

**Relating to Work:
Generation, Discourse and Social Change**

By Karen R. Foster

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Relating to Work: Generation, Discourse and Social Change

By Karen R. Foster

ABSTRACT

This dissertation intervenes in a public and scholarly conversation about generational differences and conflicts in contemporary workplaces and the workforce more broadly. In contrast to many scholars and public voices in this conversation, which take generation for granted as an *a priori* and age-based group of people, this thesis begins by exploring generation as a matter of *discourse*, through the historically-situated working life stories of 52 working people aged 25 to 86.

On the basis of qualitative interview data, set against a rich statistical and historical backdrop, this dissertation argues that generation plays two discursive roles in the experience, interpretation and accomplishment of making a living.

First, develops the concept of *generation-as-discourse*, showing how generation functions as a vehicle for thought and action – a mental structure that provides people with, and limits them to, specific way(s) of understanding, speaking about, and acting in the world. It argues that generation-as-discourse has the capacity to foreground intersections of biography and history, encouraging sympathetic interpretations of other people’s lives, but it is also malleable enough to be used to foreground only individual choice and psychology, wrenching work-related behaviours and values out of socio-historical context and encouraging intergenerational tension.

Second, it develops the idea of *generational discourses*, arguing that generation as a phenomenon or social location can actually shape other discourses – in this case, discourses about the place of work in a life well-lived. Specifically, it finds three distinct ways of relating to paid work in the post-industrial, advanced capitalist economy, evident in three different types of working life stories: namely, narratives of *faith*, *ambivalence* and *disaffection*. These three relationships are shown to underpin the clashes and divides that participants identified as “generational,” and this thesis argues that they *are* generational in that they follow a generational pattern, and correspond with economic restructuring and other socio-political transformations.

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RELATING TO WORK: GENERATION, DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

They want more. They *always want more...* They just expect more, right? Our company graciously gives us between Christmas and New Year's, you know, free, as holidays, you don't have to put more time in otherwise to get those days – and they just kind of expect that. They're gratitude-less. They're not grateful. The company provides them with a bonus, usually annually, and that's just sort of like, a given, like that *should* be given. We should supply them with ice cream, we should supply them with coffee, a separate make-your-own, individually, not this urn because the coffee gets cold... You can never satisfy. You offer something up and it becomes an expectation. There's a real sense of - well, an entitlement.

I had asked 51-year-old Penny whether she noticed any age-related differences among the people at the software company where she worked. The question barely left my lips before she answered. "Yeah I do," she said. "I find that there's an entitlement. It's quite, well - it's quite annoying."

I asked her what she meant by 'entitlement' even though this wasn't the first time I'd heard the word in an interview. She answered, "it's just the sense that the company should be there for them, because they deserve it. But yet there isn't that sense of loyalty." Instead of loyalty, Penny saw in her younger co-workers an attitude of "'I want to be the recipient but I don't want to be the giver to the company'." The quote above is what came next.

I interviewed Penny by telephone in June 2010. Just as I did in every one of the interviews conducted for this dissertation, I asked Penny to talk me through her 'working life story', from her earliest memory of work—for some it was a first job, at a grocery store or baling hay at the family farm; for others the smell of their father after a day of work at the factory—through the present and

into the imagined and planned-for future. By the time we arrived at the question of generational and age differences at work, I had already learned that Penny started out as a secretary after taking some courses at community college in the late 1970s. She and her husband met, married, and had two children by the early 1980s, and Penny stayed home with them and volunteered for sixteen years before eventually returning to paid work. Two and a half years after her re-entry onto the labour market, she enrolled in a 1-year Human Resources Management program, and upon graduating, she found work through a placement agency. She found a permanent job not long after, but was let go during company restructuring. She took some time to “recuperate”, and then found another job, at the software company she worked for when I interviewed her.

While it would later emerge as one of the most pivotal interview moments, at the time, her response about the twenty and thirty-somethings at her office was little more than uncomfortable. The elephant in the room—or in the telephone lines—was that I was a twenty-something, too, presumably in possession of many of the qualities Penny found so “annoying” in her co-workers. But we persevered, and I asked her where she thought this “entitlement” came from. “More affluence,” she began, continuing:

I don't think you're really gonna get a perspective that's beyond just what a 20 and a 30 year old [have]. [...] I really don't think that they see much beyond themselves, what they are experiencing and how it affects them [...] and they're really, um, they're driven by consumerism, materialism. That is the conversation around the water [cooler] is you know, the new set of skis, the new boat, or you know, the new clothing - 'where did you get that?'

For Penny, younger workers in their 20s and 30s *generally* brought a sense of entitlement to the workplace, because their goal as working people was to make money to afford a particular,

materialistic lifestyle, and not to contribute to society or the organization that paid them. They wanted a lot from their employer, but they were not willing to give much in return.

A short time later in August 2010 I met Cameron, a 30-year old research scientist, on the sunny patio of a restaurant. He had a steady government job, but he was nonetheless unsettled in his career plans. Although he was satisfied for now, he anticipated having to make a difficult decision in the near future. "I do enjoy the research," he said,

but these government facilities need direction sometimes... and so I kind of stir the pot; I'm a bit of a shit disturber. So if I did stick around I would probably want to move into management—even though I like the research—just so I could try to improve what's happening. And so I think if I stick with research and wanna pursue my own interests I'll probably have to move to a university, and that'll be within the next three years or so. If you wait too long, then they start to ask questions.

In all of Cameron's deliberating about what to do next, money, material things and perks from his employer were of marginal concern. In fact, when he found himself tempted by money, he reminded himself that "I make more than enough to live a comfortable lifestyle. And I have friends who've made the opposite choice and went for money and aren't necessarily happy." Instead, he considered how much control he would have over the direction of his research and how hands-on he could be with his work. Working in government, he felt hemmed in politically, and pushed toward money-making research instead of research with scientific or social value. But if he moved to a university, he worried that he would end up overseeing a lab rather than working in it. He knew that whatever he did, he liked to be busy, and appreciated being able to tailor his working hours to the hours of his scientific experiments—if he was finished all of his work at 3pm, he wanted to be able to leave, but if he needed to work late into the night, he wanted to be allowed to do that too. He did not say that

he felt he *deserved* any of this, but that he would look for the things he wanted in a job, and would be willing to trade the flexibility he desired for a lower salary or a less prestigious institution.

Cameron's case alone doesn't disprove Penny's understanding of how young people approach work. For one, they work in very different fields, under very different organizational structures. But their stories bear some similarity to the fifty others gathered in this study of people's working lives, with Cameron's priorities, interpretations and considerations reflected in the stories of many other twenty- and thirty-something interviewees, and Penny's words reverberating through many of the interviews conducted with other working people in their 50s and older. Penny and Cameron are, for my purposes, representatives of the two sides of a purportedly ongoing tension in 'the workplace' writ large, which has come to the fore in popular media, management literature and some social scientific research: the clash between so-called 'generations' at work.

Management manuals, news stories, blogs and magazine articles abound on how to 'deal' with new 'generations' of workers—the 'Millenials' being the latest in a line-up that includes Generation Y, Generation X and the Baby Boomers.¹ There are even entire organizations, such as Claire Raines and Associates, whose sole purpose is to deliver presentations and manuals to employers and managers looking to manage their multi-generational teams of workers more effectively.²

¹ See, for example: Zemke, Ron, Claire Raines and Bob Filipczak. 1999. *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers and Nexters in Your Workplace*: AMACOM; Javitch, David. 2010. "How to Get the Most out of Gen Y-ers." The Globe and Mail Online: Report on Business, November 29th. Accessed December 1st, 2010 at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/your-business/business-categories/human-resources/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-gen-y-ers/article1813777/>;

² See the Claire Raines and Associates website: <http://www.generationsatwork.com/>

Beyond the basic premise that there is *something* going on between generations at work, there is by no means a consensus about precisely what that something is. Young workers of the new millennium, fresh out of university or community college or (to a much lesser extent given the explosion in post-secondary enrolment) high school, are characterized variously as more civic-minded *and* more-self-centered,³ as go-getters *and* slackers.⁴ They are said to be technologically savvy and outspoken, and they allegedly bring attitudes, a work ethic and expectations to the workplace that are jarringly different from those of the older people who have to manage or work alongside them. Because these 'Gen Y-ers' or 'Millenials' are accustomed to multitasking with their cell phones and laptops, bosses are encouraged to give them multiple tasks at a time so they can flit around like they are used to. They need to be rewarded frequently. They should be dealt with electronically more than face-to-face because that is the way they prefer to interact. Managers are told that they should ask their young employees for input; better yet, they should seek one mentor twice their age, and one mentor half their age, and learn from each.⁵

Meanwhile, older workers—namely, the baby boomers—are characterized as slower, more careful, and more obedient; they are said to be less productive *and* more productive;⁶ they need

³ Twenge, Jean. 2006. *Generation Me: Why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive and entitled—and more miserable than ever before*. New York, NY: Free Press.

⁴ See Silverman, Craig. "Attack of the fresh-faced go-getters". *Globe and Mail*, Monday, July 2nd, 2007; compare to "Job Clinging and Slackoisie," *The New York Times: Schott's Vocab*, January 3rd, 2011. Accessed May 26th at <http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/03/job-clinging-and-slackoisie/>

⁵ Jensen, Bill and Josh Klein. 2010. *Hacking Work: Breaking stupid rules for smart results*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

⁶ Börsch-Supan, Axel and Matthias Weiss. 2007. "Productivity and Age: Evidence from Work Teams at the Assembly Line". Mannheim, Germany: Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Ageing; Roberts, M., and Stoney, C. 2003. The Case for Older Workers at Tesco: an examination of attitudes, assumptions and attributes. Working Paper. Stirling University.

social interaction at work;⁷ oddly, now they're said to have "lived to work" even though their parents' generation once chastised them for lacking a work ethic. Younger people today have been stamped with the mark of "Generation Me," but the Baby Boomers had to wear that label ("the 'Me' generation") first, in the 1970s. The picture, in other words, is a messy one. But it persists, driving a publication and consulting boom around generations and work, and stoking the fires of a journalistic debate over the perceived "problem" of the working lives of 20-somethings.⁸ Within the academy, while management scholars such as Sean Lyons and Linda Duxbury and psychologists such as Jean Twenge have contributed to this cacophonous conversation, sociologists have stayed away from the workplace-conflict discourse and focused elsewhere—for example, on how different generations manage the domestic division of labour in light of changing paid employment norms.⁹

Thus, there is room for a different, sociologically-sensitive perspective. In fact, there is ample room, and need, for more social scientific research in general. Lyons and Duxbury, Canadian researchers whose national study on generational differences in work values is the most prominent and comprehensive research program in this area, have written that there has been "little theoretical or empirical evidence amassed to date on this topic." The sparse literature that does exist, according to Lyons and Duxbury, is mostly "anecdotal or opinion-based."¹⁰ And while there are fields of scholarship which test other popular claims about today's young people in general –

⁷ Twenge, 2006.

⁸ For the two sides of this debate, first see: Henig, Robin M. 2010. 'What is it about 20-Somethings?' *The New York Times Magazine*. August 18th, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html>; see also Thompson, Derek. 2010. 'What's Really the Matter with Twenty-Somethings?' *The Atlantic*. August 23rd, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2010/08/whats-really-the-matter-with-20-somethings/61938/>

⁹ Gerson, Kathleen. 2009. *The unfinished revolution: how a new generation is reshaping family, work, and gender in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

¹⁰ P. 62 in Lyons, Sean, Linda Duxbury and Christopher Higgins. 2005. "An Empirical Assessment of Generational Differences in Work-related Values" In *Annual Conference of the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada: Human Resources Management*, ed. Deborah M. Zinni. Toronto, ON.

claims about their postponement of adulthood, for example¹¹ – few if any social scientists are directly and critically interrogating the assumptions (about young and old workers alike) propping up generation-management literatures and the idea of work-related intergenerational conflict or difference.

Lyons and Duxbury have done extensive work creating and carrying out a large-scale, quantitative study, which put forward a number of intriguing findings. They found, for example, that “Millennials” were less interested in altruistic work than older workers, and more interested in work that was “social” – i.e., work that put them in contact with others. In fact, interest in “social” work declined with each older cohort. Millennials and Generation Xers also placed more importance on prestige than Baby Boomers or the eldest workers, which the authors termed “Matures” (born pre-1945).¹² But statistics and macro-level analyses – particularly when the question at hand is about values, priorities, life goals and approaches to work – can only go part of the way toward understanding what, if anything, is going on between different so-called generations at work.

