one another. First and foremost, it was described by several participants that the "dismissal" commonly associated with ageism in the workplace was markedly different between men and women employees:

> It's that dismissal I was talking about earlier. I felt like it was more the older female. But
> that could have just been coincidence. (Marion, age 67)

When comparing the experience of older men in the workplace, it was striking the number of

opportunities they are afforded while older women are given none:

> Of the group of us that started at the beginning of COVID, one woman was hired part-
>
> time at [a company] and ended up full-time and has now gone onto a different job. The
>
> rest of us as females, nobody has been hired. Of the group of men, there was probably 8;
>
> 2 have gotten full-time jobs, 1 got a semi-part time job with one of the community
>
> colleges and did one semester with them and was not renewed. The percentage of men
>
> have gotten work is much higher than for the ladies in that group. (TAS, age 68)

> We kind of presented something before the actual project and I know that my own
>
> presentation was very good because after the presentation everyone there clapped for me
>
> and stood up, they were happy. When he presented his own, my boss responded that it
>
> was absolutely great, but it didn't seem that way. Although he didn't justify that I didn't
>
> do well, he just said that the other guy was just better. I took it that it was just because of
>
> my age. I felt that I'm getting so much older, and I can't handle such big projects. And
>
> also, the gender kind of has something to do with it, I guess. I know of another man, who
>
> is my age, and he does those kinds of projects. But I don't know. (Lacy, age 56)

This was also described by a participant who had worked in the film industry for several

decades. While older women continued to be erased from the workplace, the older men did not

meet a similar fate:

> In fact, this whole thing that there are more women now, nonsense! There were more
>
> women working in Toronto in post-production in the 90s than there are now. All the older

women got cut out and you've got all these younger guys in position. Did the older guys

get cut though? Some of the older guys made it through. So there was way less ageism

towards them. (Katina, age 60)

As well, the extent of ageism faced by older men in the workplace was drastically

different than women of a similar age. As one participant highlighted, women are continually

dismissed from the labour market while older men are revered:

Older men – they are treated more like they have experience. Their knowledge is actually

respected. (Katina, age 60)

Female participants also reported having a disproportionate number of expectations

placed upon them as they age. It is important to consider the extraneous labour that is associated

with these expectations. Women must put in extra time, make more decisions, and put in greater

effort in order to "look young." The visual aspects of aging and, more importantly, the

mainstream media's disgust for women looking "old" (Cecil et al., 2021; Hurd Clarke, 2018) can

be considered a driving force of ageist encounters in the workplace:

I think to a certain extent. Even though I don't know if I can. I think unfortunately this – I

have no facts for this – but I think somehow women unfortunately not all of them age

well. And this can be to their detriment when looking for jobs. You are shelved right

away just by appearance alone. And this doesn't happen to older men. It's like when I'm

on a Zoom call, like right now I've been wearing my glasses, but I would wear my

contacts so that I don't look older with glasses. But women do whatever they can to make

sure. (Winter, age 67)

The notion of "the invisible older woman" was highly prevalent throughout the interviews with female participants. Older female workers described themselves as not feeling seen. Not only was their labour undervalued, but them as people were too. This was especially noted in positions deemed "below" a certain seniority:

> It's ageism and sexism at the same time. But sexism relating to age. Because with the younger women, they can just be chummy-chummy and do that kind of thing. You can't do that with an older woman. What are you going to do with me? I can be a crew member but you're not going to just – I can see right through them, and they know it! So now they don't even see me. It's too bad. (Katina, age 60).

As the proportion of women in this sample far outweighed the male participants, the discussions surrounding gender and age discrimination were extensive. Participants reported being offered fewer opportunities and facing more severe consequences as a result of ageism compared to their older male colleagues. The older women included in this sample felt as though they were being systematically erased from the labour market, in contradiction to how older males experience the workplace in their opinion. While the participants in this investigation admit that strides have been made since women first entered the labour market several decades ago, they continued to feel as though sufficient attention has yet to be paid to *older* women.

4.2.4.3 Racial

Several participants, notably, discussed how their experience of ageism was buffered due to their race. That is, their "whiteness" provided security from an even harsher experience than is faced by their racialized older colleagues:

> I think I don't get the discrimination that some people get because I'm a white woman. I think that probably I've had it pretty good, (Janice, age 56)

> It's hard to say because I'm obviously white Canadian so I haven't experienced anything that bad. (TAS, age 68)

Another individual proposed that the driver of more severe experiences of ageism in the workplace may align more closely with considerations of socioeconomic status, as well as race:

> I mean I wonder if it relates more to socioeconomic background, education. I mean you'd have to tease it a part. I'm not a shy woman and I'm not a racialized woman; there I think there'd still be big issues. I'm not saying I haven't been discriminated against in the past because of being a woman but I don't think, from my experience, there is a link [to my race]. I'm basically in a fortunate position. (Denise, age 64)

Among the variety of different factors that have affected the experience of ageism in the workplace, the social conditions that have allowed these forms of oppression to exist has been a common thread. Another social condition influencing these experiences, the COVID-19 pandemic, will now be discussed.

4.2.5 Degree of COVID-19 Impact

In the past two and a half years, there has been no greater disruption in society than the COVID-19 pandemic. As is well known, this pandemic has instigated a reimagining of what the workplace looks like, with people working remotely, and even more being furloughed (Meyer, 2020). There are growing fears that a significant number of workers who have been furloughed

may not be asked to return as a direct consequence of their age (Eisenberg, 2020). This has

raised additional concerns over rising numbers of age discrimination lawsuits, which may

continue to increase as more older workers are not being called back to work, the

accommodations that they seek are not being provided, or their employers treat them as a

liability to the organization (Meyer, 2020). Another worrisome point is the fact that if/when these

older workers find themselves unemployed, they can expect to take nearly twice as long finding

a new job than younger people will (Eisenberg, 2020). These ideas were robustly illustrated in

the interviews with participants. Often, however, the positive aspects of COVID-19 have been

ignored. When probed about their experience of COVID-19 and ageism in the workplace,

conversations with participants revealed two main sub-themes that reflected the responses of

participants. These can be distinguished as positive and negative impacts.

4.2.5.1 Positive Impacts

Interviews concerning older workers' perceptions of ageism in the labour market

revealed that the "new normal" imposed by COVID-19 had some positive implications. It was

noted that the "work from home" mandate allowed participants to reside in their safe space. For

example:

> It has helped me a little bit because sometimes I might go home and work online. It
>
> makes me feel peaceful because I am the type of guy who likes his own private space.
>
> My private space makes me find peace of mind. This makes me feel good and makes me
>
> avoid the negative things that I get from my workmates. The pandemic has been a
>
> positive to me because I was away from the guys who talk about me. (Scott, age 55)

Another individual discussed this concept as well. They possessed similar feelings about the ability to remain in their personal space. It was highlighted that by being at home, they felt more comfortable:

> It was a good change because I was in the comforts of my own home. Not having to see my co-workers was a good thing. They couldn't discriminate against me all the time and I was able to be in my own home. (Lacy, age 56)

Participants also described how the uncertainty and dangers of the COVID-19 job market forced them and their co-workers to band together. This strengthened relationships within the workplace amongst employees of all ages:

> Well, I didn't have any jobs for about four months. And I think that I had a more positive relationship with my co-workers during that period because it made us stronger in a sense because we were not focused on working and everyone was ready to lend a helping hand during the pandemic. There has kind of been a big turnaround. Now my co-workers can see the reasons why they should respect older adults in the work field. (Craig, age 56)