This dissertation takes the common assumptions about generational differences at work and checks them against the accounts and life stories of real, working people, from a sociological perspective. Such a perspective involves, as C. Wright Mills famously instructed, recognizing that “neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both,” and applying the “quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man [sic] and society, of biography and history, of self and world”: *the sociological imagination*. The point of approaching this issue sociologically is to advance on a particular kind of knowledge, which Mills

¹¹ Cote, James. 2000. *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity. What Does it Mean to Grow Up?* New York: NYU Press; Clark, Warren. 2007. “Delayed Transitions of Young Adults.” In *Canadian Social Trends*: Statistics Canada.

¹² Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2005:68.

envisioned as the “urge” behind all great and “classic” social analyses whose authors possess the sociological imagination:

to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he [sic] has his quality and his being [...] to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in [ourselves] as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society.¹³

To this grand end, I pose a simple, broad question: “what is going on” with generations at work? What does it tell us—and how does it connect to what we already know—about the structure of our society, our moment in history and ourselves?

ASSUMPTIONS AND ARGUMENT

There is a tight connection between the ontological assumptions underpinning this project, and the argument advanced here. These assumptions, along with the central claims of the argument, are worth stating at the outset. Specifically, this investigation and analysis rests on the following ontological assumptions, all of which will be dealt with in more detail in the chapters that follow:

Guiding Assumptions

1. That *discourse* is an integral part of human life, and “all practices have a discursive aspect”.¹⁴ Discourse is part of the realm of human participation “in forms of understanding, comprehension or consciousness of the relations and activities in which they are involved”, as well as the “representations” of material reality that they take as “truth”; this

¹³ P. 4 in Mills, C. W. (2000/1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ P. 72 in Hall, Stuart. 2001. ‘Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse.’ Pp. 72-81 in Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon Yates (Eds.) *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*. Oxford, UK: Open University Press.

comprehension or consciousness “makes a difference” to how, why, to what ends and in what contexts people act (or do not).¹⁵

2. That discourse is intimately related to *power* in that it (i.e., particular discourse formations) is routinely “applied to the regulation of social conduct in practice”, sometimes through the coercion and governing practices of institutions we recognize as authorities – governments and state apparatuses – and also because of the link between consciousness and action described in assumption 1 above.¹⁶
3. That one of the primary sites in which individuals enact, negotiate and employ discourse and specific discourse formations is in their life narratives – the stories they tell about and to themselves and others.
4. That individual human action is, in Margaret Archer’s terminology, the outcome of the individual’s *reflexive deliberations* about his or her “subjectively defined” *concerns* in light of the “objective”, “structural and cultural” *contexts* in which s/he is located.¹⁷

From these basic ontological assumptions, and through the empirical investigation detailed in subsequent chapters, I advance the following sociological claims:

Argument and Claims

1. That generation exists – that is, it gains *meaning* – through discourse and in *discursive* form(s) – it is part of the universe of ‘linguistic or semiotic vehicles’ which organize

¹⁵ Purvis, Trevor, and Alan Hunt. 1993. Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology. *The British Journal of Sociology* 44 (3):474

¹⁶ Purvis and Hunt, 1993:474.

¹⁷ P. 96 in Archer, Margaret. 2009. *Making Our Way in the World*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

'thinking, understanding and experiencing' and thereby are part of what makes experiences meaningful.¹⁸ Specifically, generation exists on *two* discursive 'levels':

Level one: Generation-as-discourse, which refers to discourse that constructs 'generations' as a meaningful feature of human life. Specifically, *generation-as-discourse* constructs generations as groups of people who share ***both contexts and concerns*** (again, Archer's terminology) at the same historical juncture.

Level two: Generational discourses, which refers to the way certain discourse formations align with particular intersections of biography and history – that is, the alignment of contexts *and* concerns is related to (leads to and stems from) particular discourse formations.

2. Although *generation-as-discourse* rests on the acknowledgement of both contexts *and* concerns, it is sometimes truncated to include only concerns, thereby constructing generations as groups of people who simply and voluntarily possess different worldviews. This amputated version of *generation-as-discourse* is at play in the most divisive views on generations at work, and underlies the perception and experience of intergenerational conflict.
3. There are three dominant *generational discourses* around work and making a living today, which are not reducible to the age-based, atomistic renderings of generational difference advanced by management literature and popular writings on the subject. These three discourses – which I term "faith," "ambivalence" and "disaffection" – organize and influence how people relate to the project of making a living through paid and unpaid work. They

¹⁸ Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 476.

describe and narrate relationships – either faithful, ambivalent, or disaffected – not to work in its own right, but to *paid work* as it exists for most people today: *the act of selling one's labour for wages, in a post-industrial, capitalist economic system.*

4. This dissertation's case study of working life stories (and 'relating to work') suggests that *generational discourses* are potentially a central force in processes of social change.

Stepping back from these larger assumptions and claims, I turn now to a chapter-by-chapter outline of how I arrive at them.

PART ONE: STUDYING GENERATIONS AND WORK

There are a number of words in my research question that have multiple, contested meanings, any of which would lead to markedly different methods, theories and findings from the others. If part of the project at hand is to question prevailing assumptions, it would be foolish to begin by advancing some of my own without subjecting them to the same level of scrutiny.

Accordingly, in Chapter 1, I add extant sociological and philosophical literature on generations to the common sense understandings of generation introduced at the beginning of this introduction and ask the crucial question: *what* is a generation? Or rather, what do we *think* a generation is? There are multiple answers to this question, but they all oddly add up to an orthodox approach to studying generations which, as I will argue, places severe limits on what we can come to know about how generation features and functions in that interplay of human and society, biography and history, self and world. I illustrate how I intend to evade some of these limitations by adopting an approach designed to allow an appropriately complex understanding of generation to emerge *from* the data over the course of the study rather than defining it in advance. Specifically, I present the interrelated notions of *generation-as-discourse* and *generational discourses*, the two lenses I use to read and interpret the life stories of working people.

In Chapter 2, I set out my research questions and concepts, describe the data collection process and participants, and introduce the methodology and epistemology guiding the study, showing how the methods have been carefully chosen to reflect the epistemological assumptions taken, and the sociological goal of this inquiry.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the concept of *generation-as-discourse*, showing how generation 'emerged' most prominently and clearly, in the many instances in which research subjects pointed directly to generation and claimed to have experienced its effects. I discuss the considerable variability in how generation is articulated and interpreted – that is, how *generation-as-discourse* is engaged – arguing that the multiplicity of social scientific approaches to generation is mirrored in a multiplicity of everyday understandings of it. However, I also show that at the core of *generation-as-discourse* is an acknowledgement of what Margaret Archer calls “contexts” and “concerns” – two of the key elements in her model of human action. The extent to which each of these two elements gets emphasized in people’s discursive use of generation affects how they perceive and respond to putatively “intergenerational” differences.

In chapter four, I introduce the three dominant relationships people have with their work, and to the idea and act of working in general, which I conceptualize as three distinct *generational discourses* about work. Drawing heavily on the working life stories of research subjects, this chapter builds the argument that the generational clashes in people’s narratives are actually clashing ideas about the right relationship for a person to have with his or her work. Specifically, it is in making sense of the friction between these three relationships to work in post-industrial, advanced capitalist economies – ambivalence, faith and disaffection – that people seem to rely on the discourse of generation. In other words, tensions that are identified as generational are, in these cases, the meeting-up of two or three different approaches to work, which are rooted and enacted in three corresponding *generational discourses*.

Chapter Five returns to the concept of *generation-as-discourse*, linking the rendering of generation in people's stories to other sources of information about contexts and concerns – other sources such as statistics about the Canadian labour market and economy, and dominant discourses and ideologies around working, earning, and the distribution of resources in Canadian society. The point of this exercise is to highlight what parts of the social, political, economic and cultural 'relations and activities' in people's lives get emphasized when they deploy *generation-as-discourse*, and which parts get left (or shoved) in the background.

Chapter Six brings *generational discourses* into contact with the contextual factors introduced in Chapter Five, explaining why these three discourses and relationships to work exist, and why they can be considered generational. Specifically, it points to the political-economic underpinnings of ambivalence, faith and disaffection, connecting their constellation to the intersections of history and biography (contexts and concerns) that appear to bring them to fruition.

In the conclusion, I bring all of the strands taken up in the four substantive chapters outlined here to restate and defend the assumptions and claims set out a few pages ago, and developed over the next few hundred pages. I raise the possibility that *generational discourses* are a useful lens through which to study social change, as well as the nascent possibility that they are a mechanism through which social change actually transpires. I also reflect on the policy implications of my argument and concepts.

At this point, then, it should be clear that this dissertation is not "about" intergenerational tensions at work, or generational differences in work ethic, per se, because it does not accept them as real – yet. Rather, it explores the *idea* of generations, intergenerational tensions, and generational differences, through people's perceptions of each, alongside and within their historically-situated working life stories, their beliefs and values about work, and the question of

what they think they are up to in their own lives. The point of this work is not to enlighten older and younger workers about one another so they can be cordial at the water cooler or complete their collaborative tasks more efficiently. Rather, the point is to bring empirical, qualitative evidence to bear on a question that has survived for far too long on anecdote alone. And, again guided by C. Wright Mills' vision for a sociologically imaginative discipline, I want to show how the fifty-two people whose stories filled my head for over a year, and now fill the pages of this dissertation, "[have] contributed, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as [they are] made by society and by its historical push and shove."¹⁹

¹⁹ Mills, 2000/1959:6.

WHAT IS A GENERATION?

Finding a scholarly definition of 'generation' has proven to be a bit like trying to hold onto a handful of sand: the harder one tries to squeeze all of the tiny particulates together, the more they rebel, slipping through one's fingers, refusing to be solidified.²⁰ Philosophers and social theorists who construct coherent theories of what a generation *is*, in the abstract, tend to advance ideas that are too amorphous to subject easily to empirical scrutiny. Sociologists who try to study generation with precision, either as a central puzzle in their research or as just one aspect of their problem under investigation, run into problems of their own. With no real orthodoxy on how to define and operationalize generation, researchers tend to manage its evasiveness in one of two ways: either they *accept* generation axiomatically as another word for 'cohort'; or they acknowledge its innate ambiguity and supply, with apology, a more precise 'working' definition.

Like so many imprecise and scientifically frustrating terms in our "everyday lexicon"—Raymond Williams' famous tango with "culture" comes to mind—generation permeates popular thinking.²¹ It appears with regularity in references to the 'baby boomers,' 'generation X' or the 'generation gap'; it finds a place in the articulation of age-related tensions within families, communities and the workplace; it surfaces in pop-culture celebrations of 'my generation.' Based on its indefiniteness, it would be easy to write generation off as a myth—something ordinary people accept as fact which falls apart under the social scientific microscope—but it would not tell

²⁰ See Kertzer, David I. 1983. "Generation as a Sociological Problem." *Annual Review of Sociology* 9:125-149 for a helpful review of generation's "multiple meanings" in sociology.

²¹ McDaniel, Susan A. 2004. "Generationing gender: Justice and the division of welfare." *Journal of Aging Studies* 18:27-44; see Williams, Raymond. 1985. *Keywords - A vocabulary of culture and society*, revised ed., New York, Oxford University Press.

us very much.²² Based on its persistence as an idea in cultures around the world, and its continued influence and place in social scientific research, it is clear that whatever generation *is* in form and content, it is a feature of contemporary society and a component of our histories.

Still, as a sociologist looking to bring sociological concepts and questions to bear on a concept that has been taken up rather uncritically outside sociology, I am presented with a problem: I am about to begin a study of something I do not know how to find. My task in this chapter is to ask and critically assess how others have found generation, given its ambiguity. The review uncovers a rather singular tendency among those who have studied or theorized generation before: they conceive of generations as categories of people and, subsequently, they are impelled to try to draw definitive boundaries between them *before* heading into the field. Here, I propose that in taking *a priori* boundaries between generations-as-people into their empirical research, social scientists predetermine many of their findings in ways that warrant further reflection. Moreover, I argue that in treating generations as groups of people, sociologists leave much of generation's unique potential as a sociological concept undeveloped. Moving away from the generation-as-group perspective, I find one useful alternative, which I apply to the study of intergenerational differences at work: studying generation as/in *discourse*.