One of the most notable experiences throughout the pandemic is that the virtual environment had led to less frequent ageist encounters. It was indicated that while some participants would prefer to be back in the workplace, they appreciated the anonymity and privacy afforded by the new technology. Several individuals discussed the benefits of this:

> Maybe it's different because meetings are so much more structured now. There aren't as many causal conversations. It may have come out more casually when we were in the office but generally now everything is done over Zoom and the conversations are more

structured and formal, I guess. So, it may not come up as much now. And generally,

we're not on camera so some of them may not even know how old I am. (Janice, age 56)

4.2.5.2 Negative Impacts

There was, of course, extensive discussion surrounding the negative impacts that

COVID-19 has had on the experience of ageism in the workplace and labour market. Its

damaging effects have been widespread and were felt deeply by participants. It is interesting,

however, to see how what was perceived as a beneficial result from COVID-19 to once

participant can simultaneously be viewed as a negative result to another participant. Several

individuals highlighted the impersonal nature of this new technology and how it may provide

space for younger co-workers to operate on nothing but assumptions and stereotypes:

> I think that partly because there aren't the conversations in the hallway anymore, that can
>
> work both ways because you get to know somebody a little bit better in the coffee or
>
> break room or going over lunch than what happens over Zoom or Teams. (Janice, age
>
> 56).

The lack of personal connection with co-workers created a dangerously out-of-touch

environment. It was clearly identified by participants that if only they could be in contact with

their peers, their experience of ageism may improve:

> I actually work at home now, part-time on this program I teach. I'm just busting to get
>
> back into a workplace. I'm tired of working at home. I live alone, I work alone, I mean I
>
> talk to people on Zoom but. I don't care for it. What I miss is the contact with people.
>
> (Denise, age 64).

This feeling was similarly reflected in interview contexts. Participants found that due to the impersonal nature of technology, they were unable to fully portray their true selves to potential employers. For example:

> I think on the other side, it's still – I don't know if – it's tough to get across who you are in those Zoom calls. They're still impersonal. They're good but still not the best. Sometimes I think it would be better that they don't see you, right? I don't want to see them sometimes. When I'm interviewing somebody for a story that I'm writing and I'm doing a Zoom call, I say that I don't want the video. You know, it's your voice, it's who you are. I'll create the image from that. (Winter, age 67)

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic also severely inhibited the expansion of the labour market. Many positions were eliminated, and companies tended to halt any search for new talent. This had a seriously negative impact on several participants. It was noted by some that they stopped applying altogether, because they felt as though they had poor chances given their age and the level of competition. For example:

> COVID was just getting started and so all of a sudden, it's like the job market was drying up. And, you know, it wouldn't matter what I applied for. First of all, there were very few jobs out there that people were actually hiring for. So, they had the pick of the crop in terms of people who had been laid off because of COVID. My competition level increased substantially. They can find someone with half of the experience I have, who is 20-25 years younger. They'll look at them first, and they did. Of course, we went into the

lockdowns and that. That froze a period of time where nobody was hiring and so many people were not working, period. (MatureMan, age 63)

I've been looking for part-time work since. But of course, COVID hit and not a lot of part-time jobs, or jobs period. There just isn't anything available, really. Or anything that I would be right for. (TAS, age 68)

For one individual, the slow job market throughout COVID-19 has inhibited their career progression. Due to their status as an older *female* worker, they have been unable to regain the momentum that had been lost:

It really affected me because I lost the projects that I had set up to do and because of that, if that had not happened, I would be in a better position now because I would have continued working with the group of people. Whereas that group of people, things changed after that. So, I lost whatever momentum I had built up and it's become harder and harder and harder. I'm in a worse, definitely way worse position. Even though there are a lot of productions going on now. [A: Do you feel that it was harder to get back started as an older worker?]. Yes. And as a woman yes. Completely. (Katina, age 60).

It is clear from the comments above that COVID-19 exacerbated toxic workplace environments for some, while others felt more comfortable in their homes. This is quite representative of the incredibly varied experiences of ageism in the workplace and labour market.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Main Findings

The results from this investigation build upon the current knowledge base of ageism in

the workplace. In comparison to existing contemporary research that primarily utilizes

quantitative methodologies, this thesis highlights the importance and value of qualitative

interview techniques. de Blois and Lagacé (2017), for example, conducted a survey of 138 older

Canadian workers. These individuals were aged 50 and above and were selected from a pool of

six Canadian organizations (de Blois & Lagacé, 2017). Their participants did not span a variety

of sectors, with the organizations consisting of consultants for provincial and federal government

as well as private sector work (de Blois & Lagacé, 2017). This survey asked several questions

regarding how they thought younger workers perceived them, how they communicate with

younger workers, and ideas surrounding knowledge transfer (de Blois & Lagacé, 2017). The

results indicated that the older workers perceived their relationship with their younger

counterparts as positive; they reported that communication was good and of a respectful nature

(de Blois & Lagacé, 2017). These results are in stark contrast to the findings of my thesis, which

demonstrate participants' fraught relationships with younger co-workers and experiences of high

levels of age-based discrimination in the workplace. This suggests that while older workers may

project positive experiences in large-scale quantitative surveys, their day-to-day reality does not

reflect this. This may be due to the sensitive nature of ageism which can lead to social

desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013). This is when respondents reply with what they believe to be

the desired or "correct" answer (Krumpal, 2013). My study, however, made efforts to avoid this

by creating a safe space for participants to share their experiences, good or bad. The intimate

nature of the interview environment worked to manage pitfalls present within related quantitative research.

Despite the inconsistencies in findings across the different studies listed above, my findings largely align with the remainder of literature surrounding ageism in the workplace and the experiences of the older workers themselves. In particular, my findings resonate with previous accounts that highlight how experiences of ageism significantly lower feelings of satisfaction, commitment, and enjoyment in the workplace (Choi et al., 2018; Lagacé et al., 2019; Macdonald & Levy, 2016).

As well, my results significantly corroborate the leading qualitative scholar in this area of study who has amassed several decades of work on ageism in the workplace. Berger (2006; 2021) has described numerous accounts of the different facets of age discrimination in the labour market. In their investigation of employers' accounts of how to manage the aging workforce, Berger (2021) reports how employers possess several stereotypes of older workers, and these are seriously reflected throughout the hiring process. My research echoes this in the descriptions of older workers and how their employers and potential hiring managers have treated them throughout their time in the labour market. As well, employers in Berger's (2021) study noted that they perceived older workers to be of lower productivity, with lower flexibility, and negative attitudes. Workers in my investigation described how they felt these perceptions from their managers or bosses. Similarly, participants in my research highlighted the concept of "identity degradation," similar to that described in Berger's (2006) work. In this same investigation, Berger's (2006) participants discussed the ways in which they negotiate these negative experiences (via social support, creating a new identity, maintaining social roles, and generating new perspectives). We see these, and more, outlined in section 4.2.3.