THEORIES AND SCIENCES OF GENERATION

In their 2002 book, *Generations, Culture and Society*, June Edmunds and Bryan Turner wrote that in social science, "the study of generations has not played a large part".²³ They did not mean that the

²² Sennett and Cobb warned against a similar temptation in their research on class in America, asking: "What insight do we gain into their actions by calling the search for freedom and dignity a myth, what do we learn about the culture, and why it is so structured that the more it gives them the more it makes them feel vulnerable?" P. 30 in Sennett, Richard and Jonathan Cobb. 1972. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

concept was completely *absent*, but that it was particularly “neglected [...] as an analytical principle” in sociology. Whereas generation certainly featured in the field as “an aspect of social stratification, as a component of any general account of the ageing of populations, or as a feature of theories of social change”, its full potential lay beyond these uses, they wrote, and had largely been unrealized.²⁴ Since Edmunds and Turner made this point, it appears that not much has changed.²⁵ Generation continues to play a key role in studies of the family, mainly as a way of framing the relationships between parents, children and grandchildren.²⁶ It is similarly employed in studies of non-familial relationships, as a way of encapsulating in a single word what it means for people to connect with one another across a gap in age, as a means of delineating older and young research participants from one another, or pinpointing socio-historical shifts in the biographies of individuals.²⁷ Then there are the growing number of studies of second-generation immigrants, whose numbers are burgeoning and presenting a challenge to the already-doubtful homogeneity of ethnic categories.²⁸

²³ Edmunds, June and Bryan S. Turner. 2002. *Generations, Culture & Society*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, p. 2

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ There are, of course, a few notable exceptions, including the earlier noted work of Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins; also Ben-Ze'ev, Efrat and Edna Lomsky-Feder. 2009. "The Canonical Generation: Trapped between Personal and National Memories." *Sociology* 43(6):1047-1065.

²⁶ Calvin and Frances Goldscheider's work is a good example of generation used in this way: Goldscheider C, Bernhardt E, and Goldscheider F. 2008. "What integrates the second generation? Factors affecting family transitions to adulthood in Sweden" in Corrado Bonifazi, Marek Okólski, Jeanette Schoorl and Patrick Simon (eds.) *International Migration in Europe: New Trends and New Methods of Analysis*. Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press.

²⁷ Examples include: McLeod, Julie and Katie Wright. 2009. "The Talking Cure in Everyday Life: Gender, Generations and Friendship." *Sociology* 43(1):122-139; Charles, Nickie and Chris Harris. 2007. "Continuity and change in worklife balance choices." *British Journal of Sociology* 58(2):277-295; Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2005.

²⁸ Foner, Nancy. 2010. "The Second Generation Comes of Age in Contemporary New York." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33(2):343-347.

Still, Edmunds and Turner's overall statement holds true: not much use is made of generation as an *analytical principle* on par with social class or gender, although, defined loosely as the individual's location at the intersection of biographical and historical time, generation probably structures our experiences and social locations just as much as those more established social divisions. But those who want to correct the underemployment of generation as an analytical principle in sociology face a slew of complicated questions, the immediate one being: just *what* is a generation? Beyond that, *how* does generation impose structure on our experiences and social locations? *How* does it provide meaning in our accounts of those experiences? *Where* – that is, on what ontological level - can it be found in real life? *Why* is it a part of the social world in the first place? Interestingly, extant 'answers' to these questions make one common assumption: that the search for generations in real life is a search for groups or categories of people, whose boundaries are determined in advance, leaving mainly their content and qualities up for empirical exploration. Several of the most common approaches are outlined below, beginning with what I have termed 'the conscious generation.'

The Conscious Generation

Bryan Turner and June Edmunds' 2002 definition of generation is one of the most prominent apart from the axiomatic usages of generation—as an aspect of social stratification, for example—identified above. For them, generations are defined in relation to major events. They are set apart from *cohorts* (groups who share a birth year or range of years) in that they require some "major event which leads to collective consciousness" among people who experienced it during roughly the same life stage, "which in turn leads to a 'cultural legacy'".²⁹ This definition leads the authors to make fairly strong statements about what counts as a generation: Generation X, for example, is "the missing generation", because it did not "do" anything comparable to its predecessors. By the same

²⁹ Edmunds & Turner, 2002:ix

logic, history itself is "the history of the consciousness of strategic, active generations."³⁰ Generations thus must embrace and be conscious of their "collective identity" in order to qualify as generations and not simply birth cohorts.³¹

Generation as Aspect of Social Stratification

Oddly, Bryan Turner's earlier work offers a definition of generation that is different from the 'conscious generation' in important ways. In a 1998 debate with UK sociologist Sarah Irwin, Turner defined generation as "a cohort of persons passing through time who come to share a common habitus and lifestyle."³² In addition to the event-centered definitions advanced by other theorists, including his own later work with Edmunds, Turner added "the notion that 'generation' also refers to a cohort which has a strategic *temporal location* to a set of *resources* as a consequence of *historical accident* and the exclusionary practices of *social closure*."³³ In this formulation, generations are fully realized insofar as they are social strata; their borders are particularly seen in instances of conflict over or unequal access to the same resources.

In her reply to Turner in the *British Journal of Sociology*, Irwin took issue with the resource-based definition of generation, and specifically the idea that temporal location and social closure worked to cohere generations as "communities of interest."³⁴ The argument that intergenerational conflict in particular arises because of competing interests was flawed, for Irwin, because different generations alive at the same time are inevitably going to occupy different life stages, which bring

³⁰ *Ibid.*, x

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3

³² Turner, Bryan S. 1998. "Ageing and Generational Conflicts: A Reply to Sarah Irwin". *British Journal of Sociology* 49(2), p. 302

³³ *Ibid.* (emphasis added)

³⁴ Irwin, Sarah. 1998. "Age, Generation and Inequality: A Reply to the Reply." *The British Journal of Sociology* 49(2), p. 306

with them markedly different interests. In other words, we are not likely to see a generation of seniors in conflict with a generation of young or middle-aged adults over *interests*, because each of them is not competing for the same, current resources as the others. Irwin's main objection was that Turner failed to adequately distinguish generational difference as an aspect of the lifetime experience of different generations, and generational difference as an aspect of current (age based) inequalities".³⁵ I think she was right.³⁶

Irwin proposed that she and Turner were on the same quest—to place “age and generation within a more adequate theory of inequality and stratification”—but her own work, while highlighting critical flaws in Turner's, left generation largely in the realm of kinship.³⁷ Granted, Irwin's intended object of study *was* the family, inclusive of ties between older and younger therein, and in answering Turner, she nonetheless offered an important view on generations outside families. Specifically, she proposed that generation functions as an aspect of social stratification, but that it does so alongside and cross-cut by social class, and in terms of “lifetime” life chances and access to resources over the life course.³⁸

Generations as Mechanism of Social Change

Long before Turner and Irwin's exchange in the *British Journal of Sociology*, social philosophers and social scientists were cognizant of (and perplexed by) the centrality of generations to individual

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 307

³⁶ Susan McDaniel's work on generations and gender takes a similar stance, as she tried to conceptualize generation as a process that is gendered, which touches on interests and access to resources but is not inherently tied to conflict. McDaniel, Susan A. 2001. "Born at the Right Time? Gendered Generations and Webs of Entitlement and Responsibility." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 26(2):193-214.

³⁷ Irwin, 1998:305.

³⁸ Irwin agreed that the issue of resources and intergenerational conflict is *not* a “family matter”.

experience, social change and historical processes.³⁹ Most contemporary overviews trace the concept to Karl Mannheim's 1928 work, "The Problem of Generations", in which generation was offered as a way of encapsulating the unique experiences and corresponding perspectives or worldviews of people born at different times. Addressing the very tension Turner, Edmunds and Irwin would find themselves negotiating over seventy years later, Mannheim argued that "the sociological phenomenon of generations is ultimately based on the biological rhythm of birth and death. But to be *based* on a factor does not necessarily mean to be *deducible* from it, or to be implied in it. [...] Without history and social structure, generations would cease to exist, and this history and social structure must be taken into account in any definition of or analysis of generation."⁴⁰ In other words, Mannheim argued for a conceptualization of generation as the meeting of socio-historical context and age, which supplied generations, inherently, with "certain definite modes of behavior, feeling, and thought" and restrictions on "the range of self-expression open to the individual."⁴¹

Like many of his contemporaries, Mannheim was evidently drawn to generation as a "problem" because of the tumultuous historical period he was living through. In Mannheim's 1920s Germany, young people were joined, seemingly for the first time, in youth movements (some nefarious) that spanned beyond local communities. By the time the essay was published in English in 1952, it would have taken on new significance as "youth culture" seemed to cohere then-young adults into a conscious community that enjoyed the same kinds of music, bought into the same popular culture, and dressed in the same styles, all of which were markedly different from the music, cultural artifacts and sartorial choices of older adults, namely their parents. The very *ideas* of youth, adolescence and teenagers took on a new cultural significance in the post-war period, as

³⁹ McDaniel, 2001:196.

⁴⁰ Mannheim, Karl. 1928/1970. 'The Problem of Generations'. *Psychoanalytic Review* 57(3), p. 381

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

social scientific methods increasingly joined with state apparatuses to deal with populations on an age-graded basis.⁴² All of this attention to age, and the related fixation on youth as a paradoxical source of hope *and* anxiety, meant that the relationship and differences between older and younger people were brought to the fore in social science and public discourse.⁴³ Combined with the modern era perception that social change was taking place at an alarming pace—based on the rise of new technologies and unparalleled affluence in North America—much of the social scientific literature on generations from this time period focused on youth and the role upcoming generations played in social change.

Mannheim's work, for example, revolved around the idea that each successive generation inherits the world from the previous one, and that in order to understand social change, one has to wrap one's head around each generation's unique perspective—the "adversaries" each of them fight, and the concepts and categories of thought guiding their actions. He emphasized that while individuals and groups can change their perspectives, values, beliefs and attitudes over time, the introduction of actual *new* people, in the form of new generations coming into adulthood, presented the possibility of radical social change. Generations did not need to be conscious of themselves *as* generations—in contrast to Turner and Edmunds' later definition—but are rather expressed as a sort of accidental harmony, different notes struck at the same time, producing a distinctive "chord" and summing up the "spirit" of people close in age in a particular time and place.⁴⁴ Thus, to the conceptualizations of generation discussed thus far – the conscious generation, the interest group, and the aspect of stratification, Mannheim added the insight that generations come to possess a

⁴² Comacchio, Cynthia. 2006. *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of a Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ McLeod, J., & Thomson, R. (2009). *Researching Social Change: Qualitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 109, 123.

certain mentality, knowledge of which is essential if the social scientist is interested in understanding social action.⁴⁵

For others writing around the same time, and for the post-war, social-change-related reasons outlined above, the process of inheritance and change was most importantly a potential and actual source of conflict between older and younger people. Kingsley Davis, whose work is widely credited in discussions of “the generation gap”, proposed that superiority comes with age, and as younger generations come into adulthood a battle erupts between them and the generation before them over the power to control the world. The tension, for Davis, is exacerbated by the fact that young people are *physically* “equal” or even “superior” to older adults long before they possess the socio-political superiority to dictate the terms of social life.⁴⁶

Mannheim’s work proved to be highly influential, and the definition of generation it advanced continues to find purchase with contemporary social scientists. Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, for example, take their definition of generation from Mannheim’s writing, accepting that it is “a cohort of individuals born and raised within the same historical and social context, who consequently share a common worldview”.⁴⁷ Working with this definition, and its proposition that “generational boundaries” correspond to “significant historical events and periods of rapid social change,” the authors categorized their survey respondents according to birth year, so that each fell into one of two categories: the Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1964) and Generation Xers

⁴⁵ I mean “mentality” in the basic, dictionary-definition sense: “a habitual or characteristic mental attitude that determines how you will interpret and respond to situations” – except I would disclaim that “mental attitudes” are not just psychological or biological, but social as well.

⁴⁶ Davis, Kingsley. 1948. *Human Society*. New York, NY: MacMillan; see also Davis, Kingsley. 1940. “The Sociology of Parent-Youth Conflict.” *American Sociological Review* 5(4).

⁴⁷ Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2005:769.

(1965 and 1979). This categorization is the dominant one in studies of generations at work in psychology, management and public policy.⁴⁸

Generation as Historical Method

Between the early work of Kingsley Davis and Karl Mannheim and the more recent work by Edmunds, Turner and Irwin, another “take” on generation quietly found its way into the scholarly literature. In 1970, Spanish philosopher Julian Marias, resurrecting the work of José Ortega y Gasset, offered generation as a “historical method.” Tracing the uptake of the term by philosophers from the early 19th century—such as John Stuart Mill and August Comte—to its use by Marias’ contemporaries in demography, he showed how generation was “very old” as a philosophical idea, but very new as a “scientific theme”. Very odd, he noted, was the lack of crossover between the demographic and philosophical investigations of generation, as was “the rather small number of thinkers to study it seriously and profoundly.”⁴⁹ For Marias and his master Ortega, generation warranted consideration as a fundamental principle in any theory of society. Quoting Ortega, Marias proposed that

“The variations of vital sensitivity that are decisive in history appear in the form of generations. A generation is not a handful of outstanding men, *nor simply a mass of men*; it resembles a new integration of the social body, with its select minority and its gross multitude, launched upon the orbit of existence with a pre-established vital

⁴⁸ See, for example: Gentry, William A.; Griggs, Tracy L.; Deal, Jennifer J.; Mondore, Scott P.; Cox, Brennan D. 2011. “A comparison of generational differences in endorsement of leadership practices with actual leadership skill level.” *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* 63(1):39-49; Jurkiewicz, C. L. 2000. ‘Generation X and the public employee.’ *Public Personnel Management* 29:55–73; Smola, K. W., & Sutton, C. D. 2002. ‘Generational differences: Revisiting generational work values for the new millennium.’ *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 23:363–382.

⁴⁹ Marias, Julian. 1970. *The Generation as Historical Method*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, p. 18.

trajectory. The generation is a dynamic compromise between mass and individual, and is the most important conception in history. It is, so to speak, the pivot responsible for the movements of historical evolution.⁵⁰

Whereas the foregoing four approaches to generation – the conscious generation, the social stratum and the group with a shared mentality – encourage a view of generation primarily as a group of people, Marias, and Ortega y Gasset before him, proposed that the “characteristics” and “existence” of a generation *are not to be sought empirically in people as individuals*, but somewhere else, at some other level, and relating specifically to the historical process of social change. To explore generation on the basis of individual traits, or to try to slot actual people into a generational group on the basis of matching characteristics is, for these philosophers, “a basic confusion concerning the type of reality to be found in a generation”.⁵¹ However, their work leaves few clues about how to actually study generation from a sociological perspective.

It is therefore not surprising, especially given the obdurate walls between disciplines, that Marias’ work—or Ortega’s, for that matter—does not feature very prominently in the social scientific literature on generations. But Marias’ work is noteworthy, and I have drawn on it here because it articulates very salient points to consider about generation as a tool or principle for social scientific investigation, and I will return to it in the conclusion of this dissertation.⁵²

⁵⁰ Marias, 1970:94 (from Ortega’s *Obras completas III* p. 147); emphasis added

⁵¹ Marias, 1970:123.

⁵² Apart from the works discussed here, generation has not been altogether ignored, although as Edmunds and Turner noted, it has not been given much attention as an analytical principle. Part of this *might* be due to the pre-eminence of the life course paradigm. Traceable to sociologists W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki’s “pioneering” longitudinal study of the lives of Polish peasants in Europe in 1918-1920, life course theory gained considerable steam in the 1970s, and has been sustained as the “pre-eminent theory in the study of lives” up to the present. Overall, generation does not occupy a particularly pivotal role in the life course paradigm, but it surfaces repeatedly as a referent, especially in discussions of “lives and times” and “linked lives” (both of which are key principles in life course theory). It is possible that scholars looking for concepts to articulate these qualities of human and social life find them in life course theory rather than developing the

The Problem with Seeing Generation as a Pre-defined Group of People

All of the approaches outlined up to this point, with the exception of Marias and to varying degrees, share one basic stance: that "generation" is going to be found, empirically, as a category of people. From a sociological perspective, this is a common approach, but it is also problematic in several ways. First and foremost, it represents an attempt to *capture* and contain people in a way that can overstate their commonalities and underestimate their propensity to change, or to be anomalous. Granted, this is a 'flaw' of nearly every sociological categorization – gender, race, ethnicity, class; all of these concepts can *imply* homogeneity where there is variability, and durable borders where there is continual reformation. With generation, however, there is a more specific problem; namely, that it is erroneously taken (often, as demonstrated above, explicitly) as equivalent to something for which there is already a perfectly adequate word: cohort.⁵³ As a result, generation's unique potential is underexplored.

In her own work on generations and gender, and intergenerational transfers of wealth as part of the welfare state, sociologist Susan McDaniel is critical of this widespread tendency to conflate "generation" with "cohort", the latter meaning people born at the same time.⁵⁴ She directed this critique at social analysis in general, and took on Turner and Edmunds specifically. For McDaniel, generation means *more* than a group of people born at the same time:

To equate generation with birth cohort, while popularly engaging, is analytically imprecise, as well as misleading and socially divisive. [...] Birth date or cohort is, in

concept of generation. See Elder, Glen H., Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson and Robert Crosnoe. 2003. "The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory." In *Handbook of the Life Course*, eds. Jeylan T. Mortimer and Michael J. Shanahan. New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

⁵³ Kertzer (1983:126) has also noted the ubiquity of this usage in sociology and demography.

⁵⁴ See McDaniel, 2001; See also McDaniel, Susan A. 1997. "Intergenerational Transfers, Social Solidarity, and Social Policy: Unanswered Questions and Policy Challenges." *Canadian Public Policy/Canadian Journal on Aging (Joint issue)* 23(1):1-21.

fact, unchanging although its social interpretation and its relational meaning varies, as does distance from birth date in terms of relative youth or age. Generation, on the other hand, is a relative and highly change-susceptible construct, with profound period (cross sectional) variability. In these senses, generation is not only inequivalent to birth cohort, it is orthogonal to it. In this orthogonality may be hidden creative tensions useful to theorizing gendered generations.⁵⁵

Importantly, the treatment of generation as equivalent to cohort is one of the most common usages of generation in studies of generations at work.⁵⁶ (Conceptualizing generation as a structure within families, as is done in studies of social mobility across familial generations, is also prominent in literature on generations and work.⁵⁷) For example, when Nickie Charles and Chris Harris explored what they called "generational" shifts in work-life balance choices in 2007, they were actually referring to cohorts; the basis for the generational groupings in their study was birth year.⁵⁸ More recently, when Predelli and Cebulla explored shifts in the perception of labour market risk "across generations", they explicitly defined generations as "birth cohorts." The same equivalence occurs in

⁵⁵ McDaniel, 2001:197.

⁵⁶ Gentry *et. al.* 2011; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2005; Smola & Sutton, 2002. See also: Charles, Nickie and Chris Harris. 2007. "Continuity and change in worklife balance choices" *British Journal of Sociology* 58(2):277-295; Dale, Angela, E. Fieldhouse, Nusrat Shaheen and Virinder Kalra. 2002. "The Labour Market Prospects for Pakistani and Bangladeshi Women." *Work, Employment & Society* 16(1):5-25; Fouarge, Didier, Anna Manzoni, Ruud Muffels and Ruud Luijkx. 2010. "Childbirth and cohort effects on mothers' labour supply: a comparative study using life history data for Germany, the Netherlands and Great Britain." *Work, Employment & Society* 24(3):487-507; Predelli, Line Nyhagen and Andreas Cebulla. "Perceptions of labour market risks: Shifts and continuities across generations." *Current Sociology* 59(1):24-41; Roberts, Ian. 2006. "Taking age out of the workplace: putting older workers back in?" *Work Employment Society* 20(1):67-86.

⁵⁷ Guillaume, Jean-François. 2002. "Professional Trajectory and Family Patrimony." *Current Sociology* 50(2):203-211; Jones, Gill. 1987. "Young Workers in the Class Structure." *Work, Employment & Society* 1(4):487-508; Prandy, Kenneth and Wendy Bottero. 2000. "Social Reproduction and Mobility in Britain and Ireland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." *Sociology* 34(2):265-281; Punch, Samantha. 2001. "Household Division of Labour: Generation, Gender, Age, Birth Order and Sibling Composition." *Work, Employment & Society* 15(4):803-823; Strathdee, Rob. 2001. "Changes in Social Capital and School-to-Work Transitions." *Work, Employment & Society* 15(2):311-326.

⁵⁸ Charles & Harris, 2007.

the work of Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, and in Gentry *et. al.*'s recent study of "generational differences" in employees' feelings about the importance of certain leadership practices.⁵⁹ There are important exceptions, such as Daniels' work above, and Kathleen Gerson's *The Unfinished Revolution*, wherein "children of the gender revolution" are posited as constitutive of a generation because of their intersectional location in kinship and socio-historical structures.⁶⁰ But by and large, in study after study in the sociology of work, it is possible to substitute "cohort" for "generation" and have the written work mean nearly the same thing.⁶¹ In other words, "generation" is being used as a concept where "cohort" is more accurate, with the end result that generation's unique and broader analytical potential is underdeveloped.⁶²

With this broad critique out of the way, there are additional, more specific reasons why extant conceptualizations of generation as a group of people – particularly those introduced in this chapter – will not work for my present study. Sarah Irwin's approach, which again derives from her distinct focus on families, uses generation to refer to the location of individuals within kinship lines. People (research subjects) are classified into generations based on lines drawn between, for example, parents, aunts and uncles on the one hand, and their children, nieces and nephews on the other. Because my focus is not on families, I have no use for a concept of generation that does not *foreground* the connections across familial lines between, for example, the parents from one family and the parents from another family.

⁵⁹ Gentry *et. al.* 2011.

⁶⁰ Gerson, 2009

⁶¹ This is not to say that these authors do not attend to "generational" issues beyond birth year, such as shared worldviews and the impact of historical events, but that generation's ambiguity is eclipsed by cohort's precision, with little attention paid to the consequences of allowing this to happen.

⁶² Roberts, 2006.

Turner and Edmunds, on the other hand, conceptualize generation in non-familial terms, identifying distinct generations as (potential) “communities of interest”. While to some extent we agree that there is immense value in exploring generation as an analytical principle, and that generation relates in some way to material interests and resources, we understand generation in a fundamentally different way. Specifically, from time to time,⁶³ Edmunds and Turner imply that generations only have a notable impact on society when they coalesce into a *conscious* social movement with a *collective* goal, a view analogous to the well-known distinction between the class-in-itself and the class-for-itself.⁶⁴

There is one assumption attached to this approach which I find particularly problematic for my own work. Specifically, the authors imply that the effects and indeed the existence of generations are only verifiable when people consciously take up the mantle of “generation”. Susan McDaniel has pointed out that this places generation in the realm of identity, but there is an additional limitation: in order to support the “conscious generation” model, the assumption has to be made that social change happens in perceptible steps, if not leaps and bounds, propelled by willful agents who know what they are pushing against and toward. In such models of social change, political action is limited to macro-politics—the stuff of laws, regulations, state politics, economic peaks and valleys, and even formal political categories like race, class and gender. This is problematic because it undervalues the role of generation as an integral part of “societal continuity

⁶³ I have found Turner’s work to be somewhat inconsistent. Most likely, this has to do with the scholar’s intellectual position changing in the face of new information or old information reconsidered. Sometimes, I agree entirely with the definition of generation he appears to be using, while at other times it is markedly out of sync with mine.

⁶⁴ For instance, they distinguish between ‘passive’ and ‘active’ generations, with the implication that passive generations simply experience history, while active ones create it: “Generations shift from being a passive cohort (‘generation in itself’) into a politically active and self-conscious cohort (‘generation for itself’) when they are able to exploit resources (political/educational/economic) to innovate in cultural, intellectual or political spheres”. Turner, Bryan S. and June Edmunds. 2005. “Global generations: social change in the twentieth century.” *British Journal of Sociology* 56, p. 592.

and cohesion" *outside* the conscious self-identification of individuals.⁶⁵ Just as the idea of "class-for-itself" does not deny the existence or effects of the "class-in-itself", the idea of the conscious generation should not preclude us from exploring generation as something that permeates deep into the very structures of society, and which does not need a conscious social movement to take effect.

And there is good reason to propose that social change can happen *outside as well as inside* the formal-political and *consciously* collective actions of individuals and institutions. Support for this proposition can be found in the idea, developed elsewhere, that there is politics in everyday life; that the everyday *is* political.⁶⁶ In the quotidian realm of informal politics – the micropolitical realm - actions and choices have political content and consequences but are not necessarily hemmed in an official way to any formal political movement, structure or institution.⁶⁷ This realm, of consumption, work, caregiving, homemaking, making friends, and mobility, is analytically distinguishable, but not entirely distinct from or independent of the macropolitical realm. As a level of social change, the everyday encompasses people inventing new modes of inhabiting their social worlds, or using existing apparatuses of power in new ways. Together, people may not act as intentional collectivities, but the cumulative effect of their everyday, individual choices and

⁶⁵ McDaniel, 2001.

⁶⁶ See Ginsborg, Paul. 2004. *The Politics of Everyday Life: Making Choices, Changing Lives*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

⁶⁷ I borrow the term "micropolitics" from Deleuze & Guattari, although its use extends far beyond the work of these two philosophers; for example, it is taken up widely in studies of education to describe the informal politics shaping curricula. It is, for now, a convenient way of conveying the politics of everyday life, even though Deleuze and Guattari mean something more complex when they use it. Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 213

metaphorical “moves” in the game of life can be a complete shift, sometimes gradual, sometimes rapid, in the status quo.⁶⁸

This idea of everyday-life-as-political thus presents a challenge to Turner and Edmunds’ (and, to a lesser extent, Gerson’s) reliance on major formal political events and collective social movements as markers of generations; it even challenges Mannheim’s notion that generational ruptures will emerge only around major historical events and rapid social change. Turner concedes that his own inclination to see generations as event-centered is a product of his biography as a contemporary scholar who came of age in the 1960s. He was part of a “conscious generation”, which coalesced in the student and civil rights movements, and thought of itself as a generation joined in a collective stance on widely-acknowledged cultural concerns.⁶⁹ This reflexivity about how his subjectivity might lead him to look for generation in a particular, historical form did not, however, lead him to abandon the search. Instead, Turner and Edmunds recently argued that the events of September 11th, 2001 marked the creation of a new generation, thus downplaying the historicity of event-centered definitions of generations, and assuming that what “made” generations in the past is what makes them in the present.⁷⁰ This is a historicist assumption I find problematic.