The findings from my research contributes substantively to social gerontological literature. As participants relayed their perceptions, interpretations, and subsequent constructions of these events, I have been able to provide a unique glimpse into a social world that is largely misunderstood due to the dominance of unreliable and inconsistent quantitative research. The lack of scholarly attention to this area allows this thesis to act as a first step in understanding and developing insight into the interaction between employers, young workers, and older workers. The perspectives of older workers as reported throughout this research have provided a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the meanings and importance of age in the labour market and workplace. Results highlight how the knowledge possessed by older employees is continually devalued, while their wealth of experiences is seen as a hindrance to job performance. Instead of being treated as a "typical" colleague, participants reported how they are being perceived according to age-based stereotypes concerning their behaviour and personality. We can also see how participants were excluded from social groups, decision-making processes, including planning the potential future of their organization. In the labour market more generally, the concept of having "too much experience" was introduced by my participants. As they noted, this was never an issue in their younger years; experience was something you either had or did not and was not measured on a sliding scale. In the job search process, older workers felt as though they were no longer considered to be an "ideal employee," resulting in the failure to attain an interview or position. This clearly indicates a paradoxical nature of the labour market. Employers and organizations undoubtedly wish to succeed and retain high quality staff, yet are systematically eliminating those older workers who, objectively, possess the most experience.

While the results presented in this thesis, and highlighted above, cannot be generalized to the experience of all older workers due to the small non-representative sample, we can

nonetheless acknowledge the contribution of these insights to the knowledge and understanding

of older workers' job search processes and experiences in the labour market. This can provide a

strong foundation for further research in this area that may be conducted on a larger scale both in

terms of number of participants and from varying locales across Canada.

The variety of psycho-social challenges that were described by participants indicate that

they each think, feel, and (re)act in several different ways when faced with ageism in the

workplace. With the perspective that has been gained throughout analysis, I am able to reflect

upon and postulate the potential reasons for this. The interactions with individuals in their

workplace undoubtedly contribute to this greatly. Older workers reported having difficulty

coming to terms with and making sense of the new social environment that they find themselves

in once they reach a certain age or are deemed by colleagues to have reached a certain age. After

many years of enjoying employment, they are suddenly met with a hostile work environment.

This is, of course, quite jarring. Given that most participants described their age as a trivial

characteristic that possesses no influence on their ability to participate in the labour market, they

tend to meet their experiences with ageism with confusion and ultimately anger; to them, there is

absolutely no reason for them to be treated this way.

As well, participants allude to the cultivation of unsafe work environments when

describing their various ageist interactions and experiences of age-based discrimination (section

4.2.1). While scholars and organizations alike have identified the role of the Human Resource

manager to act as the "moral compass" of an organization (Woolever, 2013), participants

reported that they have faced rampant ageism and discrimination in several roles across

numerous labour sectors. This suggests a lack of age-friendly workplaces or safe spaces for

aging employees. This distinct lack of attention paid to safety and security has been perceived as

a slap in the face of older workers, as reported by the participants of this study. It is made evident to older employees that they are not respected, valued, or acknowledged in their workplace. When workplaces are not supportive of their aging employees, the overall performance of the organization suffers (Kunze et al., 2011). The creation of supportive workplace environments is central to ensuring that older workers do not simply survive in the labour market, but thrive (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008; Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013)

Additional reasoning behind participants' responses may lie in the underpinnings of stereotype embodiment and threat. Stereotype embodiment occurs when stereotypes that were once focused on "other" older people become relevant to oneself (Levy, 2009). Levy's (2009) stereotype embodiment theory proposes a model of how society's stereotypical representations of old age is implicitly internalized over the life-course, molding the self-perceptions of aging that individuals possess. The idea is that we learn about age stereotypes when we are young, and that these are internalized, gain meaning, and become relevant through the aging process. Stereotype threat, on the other hand, refers to the threat(s) experienced by an individual when they feel a situation puts them at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about their group (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 2010). Stereotype threat is theorized to operate through mechanisms linked to emotion (Levy, 2009). These mechanisms make it more likely that the individual acts in line with negative stereotypes. Both stereotype embodiment and stereotype threat can influence older people's actions and behaviors, resulting in deficits that contribute to the self-fulfilling nature of age stereotypes (Levy, 2009). This pattern was demonstrated by several participants in this study who highlighted identity loss and existential considerations. For example, Winter and Denise began to feel as though they had reached the end of their lives while Scott noted that he thinks it may be time to stop working altogether because he feels he is

becoming "incompetent" (as his colleagues would say). These individuals described how their experience of ageism had made them feel differently about themselves and their working lives.

The ways in which the ten participants have constructed their experiences are highly reflective of their social contexts. This is evident when comparing two main social locations (employment status and gender). First, participants who were unemployed and seeking a position appeared to face more "concrete" barriers due to ageism and discriminatory attitudes. While older workers who already had jobs were clearly treated quite poorly, unemployed participants were simply not even permitted interviews for positions and maintained a serious inability to re-enter the labour market. These individuals have faced more severe consequences, such as financial jeopardy. Those participants who currently maintained a job, however, reported experiencing more implicit discrimination that typically came in the form of ageist stereotyping. For example, assumptions were made about their personality, ability to complete tasks, and the value of their experience. This is not to say that the psycho-social impacts met by currently employed participants are not severe. Rather, in cases of unemployed participants, these are compounded by consequences that threaten wellness beyond the psychological realm. There are notably some exceptions to this, as some employed participants noted being passed up for promotions or future work.

Gender played a dynamic and significant role in shaping the ways in which participants constructed and managed their experiences. This was especially evident when analysing participants' coping mechanisms. Male participants, namely Scott, Craig, and MatureMan, appeared to be far less likely to admit their techniques for coping with negative experiences and emotions. These individuals often described themselves as "fighting" the emotions, dealing with them on their own, and ignoring the feelings. Female participants, on the other hand, were much

more open. The responses were quite varied and represented the numerous ways in which they managed negative experiences and emotions. For example, Marion describes her method of seeking validation outside of the workplace, TAS and Denise highlight the importance of friendships and community, and Winter notes the role of exercise and physical activity maintaining positive mental health (section 4.2.3). This demonstrates the influence and presence of popular gender roles in that men must be "tough" and do not let these things affect them, whereas women are more "in touch" with their feelings and are more willing to admit when something is wrong, or if they need help (Levant & Richmond, 2008). As well, we see further illustration of this when examining how participants described how these ageist interactions made them feel in the interview process. Female participants were able to use much richer description in order to paint a complete picture of the experiences. Male participants, on the other hand, were far less likely to comprehensively describe their feelings.

When considering the seriousness of the ageist interactions discussed in this thesis, there are evidently large-scale consequences that impact the population on a higher level. Older adults in the labour market are becoming increasingly vulnerable to severe identity degradation. That is, when faced with continual discrimination and negative stereotyping, older workers are more likely to transform their identity, self-image, and self-esteem into one that is lower quality and ultimately inferior (Garfinkel, 1956). Drawing on the discussion above concerning stereotype threat and embodiment (Levy, 2009; Steele, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995), we can see the mechanisms through which older workers begin to adopt and internalize the negative images of aging that are perpetuated widely throughout the workplace and labour market, and in media more broadly (Bonnesen & Burgess, 2004; Oostlander et al., 2022; Powell, 2013). In turn, older workers may lose the ability to see themselves as valuable after being "put down" so frequently.

Moreover, those who continue to make attempts at re-entering the labour market may enter a gray area of existence where they no longer see themselves as a "worker" but do not consider themselves to be retired, either. This "no man's land" has the potential to similarly contribute to identity degradation. There is an important gendered aspect to this discussion, as well. One participant eloquently described how women place a disproportionate level of importance on their jobs as part of their identity given the unequal expectations society places on women as they age:

> It is a problem for a lot of women where jobs become your identity. We give up an aspect of our social lives to succeed. You have to work hard to get the title as a woman, you give up certain things. Maybe you gave up a relationship or whatever. You screwed up a relationship in order for your work to be stronger, right? To spend more time in that. The balance wasn't right because you thought that was the end-goal, that that's what you needed to do. (Winter, age 67).

From the perspective of this particular participant, when women are no longer able to contribute as a member of the workforce, there is the potential that they will lose a very significant piece of themselves. We can understand this perspective in the context of the devaluation of the older female body, as explicated at the outset of section 4.2.4.2. As they begin to be seen as less attractive and desirable, the importance of validation they may receive from the workplace sees a corresponding increase. Thus, it is particularly difficult when they are no longer permitted to participate in the labour market. This is, of course, not the case for all older female workers but nonetheless represents at interesting aspect to consider when analyzing the data produced by this investigation.

We may also begin to view concerns over increased labour shortages within the larger context of the ageist labour market. Statistics Canada (2022) has highlighted that the unemployment-to-job vacancy ratio is at an all-time historical low as employers are having extreme difficulty filling vacant positions. The results of this investigation indicate that the ageist labour market may be a driving force in this national issue. Most importantly, it appears as though employers systematically eliminate skilled older adults from the recruitment pool simply by virtue of their age. This has proven to be an extreme hindrance on the ability to find individuals fit to fulfill the duties of available positions.

We must also consider the types of jobs available in relation to unemployed older workers and their willingness or ability to complete those jobs. While the largest job vacancies are currently in the fields of construction, manufacturing, and food services (Statistics Canada, 2022), participants described overnight shifts or jobs that require large amounts of manual labour as inappropriate for them. Thus, they are limited in what positions they can realistically apply for. Upon understanding this context further, I contend that there is certainly a job-skill mismatch at play. When older workers did apply for available positions, however, they were continually dismissed despite operating within an economic climate with scarce labour availability. Therefore, ageism must play some role in the discussion of labour shortage. It is important to note that by virtue of my small sample size, there was only one participant who was open to the positions in part-time/casual sectors where we are seeing the greatest number of job vacancies. The other participants who are currently searching for employment are rather specialized in their fields.

5.2 Implications and Recommendations

To begin this section, it is important to recognize the difficulties that come along with the situation of this research within the social constructionist perspective. Given that this research views the knowledge generated as being entirely unique unto the various interactions had between participants, it is challenging to make concrete, reliable recommendations for practices aimed at eliminating ageism in the workplace. The recognition that multiple realities exist, rather than any "true" account of a phenomenon, means that this thesis will not contain discussion surrounding the implications my results have for future practice. Instead, I propose that these be specific, targeted, and co-developed with older adults themselves. This will ensure that new actions and behaviours are perceived to be appropriate by those which they will impact the most. Key examples of this participatory methodology can be found in the discussions by both Flobak and colleagues (2021) and MacEntee et al. (2022). These scholars note how visual methods, in particular, can work well with participatory aims. MacEntee and colleagues (2022) highlight how their "quilted Cellphilm method" is especially useful when working with vulnerable and stigmatized communities. By working collaboratively to create, analyze, and disseminate knowledge, these participants are able to build supportive communities that challenges popular social stigmas (MacEntee et al., 2022). This is in addition to the following sections, which will discuss other pathways for future research and policy in the area of ageism in the workplace.

5.2.1 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this project indicate that the experiences of ageism in the workplace are incredibly varied. Interactions, outcomes, coping mechanisms, among others, are highly dependent upon the area of work one participates in, as well as each individual's gender, age, race, socioeconomic status, and abilities. This means that in the future, research must include a significantly larger and more diverse (in location, gender, race, etc.) sample than that which was

possible for this project. This would allow for the inclusion of a variety of experiences that are not limited by any method of categorization. By doing so, the results will be far more representative of the lived realities that exist in both Ontario and Canada.

In the same vein, future research must seek to understand how these experiences of ageism change over time. The introduction of more longitudinal investigations of ageism in the workplace and labour market will provide greater insight into the ways in which age-based discrimination changes over time. The study discussed in this thesis captured older workers at only one point in time. It would be interesting and relevant, however, if scholars understood how these experiences varied over time and what factors influence the changes and fluctuations in severity, type of interaction, consequences or outcomes, methods of coping, as well as other important and defining features. For example, research may look into comparing pre- and post-COVID-19.

While an important aim of this research was to gain a more nuanced and fulsome picture of the lived experience of ageism in the workplace, it nonetheless produced broad results that were far reaching into numerous aspects of reality. Future investigations can remedy this by executing more focused study into singular aspects of the ageism experience. For example, a project that exclusively looks at coping mechanisms or a research question that seeks to only understand the ageist aspects of the hiring process. This will, in turn, generate more detailed results that have the potential to inform policy and practice more pointedly with greater authority. Conducting analyses on these focused investigations will also provide insight that is lost in broader studies.

Current scholarship highlights the methods that employers should take to limit ageism in their workplace and to support their older workers. These methods include changing recruitment

practices, offering new training opportunities, educating the leaders within the workplace, developing flexible employment opportunities, and changing the fundamental psychosocial environment of the workplace (Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008; Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013; Pyrillis, 2016; Woolever, 2013). This knowledge has not, however, been guided by the input of older workers themselves. In future research, scholars must integrate the lived experience of older workers into recommendations for ageism prevention practices in the workplace.

While there are recognizable strengths in operating within distinct quantitative or qualitative paradigms, future research endeavours should seek to integrate mixed-methodologies into their investigations. These could, for example, measure mental health outcomes in conjunction with a qualitative understanding of their experiences. This would serve well in more longitudinal studies where measurements could be compared before or after a prevention tactic or mediation strategy.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Policy

This study also illuminated participants' perceptions of age discrimination in the hiring process. The findings suggest that government policies (highlighted in section 2.1.6) regarding the accountability of employers need to be examined and updated. The older workers included in this research believe that employers discriminate against them in such ways that make it difficult for them to even recognize and prove that age discrimination has occurred. Therefore, we can infer that it would be quite difficult to hold employers accountable for their discriminatory, ageist, and reprehensible actions or behaviours. Thus, the policies that govern employers' behaviours need closer attention in order to remove the structural barriers to renewed or continued employment.

When it comes to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's policy described in section 2.1.6, there have been a multitude of legal battles showing that ageism is quite difficult to prove (Hudson, 2017). It is particularly difficult given there is often little to no concrete proof that an act of ageism has occurred. In the future, employees should be afforded more protection under law in this matter so as not to discourage employees from reporting age discrimination. For example, this may consist of a more broad definition of age-based discrimination in order for implicit ageism to fall under the legal purview. This is key considering that by and large, the type of age-based discrimination encountered in the labour market is categorized as "implicit" (Cebola et al., 2021).

Scholars have claimed that current workplace practices are not fully in compliance with the Human Rights Code described in section 2.1.6; this is obvious when listening to and analyzing the stories provided by participants. Dinsdale (2018) has suggested that to rectify this matter and to ensure total and complete compliance to the corresponding legislation, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal should produce several orders that would further dictate the actions of employers. First, organizations should be forced to alter their hiring practices (Dinsdale, 2018). Hiring managers should specifically seek out workers who bring rich experience and knowledge to the workplace (Gurchiek, 2011; Milligan & Sung, 2014; Silliker, 2012). Job notices should also be clear that "mature" workers are welcome, while excluding any potentially discriminatory language (Pyrillis, 2016).