But in challenging and shedding the notion that generations have to be self-aware, deliberate and collectively, consciously goal-driven in order to ‘count’ as active generations, I am left with the problem of how to study them empirically. Like McDaniel, I think the conceptual impreciseness, flexibility, amorphousness and porosity of generation are its virtues; and yet, I need to establish that it is possible and desirable to *be precise* when we use it – to really *mean*

⁶⁸ Gibson-Graham, J.K. 2006. *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

⁶⁹ Turner, 1998:302.

⁷⁰ Turner and Edmunds, 2005.

“generation” and all of the fuzziness that comes along with it, not to allow it to stand in for “cohort” for reasons unspecified.

Using ‘generation’ and meaning it

Other scholars struggling with the ‘problem’ of generations have been snagged by the challenge of how to draw conceptual borders around diverse groups of people who tend to evade capture by any totalizing term. By now it should be clear that this is *not* the challenge confronted here. The task in front of us is not one of drawing boundaries around and between groups of people, dividing them into their respective generations. If categorizing people were really the task, I would not be helped along much by the idea of the everyday-as-political, or by Marias’ (or Ortega y Gasset’s) imprecise philosophy of generations as “the pivot” around which social change happens.⁷¹

What I need, instead, is a way to understand generation as *part of the human, social experience* - that is, to acknowledge that it is *something* very real to people - without assuming or concluding that it is a quality possessed by individuals or a group to which people belong, once and for all. I need a way of permitting generation to be the complicated, qualitative phenomenon outlined by McDaniel and Gerson—something that can be drawn *from* data about the social world rather than imposed *on* it (accepting the slipperiness of such a distinction, from a constructivist perspective). As is demonstrated by the cultural and social scientific writing explored earlier, and by generation’s place in everyday talk, one form in which generation undeniably “exists” is as a discourse. Looking at generation as/in discourse, importantly, frees me from the temptation to divide people *a priori* into categories or impute those categories with distinctive qualities.

⁷¹ Marias, 1970:94.

Generation as discourse

To declare that something is a discourse is to wade into a decades-long debate over just what, exactly, a discourse is. I adopt the definition provided by Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, who arrived at the following statement via a comparison of discourse against “ideology”, a term often confused with discourse:

Discourse [...] focuses attention on the terms of engagement within social relations by insisting that all social relations are lived and comprehended by their participants in terms of specific linguistic or semiotic vehicles that organize their thinking, understanding and experiencing. The concept of ‘discourse’ remains self-consciously neutral or skeptical about whether discourse as a form of existence is connected with elements, such as are invoked by notions of interest, that are external to the discursive content of lived experience.⁷²

Ideologies, on the other hand, are *effects* of discourses, which are connected to specific interests, domination and subordination.⁷³ The concept of ideology is most commonly associated with the Marxist tradition, and draws attention to the “link between ‘interests’ and ‘forms of consciousness’”, implying on some level that people’s interests have a material quality that is separate from how and whether they are conscious of them.⁷⁴ In this way, ideology is a crucial part of the Marxist project of understanding “how relations of domination or subordination are reproduced with only minimal

⁷² Purvis, Trevor and Alan Hunt. 1993. “Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology... .” *The British Journal of Sociology* 44(3), p. 476.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 474; this definition allows for the possibility of generation-as-ideology. That is not primarily what I am interested in here, but it will be explored in subsequent chapters.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 476

resort to direct coercion.”⁷⁵ The relationship between ideology and discourse, particularly around generation, will be shelved now and returned to in chapters.

Focusing for now on discourse, Purvis and Hunt convincingly show that over all of its many conceptualizations, discourse is conceived of as being primarily or most noticeably speech or text, but it can be nonverbal as well; it is “a vehicle for thought” which “allows certain things to be said and impedes or prevents other things from being said”, although it “channels” more than it “controls”.⁷⁶ Discourse theorists from Michel Foucault to Stuart Hall have explained that discourse supplies and spreads “unconscious mental habits” – ways of thinking which come to feel natural, to the point that they hardly qualify as thoughts anymore; in other words, discourse, when popular enough, becomes common sense.⁷⁷ Discourse theory, importantly, encourages social inquiry to “shake off the organization of the world into two great realms of the mental and the material” and to understand that the latter binary is not only impossible, it is not terribly useful to understanding how the world works.⁷⁸

The concept of discourse is helpful for studying generation on multiple levels. Here, as outlined in the introductory chapter, I want to study generation discursively in two ways: first as a discourse, and second as a phenomenon that might shape other discourses about other things, such that there might be “generational discourses”. The distinction between the two can be summarized as follows:

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 474

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 485.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 494

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 484.

Generation-as-Discourse

To treat generation *as a* discourse (*generation-as-discourse*) is to conceptualize “generation” as a vehicle for thought and action; it is to posit that “generation” (as a concept networked to a lexicon of other specific concepts) *is* a mental structure that provides people with, and limits them to, specific way(s) of understanding, speaking about, and acting in the world around them. For example, attributing a disagreement between a parent and a child to “the generation gap” is a usage of generation-as-discourse.

Generational Discourses

To treat generation as a phenomenon that *shapes other* discourses (thereby creating generational discourses), on the other hand, is to imagine generation as distinguishing marker of discourse; it is to say that certain discourses align with certain intersections of objective structural and cultural (social and historical) *contexts* on the one hand and subjective biographical *concerns* on the other.⁷⁹ That is, certain discourses are “generational” because they appeal to, are more convincing to, or do a better job representing and making sense of the experiences one generation (i.e., people whose biography intersects with history at roughly the same axis) than another. By way of example, the “global citizen” as a discourse could be considered a *generational discourse* insofar as it is more likely to represent the experiences and worldviews of people whose childhoods and early adulthoods transpired after the advent and spread of the Internet than those for whom local

⁷⁹ Archer, 2009; see also the introduction to this dissertation and Chapter Two’s discussion of Archer’s framework and concepts.

and immediate surroundings provided the bulk of their cultural references, experiences and direct influences.

Generation, deployed as either of these forms of discourse, could do various things in the social world, in communication and in people's unspoken understandings: it might stand in as a way of describing differences between people, or as a one-word summary of the complex idea that people who are the same age at different historical junctures (and thus different ages at the same historical juncture) are different from one another in salient ways. It could still *refer* to kinship relations between parents and offspring, but it would not necessarily be reducible to them. It could also *refer* to cohorts, but as a discourse it could carry with it the message that cohort only really matters insofar as date-of-birth determines the range of socio-historical contexts a person's biography can unfold in. As a discourse, generation also might convey Ortega y Gasset's "pivot", or Mannheim's "chord". If discourses can *be* "generational", they might furnish people with different attitudes toward social phenomena, different values; in Mannheim's language, they might point audiences and speakers toward different "adversaries".

The point is that treating generation as a discursive matter acknowledges that generation affects the world and shapes our understandings, but it allows room for variability and, most importantly, it does not seek to draw even provisional boundaries around groups of people based on age or self-identification. In other words, I can study generations and work without having to adhere, in advance, to the commonly assumed and accepted boundaries between Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials. Instead, I can propose that generation exists, that it can matter to people and it can be part of how they understand the world, but it might not categorize and characterize the way we think it does. As a result, generational differences might emerge along boundaries we do not yet recognize as generational. Additionally, studying generation as a discursive form provides the conditions of possibility for studying generation as/in ideology. These

propositions are easy to make in the abstract, but they lead the researcher to the question of precisely how to go about actually studying generation as a discourse: via what data, around which questions or puzzles, and to what ends? These questions, their connection to the topic of generations at work, and the other key concepts and themes which will be used throughout the rest of the study, are dealt with in the next chapter.

QUESTIONS, CONCEPTS, DATA AND METHODS

The main principle guiding this project's methodological approach is a commitment to allowing the research questions, themes and concepts to emerge from the data, or at the very least a commitment to retaining the ability to change or adjust these components in the light of emergent findings. I began with a small literature review (detailed in the previous chapter), which spurred a basic, guiding question, which in turn triggered some conceptual work, before data collection began. The more specific empirical questions and themes emerged over the course of data collection. In this chapter, I will describe each of these components: the initial question, the concepts, the emergent questions and themes, the data and its collection, and my rationale for the methodological, epistemological and theoretical decisions I made along the way. The organization of this chapter reflects the iterative and emergent structure of the investigation – for example, rather than presenting the literature review as a discrete, single instance, I discuss connections to extant literatures in the order in which they arose during the study; the stages of my research questions, as they were refined and changed before, during and after fieldwork, are also discussed in an order that approximates their actual emergence. I also reflect here on my personal journey as a doctoral student and sociological researcher.

EXPLORING GENERATIONS AND WORK

The basic question driving this dissertation from the outset was this: are there such things as generational differences, and do they matter, when it comes to work? And what does the answer tell us about the structure of our society, our moment in history and ourselves? This query raised methodological and epistemological questions whose answers determined my choice of methods

and data: How would I find out whether generational differences exist? What would count as evidence? What sorts of events and phenomena matter? How would I ensure generalizability? And first, what do I mean by “work”, and where does my approach sit alongside other sociologists’ approaches? Although it is ubiquitous in everyday conversation, writing, and research, work is not as straightforward as it might seem; sociologists of work have markedly different ways of defining it and reasons for studying it.

Studying Work

My engagement with the Sociology of Work has a foothold in a conversation Tony J. Watson recently started about the future of the field. Unlike most other writers squinting at the horizon of the discipline, Watson did not see anything ‘new’ on the verge of *totally* eclipsing past and current problems in the sociology of work. Rather, he wrote in the journal *Sociology* that sociologists of work had to resist dramatic prognostications and introductions of “‘new’ theoretical ‘directions’ or ‘turns’” long enough to notice the important, dominant *continuities* in the world around us, and the utility of existing approaches to studying it.⁸⁰ His goal in writing this was not to offer a new direction or goal for the field, but to “reinvigorate” it, by refreshing its memory of one of the “(still) most mentioned – but not always heeded” sociologists of the 20th Century: C. Wright Mills.⁸¹ This affinity with C. Wright Mills is what drew me to Watson’s work, but it is his vision for the sociology of work that really resonates. For Watson, the point of studying work using sociology is the same now as it ever was: to “develop a sociology of work which is mature and vigorous and which might be meaningful to people other than those who read the academic journals.” This is more or less Mills’ stripped-down vision for sociology in general:

⁸⁰ Watson, Tony J. 2009a. “Work and the Sociological Imagination: The Need for Continuity and Change in the Study of Continuity and Change.” *Sociology* 43(5):861-877.

⁸¹ Watson, 2009a:862.

Mills was anxious to make sociology relevant and appealing to both scholars and the wider public. But this was to be achieved by critical engagement with issues which people would recognize to be relevant to their own lives and not by self-regarding demonstrations of the cleverness, inventiveness or prophetic insight of academic writers.⁸²

This objective – being critical, engaged and relevant to people’s lives – served as a guide and, following Mills, a constant “anxiety” about the *point* of my research.

Defining Work

Beyond inspiring me to constantly ask whether my research would “be meaningful to people”, Watson’s work also provided me with the most satisfactory definition of work I could find. In the lead-up to the project, while I was still getting my footing in the deep sociological literatures on generations, work and narrative, it was not long before “work” began to lose its sturdiness as a concept. Like generations, it means something to people who hear and say it, but the division between work and not-work, and thus the definition of work itself, dissolves under pressure.⁸³ It was not *that* long ago that feminists pointed out that domestic chores and caregiving constitute *work*, even though they are unpaid and often unrecognized as such.

Arlie Hoschild’s 1989 book, *The Second Shift*, reminded us that women who work outside the home do not cease working when they cross the threshold at the end of the day; what they do at home, caring for family members, cooking, cleaning, organizing and planning, is still work. Conversely, Hoschild’s later work, *The Time Bind*, showed that paid employment outside the home

⁸² Watson, 2009a:862.

⁸³ Many sociologists before me have pointed this out: see Glucksmann, Miriam A. 1995. “Why ‘Work’? Gender and the ‘Total Social Organization of Labour’.” *Gender, Work & Organization* 2(2):63-75; Pahl, Ray. 1984. *Divisions of labour*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

comes to be framed as being for-the-family (and the office comes to feel more like home) even as it cuts increasingly into the time parents have with their children and partners.⁸⁴ There are other cases where the boundary between work and not-work has been challenged, for example by Miriam Glucksmann, who argued that consumptive activity is work too.⁸⁵ Indeed, distinctions between forms of work, from paid employment to domestic work, from childrearing to volunteering and civic participation, are visible and important to the narratives that appear in the following chapters. The shape, variability and salience of these distinctions will be discussed throughout.

Nevertheless, I agree with Watson, who proposed that while reflexivity about the definition of work is crucial, sociologists of work must step back from the edge and assert some boundaries. This assertion, it turned out, grew out of Watson's affinity with the Pragmatic tradition, which is concerned with helping human actors realize their life projects with better knowledge of the world around them. I have always aligned my sociological bent with Pragmatists such as Richard Rorty and James Dewey, and as such, my admiration for Watson's work makes sense. We both agree with pragmatists that our project as sociologists is not to ascertain the "correct 'representation of reality in cognition'", but to gain and present the knowledge that brings about "an increase of the power to act in relation to an environment' (Joas, 1993: 21)".⁸⁶ When it comes to defining work, this Pragmatic goal leads us toward a definition that reflects the macro-level processes and patterns which the average person going about his or her daily business cannot see in their totality. It is with this objective in mind that I use Tony Watson's definition and rationale, conceptualizing work as

⁸⁴ Hoschild, Arlie R. 1997. *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. New York, NY: Henry Holt Publishing.

⁸⁵ Glucksmann, Miriam. 2006. 'Shifting Boundaries and Interconnections: Extending the "Total Social Organisation of Labour"', in L. Pettinger, J. Parry, R. Taylor and M. Glucksmann (eds) *A New Sociology of Work?* Oxford, UK: Blackwell/Sociological Review.

⁸⁶ Watson, 2009a:864.

the carrying out of tasks which enable people to make a living within the social and economic context in which they are located. This concept of work avoids the danger of defining work so broadly that any human task performance can be included (from combing one's hair in the morning to pulling the cork from a bottle of wine). 'Work' for the purposes of sociological study (and to avoid the sociology of work harbouring wildly imperialistic ambitions!) is better limiting itself to activities with an economic element, in the very broad sense of dealing with problems of survival in a world of scarce resources. Importantly, this way of conceptualizing work clearly embraces such activities as domestic and voluntary work.⁸⁷

In the chapters that follow, interviewees' narratives revolve around work defined in this way, so that stories of working for free—or for non-monetary remuneration in the form of chocolate milk or the choice of one of the family's steers, for example—are considered in the same realm as stories about starting a café business, working a cash register, representing clients in the court of law, raising twin girls or painting a canvas to sell, although the role of remuneration and the influence of normative understandings of what 'counts' as work and what does not will be foregrounded from time to time. Under the helpfully vague umbrella of "making a living", there is continuity between all of these activities which, at the same time, *cannot* be extended to the quotidian exercises Watson makes light of, namely hair-brushing and cork-pulling.

This basis for separating work (in multiple forms) from not-work is what makes possible the questions I will ask about how making a living relates to living a life, and how this relationship is shared (or not) among people of different ages, and how generation might affect the way people manage the relationship between work and life. Importantly, participants did not need to be hemmed to this particular definition of work. Those who volunteered included their volunteer

⁸⁷ Watson, 2009a:869, emphasis added.

work in their considerations. Those who took care of children or parents swept those activities into their narratives around work, too – but none of their stories included hair-brushing.

STARTING OUT: EVIDENCE AND DATA

Thus I began with an empirical puzzle around generations (as discursive phenomena) and work (as “making a living”), but I was left with the epistemological and methodological puzzle of how to study these things.

Qualitative methods and narrative analysis

Choosing a qualitative approach was straightforward, based on my desire for an emergent analysis, and a political and rational preference for qualitative methods over quantitative, survey-based research.⁸⁸ My admiration for the work of narrative researchers such as Arthur Frank, Andrea Doucet, Margaret Somers and, again, Tony Watson,⁸⁹ led me to narrative inquiry; its inherent and demonstrated suitability to emergent analyses⁹⁰ – given its emphasis on rich, detailed, participant-centered data – underscored its potential for my study. More specific to the question of generational discourse and work, people’s personal narratives are vehicles for wider discourses, and they are also well-established as a unit of analysis in studies of people’s working lives.⁹¹ In fact,

⁸⁸ See Morrow, Raymond. 1994. *Critical theory and methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

⁸⁹ Watson, Tony J. 2009b. "Sociology, Narrative and Discourse." In *The Handbook of Business Discourse*, ed. Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

⁹⁰ See p. 60 in Reissman, Catherine. 1993. *Narrative Analysis*. London: Sage.

⁹¹ Combining narrative and discourse, see e.g. Wagner, Ina and Ruth Wodak. 2006. "Performing success: Identifying strategies of self-presentation in women’s biographical narratives." *Discourse & Society* 17(3):385-411. The prominent sociology of work journal, *Work Employment and Society* recently began a project inviting submissions of first-person work narratives – see Taylor, Phil, Chris Warhurst, Paul Thompson and Dora Scholarios. 2009. "On the front line." *Work, Employment & Society* 23(1):7-11. Other recent studies that use a narrative approach to build understandings of working life include: Devadason, Ranji. 2007. "Constructing Coherence? Young Adults’ Pursuit of Meaning through Multiple Transitions between Work, Education and Unemployment." *Journal of Youth Studies* 10(2):203 – 221; Mrozowicki, Adam, Valeria Pulignano and Geert Van Hootegem. 2010. "Worker agency and trade union renewal: the case of Poland." *Work, Employment &*

prominent sociologists of work have recently called specifically for a *revival of worker narratives* “as a means of understanding social questions.”⁹² They called it a “revival” or a “recovery” because, in the 1970s and into the 1980s, “narrative accounts” of working, produced by sociologists and popular writers (such as Studs Terkel’s *Working*) dominated the social scientific and critical study of work. But as Taylor *et. al* explain – in their call for submissions of first-person work narratives to a special issue of *Work, Employment and Society* - this dominance was short-lived:

It was the richness of such narrative accounts that generated the formidable insights into the social processes at the workplace whether the quotidian and alienating experiences of routinized assembly-line work, the articulation of worker grievances or its relative absence, the functioning of shop floor union organization, informal work practices and behaviours, or, in the case of feminist inspired authors, distinctively genderized modes of action. Multiple factors combined to arrest the proliferation of these ethnographic accounts. The wider political economic environment was certainly influential, particularly the decline of manufacturing in the early 1980s, the greater practical difficulties of accessing the emerging service occupations, the long-term decline in workplace-based trade unionism and the growth of managerialism. Concomitantly, academic interest in workers’ agency diminished as management was increasingly seen as the only actor that mattered.⁹³

Hearing this call to revive a now-marginalized approach to the sociology of work – and finding it immediately compatible with the push I received from Tony Watson, to produce a sociology of work

Society 24(2):221-240; Schoneboom, Abigail. 2011. “Workblogging in a Facebook age.” *Work, Employment & Society* 25(1):132-140; and Siltanen, Janet, Allette Willis and Willow Scobie. 2009. “Flows, Eddies, Swamps and Whirlpools: Inequality and the Experience of Work Change.” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 34(4)

⁹² Schoneboom, 2011:np.

⁹³ Taylor *et. al.*, 2009:8.

that resonates with people's lives – it was very easy to choose narrative analysis. But an additional question of evidence and data remained: whose narratives would I use? Who would I talk to?

Having established via the literature review described in Chapter 1 that I wanted to allow generation to emerge *from* the data rather than structure its collection and analysis from the outset, my plan was to cast a wide net, look at what I caught, and ask whether or not perceivable divisions (in narrative tropes, professed feelings about work, average work trajectories, etc.) emerged along age or generational lines. Thus I did not delimit and seek out two or more distinct generations of participants, and narrative allowed me to do this, because my "object of investigation" is the story, not the person.⁹⁴

Research Subjects

In order to at least lay a foundation for "discovering" generation, I aimed to conduct an even number of interviews with men and women of different ages, from early twenties to late eighties. The actual age distribution (available in appendix I, table 1) almost meets the goal I set out with: there are 30 women and 22 men; eight participants were in their twenties, 16 in their thirties, seven in their forties, 13 in their fifties, five in their sixties, one person was in his seventies, and four people were in their eighties. Interviews were conducted in three cities of varying sizes, which I have changed throughout the text in order to protect respondents' anonymity. In terms of other measures of diversity, there is some representation from visible ethnic minorities (appendix I, table 2), and interviewees were drawn from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, based on their highest level of education, their occupation, and their family backgrounds (appendix I, table 2). In the end, I am limited in my ability to make any grand or *final* claims about gender, class or ethnicity, but I do reflect on the impact and salience of these things in the analysis. Moreover, I accept the

⁹⁴ Riessman, 2006:1.

notion of intersectionality: that the meaning and impact of each of these axes of difference is contingent upon its intersection(s) with other axes of difference.⁹⁵

Among the fifty-two people interviewed, there are manual labourers, tradespeople, businesspeople, artists and writers, professionals, students, stay-at-home parents, unemployed job-seekers and retail workers. Over the course of their lives, they have been (among many other things) models, cashiers, ranch-hands, high-profile marketing consultants, CEOs, motel maids and lifeguards. They have done the work we all 'see' and more or less understand, of turning down beds, ringing through groceries, prosecuting accused criminals and delivering mail, and also the work we rarely think about, like writing the closed captions for TV programs, cleaning centuries-old art in museums, practicing monkshood, brining herring for pickling, and coaxing pheasants to sleep, hiding them under bushes for wealthy people to 'hunt'.

Such diversity is uncommon in sociological studies of work, which conventionally zero in on one or a limited number of occupations, workplaces or types of workers. I did not limit the sample to any single industry or occupation, or even sets of industries and occupations. I only excluded participants when I already had two or three interviewees with the same occupation (or at the same workplace). However, my sampling method is not without methodological rigour or basis. The method I come closest to is "statistically nonrepresentative stratified sampling" – an approach proposed by Jan Trost in 1986 and still used in qualitative research today.⁹⁶ It involves drawing a table of the main variables of interest – in my case, these were age, gender, education-level and occupation – and aiming for 'stratification' along those lines.

⁹⁵ McCall, Leslie 2005. 'The Complexity of Intersectionality.' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (3).

⁹⁶ Trost, Jan E. 1986. Statistically nonrepresentative stratified sampling: A sampling technique for qualitative studies. *Qualitative Sociology* 9 (1):54-57.

Accordingly, when I was close to fifty interviews, I took stock of the breakdown and tried to ensure that the last several interviews filled the remaining 'gaps'. (At that point, there were no women in their forties, and very few people overall with less than a post-secondary education, so I sought interviewees with one or more of those characteristics.) The aim throughout was thus to achieve a sample with maximum variability in terms of both age *and* occupation, and a roughly even split between men and women in each age category (twenties, thirties, forties etc.). The broader objective was to construct a sample diverse enough to support a search for commonalities (in experiences and stories) that extended across other differences and divisions. Even with this diversity, I contend that the interviewees here are joined by the simple fact that they all worked in Canada in the late 21st Century, and thus they share, on a very important level, a social, moral, and cultural "universe."⁹⁷

Still, the point remains that this approach yielded a highly diverse sample, thus limiting my ability to isolate the effects of many variables. However, I make one more argument for taking this risk and defying scientific sociological convention. As I explored the academic literature on work, I was reminded of the late Studs Terkel's book, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*.⁹⁸ The book, a collection of first-person accounts of working from a wide and diverse range of American workers, is a staple on the reading lists of Sociology courses across North America.⁹⁹ But Terkel was not a *professional* sociologist, and he made this clear in his writings. On his earlier *Division Street*, he remarked that "Being neither a sociologist, nor a research man, motivational or otherwise, I followed no blueprint or set of statistics." Rather, he

⁹⁷ Denzin, Norman and Yvonne S. Lincoln. 2011. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London, UK: Sage Publications, p. 70.

⁹⁸ Terkel, Studs. 1972. *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

⁹⁹ Hirsch, Paul M. and Daniel B. Cornfield. 2010. 'When He Listened, People Talked.' *Contexts* (American Sociological Association) 9(2).

sought anyone – “the man [sic] of inchoate thought” – who would speak to him, because he believed that all had “pertinent comments to make on urban life in the twentieth century.”¹⁰⁰

Despite this admission, Terkel is lauded as “a sociologist’s non-sociologist”¹⁰¹ and a “rogue sociologist.”¹⁰² He is cited as an example of exactly the kind of connection C. Wright Mills hoped for between sociology and the public, because he brought “sociological insight and analysis” to bear on problems and issues that resonated with ordinary people, and exposed the realities that “seemed invisible or unacceptable.”¹⁰³ The sociology in Terkel’s work – the methodological rigour – came from his interest in particular issues, the way he listened, and the way he analyzed what he heard; all of these elements were undeniably created by a sociological imagination.