Employers should also be required to develop new education and training programs for all workers (Dinsdale, 2018). It is widely acknowledged by scholars that opportunities for additional training can be essential to retaining and promoting older workers (Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013; Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Stevenson White et al., 2018). As well,

introducing opportunities for further training to older workers can work to prevent ageism in the workplace by opposing the popular negative beliefs about these individuals (Dickson, 2015; Woolever, 2013). Educational programs should also be targeted towards managers and other leaders in the workplace to help them understand, identify, and thwart instances of age discrimination (Kadefors & Hanse, 2012; Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Pyrillis, 2016).

5.3 Strengths and Limitations

This thesis draws upon several key advantageous characteristics in order to bolster its strengths and contributions to social gerontology. This has been discussed widely throughout the thesis but will be summarized here for clarity. The application of a qualitative methodology allowed for a more comprehensive, nuanced image to be captured of the varied experiences of ageism in the workplace and labour market. In doing so, I ensured that a high degree of reflexivity was maintained throughout the entire process, from this project's inception to the writing of this thesis. As evidenced by the discussion throughout Chapter 3, there was a strong commitment to reflexivity concerning both the theoretical position of this work and my own personal influence as a researcher. Throughout the interview, this was maintained through conversation with the participants as well as the keeping of a personal journal to track the influence that various aspects of my biography may have on the results. As well, this methodological approach ensured that there was a consistent theoretical underpinning to this project. Again, this was present from inception to final product. The social constructionism lens can be seen in the objectives of this research, the data collection, the analysis, and the writing of this final report. This consistency strengthens the results and supports the reliability of my findings and discussion.

While this investigation sought to understand the experiences of older workers who face ageism in the labour market through the application of a rigorous methodology, I acknowledge that there are nonetheless several limitations that have shaped the data discussed throughout this thesis. This primarily lies in the data that I do *not* have. The sample that was under study was rather small, with only ten individuals being selected for inclusion. Despite being a function of available resources (time, money, etc.), this certainly limits who was part of this investigation. This sample reflects larger issues of gerontological research, with participants being largely Caucasian, affluent, and able-bodied older adults (Chazan, 2020; Martinson & Berridge, 2015). Similarly, this sample consisted of mostly women, which shaped the discussions that were had. The omission of a diverse array of perspectives results in only certain stories and experiences being told. The ways in which recruitment of participants was carried out is also important to acknowledge. Geographical limits were highlighted in the recruitment poster in order to temper the response. By including only those who work and reside in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area, I am excluding those in more rural areas of Ontario. This means that my sample is not entirely representative of the older adults who are working and seeking employment throughout this province. As well, by advertising this study through technological means (i.e., social media and email), my research request only reached those with some digital literacy. This, of course, has implications for the education level, age, and socioeconomic status of the sample (Pew Research Centre, 2014).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this research was to understand the lived realities of older adults who face ageism in the workplace and labour market. Several other sub-questions accompanied this, including how older workers understand their experiences, whether older workers internalize their experiences, and how ageism intersected with other forms of discrimination. Based on qualitative, social constructionist theories, analysis of interview transcripts aided in the development of several key revelations. Relevant themes that attempted to reflect the fulsome experience of ageism in the workplace were ultimately constructed through my interpretation of the data. These include (1) the nature of the ageist interaction; (2) psycho-social consequences; (3) preferred coping mechanisms; (4) intersections with other forms of discrimination; and (5) the degree of COVID-19 impact. It can be concluded that the experience of age-based discrimination in the labour market is incredibly varied and is constructed based on the intersections of one's social locations (gender, age, race, socio-economic status, etc.). The results of this study indicate the numerous ways in which ageism in the workplace can influence the thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and actions of older adults. While this research concedes that these experiences are entirely unique for each participant, there are common characteristics that occur independent of individual variations. These are each highlighted in-depth throughout Chapter 4.

The qualitative methodology undertaken for this thesis does not allow for the claim of generalizability, yet the sociological and gerontological knowledge produced here undoubtedly contribute to scholarly understandings of older workers experiences in the labour market. The richness of participants' accounts throughout this research demonstrates significant

advancements in how scholars reconcile the meaning of age in the modern workplace and labour market.

These important qualitative methodologies were chosen because I wanted to gain a fulsome, nuanced, and detailed understanding of the lived experiences of older workers. Unsatisfied with the existing impersonal quantitative imaginings of this issue, I executed qualitative interview techniques in order to eloquently capture the voices of older workers. This approach was intended to describe in rich detail how older workers construct and make meaning of their experience of ageism in the labour market. The findings followed my initial assumptions that the experience would be highly varied and dependant on several interwoven factors (i.e., occupation, age, gender, race, and social class). As well, results matched the social constructionist theories that were introduced in Chapter 3. These highlighted how multiple perspective can arise on similar events due to unique social interactions between individuals (Burr, 2015; Durrheim, 1997). The findings also demonstrate how social locations operate in tandem to shape one's experience of ageism. By coming to terms with the importance of an intersectional approach to ageism scholarship, we can begin to move forward with new research in a meaningful way.

I am certain that the insights into the lived experiences of the participants in this study could only have been obtained from qualitative interviews. In order to illustrate the applicability of these results, however, larger scale investigations must occur. The inclusion of a larger sample population would improve the generalizability that was limited in my own research. The analysis of this data also highlighted some potential new areas of study. Longitudinal investigations could demonstrate how the experience of ageism changes over time and endeavour to discover what factors mediate these temporal fluctuations. As well, the integration of mixed methodologies

would not duplicate data but could instead produce complementary insights that would not be otherwise accessible through a single method of data collection (Darbyshire et al., 2005).

As discussed at length in section 5.2.2, the results indicate that there are distinct gaps in the legislation that governs the actions of employers and organizations when it comes to ageism. Policymakers should examine how they hold employers accountable in addition to how they are protecting older workers against implicit discrimination. New policy, on the other hand, should be introduced "on the ground" that seeks to counteract ageist attitudes in the workplace. For example, mandatory changes to recruitment and retention strategies or new educational programs might help employers better understand ageism so that they can modify their own (implicit or explicit) attitudes and behaviours.

While this research has undoubtedly contributed new knowledge and understandings to the scholarship and literature base, it has also been transformative for how I, personally, view and conceptualize ageism in the workplace. At the outset, I anticipated hearing exclusively outright, blatant, explicit accounts of age-based discrimination. As well, I felt as though it was a given fact that all older workers had experienced ageism in one form or another but just did not want to admit it to themselves or others. This was the perspective of a student and researcher who had been buried in literature and had yet to speak face-to-face (or rather, face-to-computer screen) with any older workers. Through the completion of qualitative interviews and subsequent analysis, I came to understand the true complexities that are present when trying to comprehend lived experience. The overwhelmingly implicit nature of this issue was staggering to me, and I began to parse out the how difficulties in recognizing this as true ageism arise amid a backdrop of decades of social justice focusing on racial and sex-based discrimination. By comparing their lived reality to the popular examples of discrimination, participants simply did not feel that what

they faced was as "severe" and thus should not be classified similarly. The social and political context of anti-discrimination attitudes and legislation played a greater role than I could have ever imagined. As well, individuals were not simply hesitant to acknowledge their experience of ageism, but rather they *would not* make such accusations against employers or organizations because participants relied so deeply on their ability to access the power and economic prosperity that accompanies the maintenance of those relationships.