Finding Participants

After two pilot interviews with people close to me, I launched my public search for interviewees in London by hanging posters in community centres and asking my contacts in the federal government and local large institutions to forward an email poster to their networks. I contacted a handful of people I already knew directly, because they had intriguing occupations, and asked if they could connect me with any colleagues who might be willing to do an interview. I also asked to place an ad in a community newspaper, and in response, the newspaper offered to cover my project as a story, for free. This drew in five interviews directly, while the community centre posters only solicited one. The rest of the London interviews were secured through the extended networks of

¹⁰⁰ See <http://www.studsterkel.org/dstreet.php>

¹⁰¹ Hartmann, Doug and Chris Uggen. 2010. ‘From the Editors.’ *Contexts* (American Sociological Association) 9(2):3.

¹⁰² Hirsch & Cornfield, 2010.

¹⁰³ Hartmann & Uggar, 2010; Hirsch & Cornfield, 2010.

people I know. In Montreal and Bedford, I relied exclusively on this snowball-style 'sampling', but still, in all but five of the fifty-two cases, I interviewed people I had never met nor heard of before.

Collecting working life stories

In the beginning, each of the interviews began with a "lifeline".¹⁰⁴ Interviewees were given a sheet of paper and a pencil and asked to draw a line representing their life, from birth through to the present. On one side of the line (i.e., above or below), they were asked to plot work milestones, markers, events or periods; on the other, they were to plot the 'personal' side of things—usually related to health, family, friends and hobbies. Some interviewees constructed the lifeline in-step with the interview, telling me about each point as they wrote it down, while others drew and plotted the entire lifeline and *then* narrated it. Most, unfortunately, found the whole task too distracting, or they were not entirely clear on what they were supposed to do—or perhaps it was too awkward, too early, to sit there drawing with me peering over their work. Thus, the lifeline approach was dropped by about the twelfth interview. The ease with which most interviewees told their working life story, barely pausing, weaving in just-remembered events and feelings as they went along, was remarkable. In most cases, I did not have to prod them to keep going, and many of the questions I had in my interview guide (appendix II) were answered without me having to ask. Interviewees knew that the focus of the study was work, and so work was the thread to which all of their stories clung, without much input on my part. Very little intervention was needed to braid personal, non-work stories into the narrative being shared, because—as might be suspected—the things which happen at and around work and in people's careers are intimately related to the things going on at home, in interpersonal relationships, wider societies and the life course generally. Interviews were recorded (save for one, for which I took notes) and lasted anywhere

¹⁰⁴ Doucet, Andrea. 2006. *Do Men Mother?* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

from thirty minutes (appropriately, in the case of the youngest participant) to two hours, but most took around one hour.

EMERGENT ANALYSIS

The technical details of analysis are easy. I personally transcribed all of the interviews, and coded (and re-coded) and analysed them using the analytical software *Atlas.ti*. Roughly half of the recordings were also fed into the oral data analysis program *Stories Matter*, which allows researchers to analyse and code data without losing its orality through transcription. The limitation of *Stories Matter* is that it does not allow for the complex analysis of data—one cannot, for example, isolate the instances where two codes overlap, and thus it is more painstaking to figure out the relationships between the different concepts, themes and codes one is working with. The benefit of *Stories Matter* (which, for me, warranted a supplementary use of it) is that the researcher returns to the oral data again and again, hearing every pause, every change in tone or inflection, a laugh, an audible smile, or the length of a pause. Listening to those recordings brings the researcher back, in a sense. Listening to my interview with Helen, I can hear the sounds of late summer—birds singing, construction trucks rambling by her inner-city Bed and Breakfast, the creaking of the wooden chairs we sat in on the porch. Returning to my interview with Jody and Brad, I travel back to the warmth and business of their home—the dog scratching at the gate to come inside, the baby gurgling as he wakes up, just audible through the monitor Brad has set out on the table while we talk.

After many months of dealing with the transcripts just by listening to and reading them, I began to realize that my big, basic research question, about generational differences, patterns and tensions at work, was far more complicated than it originally seemed. Specifically, I bumped up against additional, more specific questions, not only about *what I wanted to know*, but also epistemological and methodological questions about, in the words of Andrea Doucet and Natasha

Mauthner, "what *can* be known and *how*?"¹⁰⁵ But as I will admit and explain now – in the name of intellectual honesty - I settled on what I *could* know and *how*, before I fully appreciated what I *wanted* to know.

Coming to know without knowing what for

My big question – what, if anything, is going on with generations and work – was intentionally broad. The people I invited to participate in interviews are deliberately a diverse group. I aimed for maximum variability. But I also assumed, perhaps naively, that everyone was going to have something in common, something shared and constant which could serve as the backdrop, against which differences would be visible and meaningful. This shared *something* is work: the sheer fact of doing it, and by virtue of doing it, having to experience it as one part of a life that has many other parts. I wanted to know if there were different ways of experiencing, approaching, and "doing" work in a general sense – fitting it into life, thinking about it, feeling about it, worrying about it, planning it, starting it, leaving it, explaining it to other people, and comparing it to the work of others. I did not select participants from a single workplace or industry or occupation, so I could not compare people's approaches to occupation-specific things. Still, the people in my sample shared, without doubt, two things: first, they worked and lived in Canada in the 21st century, and second, they told me what it was like to do so, from their earliest memory of work, through their present, day-to-day experiences, to their futures as they imagined they might play out.

But packed up in my simple, broad research question – are there generational differences at work, and do they matter? – one smaller question in particular had been forming at the back of my mind since the first draft of my research proposal: how do people relate to their work? It was an

¹⁰⁵ Doucet, Andrea and Mauthner, Natasha S. 2008. "What Can be Known and How? Narrated Subjects and the Listening Guide." *Qualitative Research* 8(3), 401, emphasis added.

infuriating question, because I could not articulate what it meant to “relate to” work. I knew it involved the things listed above: thinking, worrying, and feeling about work, planning, doing and relating to it, but to translate this into a snappy research question proved to be very difficult. I left it alone, used it only in my notes to myself or, interestingly, in discussions about my study with friends and acquaintances; they always knew what I meant, and could engage with my topic on the basis of that concept – “relating to work” - but I could not put it in precise, social scientific terms. And so, I took nothing very deliberate with me into the interviews but an interview guide aimed at helping people through their working life stories, and the sense that *something* about relating to work was going to be revealed in them.

It was that nagging phrase that eventually came to the fore in a pivotal moment in the analysis, just when I felt I was fumbling around in the dark and, worst of all, that I was doing it for no reason. I was seeing a pattern, but I did not know how to name it. I could group the interviews together into three separate groups. I knew there was something holding each group together and distinguishing it from the other two. But I could not articulate what that *something* was. I thought it might be a particular “plot” in their narratives, but I tried that. It did not work. People fell out of the groups no matter how I tried to keep them in. I thought it might be a certain ideology about where work ought to fit in a life well-lived, and while in some respects it was, the argument felt clumsy and unfair to research participants. When I realized I was ascribing beliefs to them without *really* knowing if I was right, I stopped. I tried other formulations, using ideas from narrative analysis and linguistics to see if the difference was in terms of *how* people told their stories – what rhetorical devices they made use of, for example; I thought it might be a distinction between different kinds of reflexivity, but that analysis failed to capture the patterns I knew I was seeing too.

I hung on to one helpful question from Catherine Riessman’s *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*—“why was the story told *that way*?”—which helped guide my focus back to each narrative

as a whole as opposed to the events which each was ostensibly about.¹⁰⁶ Staring at that piece of paper with the three groups, with my husband beside me throwing out possible explanations, it came together: the narratives gathered in this dissertation were told in such a way as to convey the narrator's "relationship to work" – a theme that includes those seemingly intangible yet ubiquitous aspects of making a living listed above (thinking, worrying, feeling etc.) and which participants put in the context of overarching values, concerns, desires and beliefs. In the chapters to come, it is clear that people can relate to work in wildly different ways, but there are also distinct patterns linking some people's relationships to their work to that of others, and setting some people's apart. Those three groups of participants I was seeing represented three different ways of relating to work. They provide the central argument of this dissertation, which will begin in the next chapter.

RELATING TO WORK AS A SOCIOLOGICAL CONCERN

While "relating to work" was a 'discovery' for me, sociologists of work have been circling variations on this theme for decades. Whether in Weber's exploration of the protestant work ethic, Frederick Taylor's *Scientific Management* or contemporary studies of work identities, social science has concerned itself, whether in service of "capital" or in criticism of it, with what *motivates* people to work, to find work meaningful, and to commit to it as a central part of their lives (or not). The impetus behind these investigations is context-dependent, as are the concepts and methods brought to bear on them. In Taylor's time, around the turn of the century, understanding why people work was central to understanding how to make them do it more efficiently.

This emphasis on productivity persisted through the 1950s and 60s, when the notion of "central life interests" was developed as a way of testing the "orientation" of working people toward

¹⁰⁶ Riessman, 1993:2

their jobs versus their orientation toward life outside their jobs.¹⁰⁷ In these studies, originating with Robert Dubin's inquiry into the "worlds" of industrial workers, people were asked via a series of not-so-direct questions where the most important relationships and events in their lives took place – at work or outside it? The first study to employ this found that "for almost three out of every four industrial workers studied, work and the workplace *are not* central life interests."¹⁰⁸

Subsequent conceptualizations of "work orientation" developed away from this overly simplistic binary and the related concept of "work commitment," highlighting the important nuance such concepts glossed over.¹⁰⁹ Crucially, these later studies –which many trace back to sociologists Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt (1968) – reframed the "work commitment" question as a matter of *what kind* of meaning and orientation people had to their work rather than the simple yes/no question of *whether* they were oriented to their work.¹¹⁰ They also took place in the context of moves for women's rights, and at the moment when women were beginning to head for the workforce in larger numbers.

For this and other reasons, the concept of work orientations was and is controversial. Feminist scholars in particular set out to challenge the prevailing notion that women and men possess fundamentally different orientations to work, with women being mainly "home-centered"

¹⁰⁷ Dubin, Robert. 1956. Industrial Workers' Worlds: A Study of the "Central Life Interests" of Industrial Workers. *Social Problems* 3 (3):131-142.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 131.

¹⁰⁹ Morrow, Paula C. 1983. Concept Redundancy in Organizational Research: The Case of Work Commitment. *The Academy of Management Review* 8 (3):486-500.

¹¹⁰ Goldthorpe, John H., David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer, and Jennifer Platt. 1968. *The Affluent Worker: industrial attitudes and behaviour*. Vol. 2. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; See also Charles, Nickie, and Emma James. 2003. Gender and work orientations in conditions of job insecurity. *The British Journal of Sociology* 54 (2): 241; Reed, Ken. 1997. Orientations to work: the cultural conditioning of motivation. *Journal of Sociology* 33 (3):364-386.

and men “work-centered”.¹¹¹ As Nickie Charles and Emma James argued more recently (2003), the ‘work orientations’ approach oversimplified the issue, ignoring the crucial effects of gender, life stage, and even economic need in order to advance “essentialist” models of people’s relationships to their work.¹¹² Such models and the false dichotomies they perpetuate have been challenged, also, by the now-widely-accepted view that ‘work’ needs to be understood as including, but *not limited to* paid work done outside the home.¹¹³

At the same time (the 1990s and early 2000s) as these debates were winding down in sociology, the late modern theories of Beck, Giddens, Bauman and Lash, in conversation with the ‘end of work’ debate, drew attention to the question of work’s significance to late modern life, and its function as a “source of identity, meaning and social affiliation.”¹¹⁴ The focus here is less on gender relations and more on societal shifts away from tradition and toward increasing individualism and *reflexivity*, as people are increasingly required to live their lives as self-directed projects. The concern vis-à-vis work (by which these scholars *mean* paid work, even though they often leave this unsaid) is that if rigid class structures, local economies and jobs-for-life melt away, leaving hyper-mobility, global scapes and flows, and fragmented ‘careers’, work must necessarily

¹¹¹ The most prominent of those advancing this claim, and engendering a strong reaction from feminist academics, is probably Catherine Hakim. See Hakim, C. 1991. ‘Grateful slaves and self-made women: Fact and fantasy in women’s work orientations’. *European Sociological Review* 7(2): 101–21; 1995. ‘Five feminist myths about women’s employment’, *British Journal of Sociology* 46(3): 429–55.

¹¹² Charles & James, 2003.