Overall, the research presented in this thesis contributes significantly to the field of social gerontology. The rich description of experiences provided by participants allow for us to understand the role of age in the workplace and labour market more comprehensively. The insights into interactions between employers, young workers, and older workers constitutes a foundation of knowledge that will inform future scholarly investigation into ageism in the workplace. This work strongly aligns with contemporary literature surrounding ageism in the workplace and the accounts of older workers. The results of this thesis have allowed me to demonstrate the systematic erasure of older adults from the labour market and the vast implications that these experiences have for the lives of older workers.

References

Armstrong-Stassen, M., & Schlosser, F. (2008). Benefits of a supportive development climate for older workers. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 23*(4), 419-437.

Aronson, J. (1995). A pragmatic view of thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report, 2*(1), 1-3.

Berger, E. D. (2006). 'Aging' identities: Degradation and negotiation in the search for employment. *Journal of Aging Studies, 20*, 303-316.

Berger, E. D. (2021). *Ageism at work: Deconstructing age and gender in the discriminating labour market.* University of Toronto Press.

Blackstone, A. (2013). Harassment of older adults in the workplace. In P. Brownell & J. Kelly (Eds.), *Ageism and mistreatment of older workers: Current reality, future solutions* (pp. 31-47). Springer.

Bodner, E., Shrira, A., Hoffman, Y., & Bergman, Y. S. (2021). Day-to-day variability in subjective age and ageist attitudes and their association with depressive symptoms. *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences, 76*(5), 836-844.

Bonnesen, J. L., & Burgess, E. O. (2004). Senior moments: The acceptability of an ageist phrase. *Journal of Aging Studies, 18*, 123-142.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.

Brown, P. (1995). Naming and framing: The social construction of diagnosis and illness. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour,* Extra Issue, 34-52.

Brownell, P., & Powell, M. (2013). Definitions and theoretical models for understanding ageism and abuse in the workplace. In P. Brownell & J. Kelly (Eds.), *Ageism and mistreatment of older workers: Current reality, future solutions* (pp. 17-28). Springer.

Butler, R. N. (1969). Age-ism: Another form of bigotry. *Gerontologist, 9*(4), 243-246.

Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. Routledge.

Calasanti, T. (2020). Brown slime, the silver tsunami, and apocalyptic demography: The importance of ageism and age relations. *Social Currents,* 1-17.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s 15, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982,* being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), 1982, c 11.

Cebola, M. M. J., dos Santos, N. R., & Dionísio, A. (2021). Worker-related ageism: A systematic review of empirical research. *Ageing & Society*, 1-33.

Cecil, V., Pendry, L. F., Salvatore, J., Mycroft, H., & Kurz, T. (2021). Gendered ageism and gray hair: Must older women choose between feeling authentic and looking competent? *Journal of Women and Aging, 34*(2), 210-225.

Chasteen, A. L., Horhota, M., Crumley-Branyon, J. J. (2021). Overlooked and underestimated: Experiences of ageism in young, middle-aged, and older adults. *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences, 76*(7), 1323-1328.

Chazan, M. (2020). Unsettling aging futures: Challenging colonial-normativity in social gerontology. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life, 14*(1), 91-119.

Choi, E., Ospina, J., Sterger, M. F., & Orsi, R. (2018). Understanding work enjoyment among older workers: The significance of flexible work options and age discrimination in the workplace. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 61*(8), 876-886.

Ciampa, E., & Chernesky, R. (2013). Creating supportive work environments for older workers. In P. Brownell & J. Kelly (Eds.), *Ageism and mistreatment of older workers: Current reality, future solutions* (pp. 93-110). Springer.

Cooke, M. (2006). Policy changes and the labour force participation of older workers: Evidence from six countries. *Canadian Journal on Aging, 25*(4), 387-400.

Cortijo, V., McGinnis, L. P., & Sisli-Ciamarra, E. (2019). The AGE model: Addressing ageism in the workplace through corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Labour and Society, 22*, 197-213.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist policies. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1*(8), 139-167.

Darbyshire, P., MacDougall, C., & Schiller, W. (2005). Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: More insight or just more? *Qualitative Research, 5*(4), 417-436.

Davies, E. M. M., Van Der Heijden, B. I. J. M., & Stephenson, J. (2018). Are managers open to involvement in employee retirement? The influence of manager psycho-social characteristics, decision-making environment and older employee situational factors. *Aging & Society, 38*, 1279-1301.

de Blois, S., & Lagacé, M. (2017). Understanding older Canadian workers' perspectives on aging in the context of communication and knowledge transfer. *Canadian Journal of Communication, 42*(4), 631-644.

Dennis, H., & Thomas, K. (2007). Ageism in the workplace. *Generations, 31*(1), 84-89.

Dickson, J. J. (2015). Supporting a generationally diverse workforce: Considerations for aging

      providers in the US healthcare system. *Journal of Best Practices in Health Professions*

      Diversity: Education, Research, and Policy, 8(2), 1071-1086.

Dinsdale, M. (2018, October 11). Canada [Online]. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from

      http://www.agediscrimination.info/international-age-discrimination/canada

Dowling, M. (2006). Approaches to reflexivity in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher, 13*(3),

      7-21.

Duffy, F. (2017). A social work perspective on how ageist language, discourses and

      understandings negatively frame older people and why taking a critical social work

      stance is essential. *British Journal of Social Work, 47*, 2068-2085.

Durrheim, K. (1997). Social constructionism, discourse, and psychology. *South African Journal*

      of Psychology, 27(3), 175-182.

Eisenberg, R. (2020, July 17). A new ageism? The fallout from the pandemic [Online]. Retrieved

      September 15, 2022, from https://www.nextavenue.org/ageism-fallout-from-pandemic/

Evans, C. (2017). *Analyzing semi-structured interviews using thematic analysis: Exploring*

      voluntary civic participation among adults [Data set]. SAGE Research Methods Datasets.

Fitzgerald, L., & Casey, J. (2007). Working overtime: Mandatory retirement in Canada.

      LawNow, 31(4).

Flobak, E., Nordby, E. S., Guribye, F., Kenter, R., Nordgreen, T., & Lundervold, A. J. (2022).

      Designing videos with and for adults with ADHD for an online intervention:

      Participatory design study and thematic analysis of evaluation. *Journal of Medical*

      Internet Research – Mental Health, 8(9), 1-30.

Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond.* New York University

    Press.

Garfinkel, H. (1956). Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies. *The American Journal of*

    Sociology, 61(5), 420−424.

Government of Canada. (2022, April 28). Promoting the labour force participation of older

    Canadians [Online]. Retrieved November 14, 2022, from

    https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-

    development/corporate/seniors/forum/labour-force-participation.html#h2.3-3.3

Gunderson, M. (2003). Age discrimination in employment in Canada. *Contemporary Economic*

    Policy, 21(3), 318-328.

Gurchiek, K. (2011). Older workers need more flexible policies. *HR Magazine,* 13.

Hagestad, G. O., & Uhlenberg, P. (2005). The social separation of old and young: A root of

    ageism. *Journal of Social Issues, 61*(2), 343-360.

Hill, A. (2019, August 19). Over a third of Britons admit ageist behaviour in new study;

    Research by SunLife found those in their 30s most likely to use discriminatory language.

    The Guardian.

Horton, S., Baker, J., Côté, J., & Deakin, J. M. (2008). Understanding seniors' perceptions and

    stereotypes of aging. *Educational Gerontology, 34*, 997-1017.

Horton, S., Baker, J., & Deakin, J. M. (2007). Stereotypes of aging: Their effects on the health of

    seniors in North American society. *Educational Gerontology, 33*, 1021-1035.

Hsiung, P. C. (2008). Teaching reflexivity in qualitative interviewing. *Teaching Sociology, 36,*

    211-226.

Hudson, D. (2017, March 31). The golden years: The aging workforce and human rights matters

  [Online]. *Queens University Industrial Relations Centre.* Retrieved September 15, 2022,

  from https://irc.queensu.ca/wp-content/uploads/articles/articles_the-golden-years-the-

  aging-workforce-and-human-rights-matters.pdf

Hurd Clarke, L. (2018). Women, aging, and beauty culture: Navigating the social perils of

  looking old. *Journal of the American Society on Aging, 41*(4), 104-108.

Hurd Clarke, L., & Korotchenko, A. (2016). 'I know it exists… but I haven't experienced it

  personally': Older Canadian men's perceptions of ageism as a distant social problem.

  Ageing & Society, 36, 1757-1773.

Jackson, S. E., Hackett, R. A., & Steptoe, A. (2019). Associations between age discrimination

  and health and wellbeing: Cross-sectional and prospective analysis of the English

  Longitudinal Study of Ageing. *Lancet Public Health, 4*, e200-e208.

Jackson, W. A. (1994). The economics of aging and the political economy of old age.

  International Review of Applied Economics, 8(1), 31-45.

Kadefors, R., & Hanse, J. J. (2012). Employers' attitudes toward older workers and obstacles and

  opportunities for the older unemployed to reenter working life. *Nordic Journal of

  Working Life Studies, 2*(3), 1-19.

Koonin, M., & Green, T. M. (2004). The emotionally abusive workplace. *Journal of Emotional

  Abuse, 4*, 71–79.

Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: A literature

  review. *Quality & Quantity, 47*(4), 2025-2047.

Kunze, F., Boehm, S. A., & Bruch, H. (2011). Age diversity, age discrimination climate and performance consequences – a cross organizational study. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour, 32*(2), 264-290.

Lagacé, M., Tanguay, A., Lavallée, M., Laplante, J., & Robichaud, S. (2012). The silent impact of ageist communication in long-term care facilities: Elders' perspectives on quality of life and coping strategies. *Journal of Aging Studies, 26*, 335-342.

Lagacé, M., Van de Beeck, L., & Firzly, N. (2019). Building on intergenerational climate to counter ageism in the workplace? A cross-organizational study. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 17*(2), 201-219.

Levant, R.F. & Richmond, K. (2008). A review of research on masculinity ideologies using the male role norms inventory. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *15*(2), 130-146.

Levy, B. (2009). Stereotype embodiment: A psychosocial approach to aging. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 18*(6), 332-336.

Levy, B. R., Slade, M. D., Kunkel, S. R., & Kasl, S. V. (2002). Longevity increased by positive self-perceptions of aging. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83*(2), 261-270.

Levy, S. R., & Macdonald, J. L. (2016). Progress on understanding ageism. *Journal of Social Issues, 72*(1), 5-25.

Lyons, A., Alba, B., Heywood, W., Fileborn, B., Minichiello, V., Barrett, C., Hinchliff, S., Malta, S., & Dow, B. (2018). Experiences of ageism and the mental health of older adults. *Aging & Mental Health, 22*(11), 1456-1464.

Macdonald, J. L., & Levy, S. R. (2016). Ageism in the workplace: The role of psychosocial factors in predicting job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement. *Journal of Social Issues, 72*(1), 169-190.

MacEntee, K., Kendrick, C., & Flicker, S. (2022). Quilted cellphilm method: A participatory

    visual health research method for working with marginalised and stigmatised

    communities. *Global Public Health, 17*(7), 1420-1432.

MacRae, H. (2020). 'I've never given it a thought': Older men's experiences with and

    perceptions of ageism during interactions with physicians. *Ageing & Society, 42,* 1318-

    1339.

Malinen, S., & Johnston, L. (2013). Workplace ageism: Discovering hidden bias. *Experimental*

    Aging Research, 39(4), 445-465.

Malta, S., & Doyle, C. (2016). Mental health and well-being in older people: Butler's three

    constructs of ageism in Australasian Journal on Ageing. *Australasian Journal on Ageing,*

    35(4), 232-235.

Martinson, M., & Berridge, C. (2015). Successful aging and its discontents: A systematic review

    of the social gerontology literature. *The Gerontologist, 55*(1), 58-69.

McConatha, J. T., Schnell, F., Stricker, L., & Magnarelli, J. (2020). I am not invisible: The

    impact of age discrimination in the workplace. *Innovation in Aging, 4*(S1), 25.

Meisner, B.A. (2012). A meta-analysis of positive and negative age stereotype priming effects on

    behavior among older adults. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological*

    Sciences and Social Sciences, 67(1), 13–17.

Messacar, D., & Kocourek, P. (2019). Pathways to retirement, well-being, and mandatory

    retirement rules: Evidence from Canadian reforms. *Journal of Labour Research, 40*, 249-

    275.

Meyer, H. (2020, September 1). A flood of age discrimination lawsuits is expected from

    COVID-19 and the economic downturn [Online]. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from

https://www.abajournal.com/web/article/flood-of-age-discrimination-suits-expected-with-pandemic-economic-downturn

Milligan, P. A., & Sung, P. P. (2014). Older just means older. *Chief Learning Officer, 13*(6), 62.

Minichiello, V., Browne, J., & Kendig, H. (2000). Perceptions and consequences of ageism: Views of older people. *Ageing & Society, 20*, 253-278.

Nelson, T. D. (2002). *Ageism: Stereotyping and prejudice against older persons.* MIT Press.

Nelson, T. D. (2009). Ageism. In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination* (pp. 431-440). Psychology Press.

Ng, T. W. H., & Feldman, D. C. (2012). Evaluating six common stereotypes about older workers with meta-analytical data. *Personnel Psychology, 65*(4), 821-858.

Okun, S., & Ayalon, L. (2022). Ageism: The importance of the linguistic concept for the construction of the experience. *Ageing & Society*, 1-15.

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2000). *Discrimination and age: Human rights issues facing older persons in Ontario*. Toronto: Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (n.d-a). Age discrimination (brochure) [Online]. Retrieved September 25, 2022, from http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/age-discrimination-brochure

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (n.d-b). Relevant Code provisions [Online]. Retrieved September 25, 2022, from http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-discrimination-and-language/relevant-code-provisions

Oostlander, S. A., Champagne-Poirier, O., & O'Sullivan, T. L. (2021). Media portrayal of older adults across five Canadian disasters. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 94*(2), 234-250.

Ouellet-Léveillé, B., & Milan, A. (2019, July 25). Results from the 2016 census: Occupations

      with older workers [Online]. Retrieved November 14, 2022, from

      https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00011-eng.htm

Pew Research Centre. (2014, April 3). Older adults and technology use [Online]. Retrieved

      November 14, 2022, from https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/04/03/older-adults-

      and-technology-use/

Posthuma, R. A., & Campion, M. A. (2009). Age stereotypes in the workplace: Common

      stereotypes, moderators, and future research directions. *Journal of Management, 35*(1),

      158-188.

Powell, M. (2013). What do newspapers say about older adults in the workforce? In P. Brownell,

      & J. Kelly (Eds.), *Ageism and mistreatment of older workers: Current reality, future*

      solutions (pp. 49-67). Springer.

Probst, B. (2015). The eye regards itself: Benefits and challenges of reflexivity in qualitative

      social work research. *Social Work Research, 39*(1), 37-48.

Pyrillis, R. (2016). Boomer bust. *Workforce, 95*(10), 26-57.

Qu, S. Q., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in*

      Accounting and Management, 8(3), 238-264.

Rabionet, S. E. (2011). How I learned to design and conduct semi-structured interviews: An

      ongoing and continuous journey. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(2), 563-566.

Revera. (2012). Revera Report on Ageism [Online]. Retrieved March 26, 2022, from

      https://www.ageismore.com/getmedia/fe93c719-8bc7-433e-92da-ecb1825a3637/Revera-

      Report_on_Ageism.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

Robertson, G. (2017). Ageing and ageism: The impact of stereotypical attitudes on personal

    health and well-being outcomes and possible personal compensation strategies. *Self &*

    Society, 45(2), 149-159.

Shippee, T. P., Wilkinson, L. R., Schafer, M. H., & Shippee, N. D. (2019). Long-term effects of

    age discrimination on mental health: The role of perceived financial strain. *Journals of*

    Gerontology: Social Sciences, 74(4), 664-674.

Shpakou, A., Klimatckaia, L., Kuzniatsou, A., Laskiene, S., & Zaitseva, O. (2021). Medical care

    and manifestations of ageism in healthcare institutions: Opinion of elderly people. The

    example of four countries. *Family Medicine & Primary Care Review, 23*(1), 69-74.

Silliker, A. (2012, May 21). Australia offers $1,000 for hiring of older workers. *Canadian HR*

    Reporter, 25(10), 1 & 10.

Smith, B, & Sparkes, A. C. (2016). Introduction: An invitation to qualitative research. In B.

    Smith, & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Research in Sport*

    and Exercise (pp. 1-3). Routledge.

Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014). Qualitative analysis. In A. C. Sparkes, & B. Smith (Eds.),

    Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health (pp. 115-146). Routledge.

Statistics Canada. (2022, November 18). Labour shortage trends in Canada [Online]. Retrieved

    October 25, 2022, from https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects-start/labour_/labour-

    shortage-trends-canada

Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: And other clues to how stereotypes affect us (Issues of*

    our time). W.W. Norton & Company.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of

    African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 797–811.

Stevenson White, M., Burns, C., & Conlon, H. A. (2018). The impact of an aging population in

the workplace. *Workplace Health & Safety, 66*(10), 493-498.

Taylor, P. & McLoughlin, C. (2017). Gendered ageism and micro aggressions in the workplace.

Innovation in Aging, 1(S1), 116.

Tuckett, A. G. (2005). Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: A researcher's experience.

Contemporary Nurse, 19, 75-87.

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis:

Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing and Health Sciences,

15*, 398-405.

Whiting, L. S. (2008). Semi-structured interviews: Guidance for novice researchers. *Nursing

Standard, 22*(23), 35-40.

Woolever, J. (2013). Human resource departments and older adults in the workplace. In P.

Brownell, & J. Kelly (Eds.), *Ageism and mistreatment of older workers: Current reality,

future solutions* (pp. 111-134). Springer.

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introduction
- Go over Oral Consent Script and Information Letter → obtain consent
- This interview will be recorded to increase accuracy and to reduce the chance of misinterpreting what anyone says
- All recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secure, McMaster University-approved online cloud service
- Only I and my faculty supervisor will have access to the transcript of your interview (with your personal name removed)
- Remind the participant that these questions and this interview in sensitive in nature and may bring up negative emotions. Please know that they can take a break at any point and remove consent at any point during the interview and up to 1 month after the interview takes place
- I will ask for a pseudonym at the end of the interview and your personal information will be removed once it is transcribed – only myself and my supervisor will have access to the document that links your name with your transcript
- Introduce myself, highlight why I value this research and their input

General demographic questions
- Age, gender, race, education level, marital status
- What is your present or former occupation?
- *If attempting to re-enter the labour market:* Which occupation or sector are you looking to gain entry to?

Ageism-Specific Questions
Description of experiences:
- What does ageism in the workplace look like to you (in your experience)? What does it sound like?
- Can you describe to me your most memorable experience of ageism in the workplace and/or hiring process?
- Do you experience ageism on a day-to-day basis? If so, what does it look like?
- *If trying to re-enter the labour market:* are there certain aspects of the hiring process that make you feel discriminated against due to your age?

Feelings ascribed to the experiences:
- How do these experiences make you feel?
- How do these experiences of age-based discrimination in the workplace make you feel about your personal aging experience? Does it impact how you feel about getting older in general?
- Do these experiences make you feel more or less connected to your workplace community? How so?
- How do certain elements of the workplace (i.e., age-based terminology, age-based assumptions about abilities, inclusion/exclusion in decisions, inclusion/exclusion in social events) make you feel? Have you ever before considered that they were forms of ageism?

Coping mechanisms:

- How would you describe the ways in which you cope with these experiences?
- Do certain elements of the workplace make you feel better after enduring ageist behaviour? If yes, please describe them to me. Why do these make you feel more positively?

Intersections of discrimination:
- Have you ever experienced any discrimination in the workplace that was based on a characteristic other than age? If yes, can you describe the experience to me?
- Do you feel as though this experience was compounded (or different) due to your age? If yes, why?

Employer support:
- Do you feel supported by your employer when you face ageism? Why or why not? If no, what do you think can be done to make the workplace safer for older adults?

COVID-19
- Has COVID changed the way in which you interact with co-workers or employers? Do you feel that this has been positive or negative?
- In your experience, has COVID changed the way in which you experience age-based discrimination in the "workplace"
- Did you lose work due to COVID? Do you feel as though your experience of this was different due to your age? How so?

Interview Wrap Up
- Is there anything else you would like me to know in relation to your experience of ageism in the workplace or labour market? Is there anything else you feel is important for your employers to know?
- If I have any follow up questions – can I contact them?
- Pseudonym?
- How can I send the gift card?
- Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your experience with me. Your contributions are very valuable to this research.

Appendix C: Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Highest Education	Employment Status	Occupation/Sector
Scott	55	Male	Latino	Divorced	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	Medical
Craig	56	Male	Black	Married	Bachelor's Degree	Employed	Construction
Lacy	56	Female	Black	Married	Master's Degree	Retired	Canadian Armed Forces
Janice	56	Female	White	Married	Some undergraduate education (unfinished)	Employed	Customer Operations
Winter	67	Female	White	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Unemployed	Marketing
Marion	67	Female	White	Married	Bachelor's Degree	Retired	Museum Curator
TAS	68	Female	White	Widowed	Master's Degree	Unemployed	Part-Time / Casual Employment
Denise	64	Female	White	Widowed	2 Master's Degrees	Unemployed	Academia/Public Health Policy
Katina	60	Female	White	Single	College Diploma	Freelance	Film Industry
MatureMan	63	Male	White	In Relationship	College Diploma	Unemployed	Supply Chain Management