¹¹³ Glucksmann, Miriam A. 1995. Why ‘Work’? Gender and the ‘Total Social Organization of Labour’. *Gender, Work & Organization* 2 (2):63-75; Pahl, Ray. 1984. *Divisions of labour*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell; 1988. *On Work*. Oxford: Blackwell. For a discussion of how this point made its way into Canadian state-led data collection, see Luxton, Meg, and Leah Vosko. 1998. Where Women’s Efforts Count: The 1996 Census Campaign and “Family Politics” in Canada. *Studies in Political Economy* 56.

¹¹⁴ Doherty, Michael. 2009. When the working day is through: the end of work as identity? *Work Employment Society* 23 (1):84-101.

start to lose some of its significance and reliability as a grounding for individual identities and lasting social ties.¹¹⁵

In this dissertation, I acknowledge these historically-embedded reflections on work's place in life, and people's relationships to it, but I depart from most of them in a number of ways. First, the use of narrative data is relatively uncommon in these sorts of studies. Second, I am explicitly concerned with the question of *how* people relate to their work – not *whether*. If my object of study is narratives about work, and it is through narrative (and discourse) that experience is made meaningful, then work will always have some sort of meaning, but the meaning will vary from person to person. Third, I take up Charles and James' point that relationships to work cannot be considered without due attention to employment relationships and the relations between work and home, relations I argue are constructed in and articulated through narrative. Finally, while I do identify a typology of relationships to work, I understand these relationships as discursively constructed, reflexive productions; they are not essential or unchanging, nor are they deducible from objective conditions or characteristics of individuals alone.

In getting to this particular focus – or rather, those mysterious categories which led to the notion of 'relating to work' – I employed a number of narrative analysis methods which proved

¹¹⁵ In addition to Doherty, 2009, see: Atkinson, Will. 2007. Beck, individualization and the death of class: a critique. *British Journal of Sociology* 58:349-366; 2010. The myth of the reflexive worker: class and work histories in neo-liberal times. *Work, Employment & Society* 24 (3):413-429; Bauman, Zygmunt. 1995. *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Cambridge: Blackwell; 1998. *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press; Beck, Ulrich. 2000. *The Brave New World of Work*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Beck, Ulrich, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash. 1994. *Reflexive modernization: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press; Fevre, Ralph. 2007. Employment insecurity and social theory: the power of nightmares. *Work, Employment & Society* 21 (3):517-535; Mythen, Gabe. 2005. Employment, individualization and insecurity: rethinking the risk society perspective. *The Sociological Review* 53 (1):129-149; Sennett, Richard. 1998. *The Corrosion of Character - The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; 2005. *The Culture of the New Capitalism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; 2008. *The Craftsman*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Strangleman, Tim. 2007. The nostalgia for permanence at work? The end of work and its commentators. *The Sociological Review* 55 (1):81-103.

essential. Most importantly, following Riessman, my focus is less on the exact details of research subjects' lives – the content of their narratives – and more on the forms those narratives take. This is in keeping with what Riessman writes is the “purpose” of narrative analysis: “to see *how* respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives.”¹¹⁶ But beyond this, I used an approach modeled to me by one of my mentors, sociologist Andrea Doucet, whose advocacy for *The Listening Guide* proved well-warranted for reasons I will turn to now.

What can be known...

A central and perennial question for qualitative researchers is what they can legitimately ‘know’ on the basis of their research subjects’ accounts. Looking at my own study, I had to ask what I could *really* know about interviewees’ working life stories and, once I knew it by name, how they relate to work. Specifically, I had to reflect on whether or not I could write about the story each research subject told me about his or her life as though it was *the life itself*. Many narrative researchers have weighed in on this dilemma before. They have asked, as Arthur Frank does, whether narratives can be authentic, whether they serve as windows onto some authentic self.¹¹⁷ They have asserted, as Doucet and Mauthner do, that the narrative is simply the best way we have of accessing and making sense of social life, but, in the words of Ken Plummer whom they cite, “it is not *the* life, which is in principle unknown and unknowable.”¹¹⁸

Moreover, outside the basic concern of whether or not research subjects tell the *truth* – a problem in quantitative, survey-based research as well – lies a more philosophical question about

¹¹⁶ Riessman, 1993:2.

¹¹⁷ Frank, Arthur. 2002. “Why Study People’s Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1(1):1-20.

¹¹⁸ Doucet and Mauthner, 2008:404.

whether people are agentic, critical *creators* of the narratives they tell or are constructed *by* those narratives. Framing this debate with the provocative question “what can be known and how”, sociologists Andrea Doucet and Natasha Mauthner offered one way to address the “theoretical impasses between critical and constructed subjects” or “between subjects who structure their lives and subjects who are overly structured”:¹¹⁹ the concept of “the narrated subject.”

Drawing on the conceptual work of Lois McNay, Doucet and Mauthner propose that researchers should focus on the narrated subject or narrative self – the relational, situated, temporal, and creative subject, as told *by* the subject. The narratives shared in research interviews, although they may well be different from narratives produced for other people and purposes and in other settings, “provide subjects with identities, and allow them to speak about who *they believe they are*.”¹²⁰ It is this subject – the one research subjects believe they are – that is important and knowable to us, as social researchers. It is the narrated subject, moreover, who relates to work in one of the three ways explored in this dissertation. For Doucet and Mauthner, while “there may well be something ‘beneath’ or ‘behind’ or outside narrative”, the narrated subject, and the sense we make of their narratives “within the wider web of social and structural relations from which narrated subjects speak”, might even be “all we can know.”¹²¹ Drawing on the methodological cues provided by Doucet and Mauthner, I focus on the narrated subject in this dissertation.

¹¹⁹ Doucet, Andrea and Mauthner, Natasha S. 2008. “What Can be Known and How? Narrated Subjects and the Listening Guide.” *Qualitative Research* 8(3), 401.

¹²⁰ Doucet & Mauthner, 2008:406.

¹²¹ Doucet & Mauthner, 2008:404.

...and how?

Thankfully, Doucet and Mauthner offer a clear method – the “Listening Guide” - as a way of “translating epistemological conceptions of relational narrated subjects into research practice.”¹²² Although I only recognized its utility once I was already deep into my analysis, I adopted it immediately and used it to analyze most of the interviews collected here.

The Listening Guide is a “voice-centered”, “relational”, “feminist” method, developed by Carol Gilligan and colleagues, organized around “multiple and successive ‘readings’ of interview transcripts ‘each time listening in a different way’”.¹²³ Doucet and Mauthner augment the method slightly, settling on four different readings of their transcripts. The first is a “reflexive reading”, in which they “combine the basic grounded theory question, which is ‘what is happening here?’ (Charmaz, 2006), with elements from narrative analysis such as an interest in recurring words, themes, events, chronology of events, protagonists, plot, subplots, and key characters (Mishler, 1986; Elliott, 2005)”.¹²⁴ Importantly, this narrative reading is a reflexive one in which the researcher reflects on the assumptions and biases in his or her immediate reactions to the text. Practically, this is done by laying the subject’s words in one column, and the researcher’s reactions in another, side-by-side (leaving the possibility of comparing with a second researcher, if applicable).

Doucet and Mauthner call the second reading “tracing narrated subjects,” the aim of which is to focus on “how this person speaks about her/himself and the parameters of their social world.”¹²⁵ This reading is facilitated by using a coloured pencil to circle or trace the subject’s use of “I” (and to

¹²² *Ibid.*, 404.

¹²³ Brown, 1998:33, quoted in Doucet & Mauthner, 2008:405.

¹²⁴ Doucet & Mauthner, 2008:405.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 406.

note when they switch to 'you' or 'we'). I had been doing this before I realized it was a step in Doucet and Mauthner's Listening Guide – it is how I began to read for reflexivity, noting how and where subjects reflected consciously on their actions in retrospect (as opposed to narrating them as though they can be taken for granted).

In the third reading – for relational subjects – the focus is on “social networks, and close and intimate relations.” To these two foci, I will add a wider, more abstract sense of “the social”, for reasons which should become clear in the chapters that follow. Suffice it to say for now that I needed a view of relationality that encompassed more than interpersonal relations – something that could capture research subjects' reflections on their place in the world writ large, their connections to unknown others around the world and in their communities, and the roles they played in processes much larger than their own lives.

The fourth reading Doucet and Mauthner outline turned out to be helpful in exploring generation as a discourse, as it “focuses on structured power relations and dominant ideologies that frame narratives”.¹²⁶ It is through this reading that I looked for the instances in which generation was invoked as a way of explaining or describing encounters at work, approaches to work, and differences between self and other, to name just a few examples.

Reflexivity

The first, 'reflexive' reading was not the first time I considered my relationship to the narratives, the participants and the research question in this study, although it did serve as a reminder that the values, assumptions, experiences and political views that spurred my interest in the issue of generations and work continued to influence how I gathered and interpreted the data. Five years ago, when I was twenty-three, I told my full-time employer of one year that I had applied and been

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 407.

accepted to a PhD program, and therefore would be leaving my job in four months. The next day, my boss informed me that he would rather I vacate my position at the end of two weeks. In the course of terminating my contract, he told me I was like everyone else in my generation: entitled and looking for instant gratification.

Beyond the obvious irony of turning to a PhD for instant gratification, my boss misjudged me and my decision. He thought I was leaving because I had not advanced as quickly as I expected, or because I felt like I was entitled to more money or my own office or some other perk. That was not the case. I thought I was making a lot of money (looking back, I wasn't); I liked my shared office; I liked the laid-back feel of the workplace; and I was happy at the bottom of the organizational ladder, learning from the people above me. Those parts of the job felt right. But I did not like the *work*, I did not believe in the societal value of the industry, and thus I knew very quickly that this was not where I wanted to leave my mark, as a human being. I also knew, despite the obvious material comforts and prestige my boss's work afforded him, I did not want that life for myself. My boss could not see my decision in anything other than the seemingly totalizing terms of generation; I had not thought of myself as part of any kind of generation before.

I came to this as a dissertation topic after pitching several other ideas, namely the ideas I had when I applied for admission to the PhD program. Those ones never gelled, and somewhere along the way, in the course of conducting a literature review around young people's life transitions and work, I saw the terms my boss had used—entitlement, instant gratification, generation—applied to people my age who were seemingly floundering between youth and adulthood, and causing distress to parents, employers, researchers and policy makers.¹²⁷ I realized that missing from most of this literature was a consideration of young workers' values and goals and how they

¹²⁷ James Cote's work (2000's *Arrested Adulthood* and 1994's *Generation on Hold*, with Anton Allahar) was especially troubling to me.

might legitimately differ from the normative ones presumed by researchers and based, most likely, on the goals and values of older, established workers. There also seemed to be a lot of attention paid to how young workers were failing to “keep up” rather than to the moral question of whether we should want them to. Finally, generation appeared to be thrust into these discussions and analyses without much critical attention to what it meant.

I carried these impressions with me into the deeper literature review and the interviews, but I also brought a set of judgments about other people’s values, priorities and life decisions. Having eschewed the promise of a materially-rich future because I did not feel that my job matched my vision for a better world, I judge people who put money ahead of ethics. At times, I had the jarring realization that this judgment led me to distrust the narratives of wealthy people, and to enter them looking for contradictions. It led me to regard the narratives of working class and young workers just starting out as more admirable. It was a temptation I have fought to resist here, but only to the extent that resisting it is more intellectually honest.

Nevertheless, the narratives here opened my eyes to the fact that there are countless other variables that affect people’s negotiations of their material needs and their sense of the common good—beginning with their definitions of “needs” and “good” and extending to the needs of others, significant and pivotal life events, insecurities, religion, identity, class (dis)positions, and so on—and in turn, the way they imagine paid work’s relationship to those beliefs and values. Having negotiated my career decisions reflexively, I admonished people who seemed to just float along in their jobs, ignoring existential and moral questions because it was easier to do that than to confront them. But the detail in participant narratives suggests that there is no such thing as a life devoid of moral and existential questioning—just the questions change.

Through all the listening, transcribing, analyzing, discussing, comparing and reflecting I have come to a place where I believe I am doing the best I can at maintaining enough critical

distance to cast judgment where it is due while also acknowledging that the people I spoke to believe, most of the time, that they are doing the best they can to be good people—and they are good people. But like me, they are fallible, and therefore I apply the same scrutiny to their stories, their reflexivity and their values, as I do my own.

Methodological Limitations

The methods employed for this project imposed some notable limitations on what can be gleaned from the interviews, and what can be said about the world in light of them. While every effort was made to include people from a range of socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, it was impossible to get the right representation in a sample of fifty-two people. People in stable, traditional white collar jobs were usually very eager to participate – so much so that I had to turn quite a few away – whereas people in non-standard or precarious employment, or in those misleadingly-labelled ‘unskilled’ jobs, were often less keen, too busy, sceptical of my purposes and leery of being recorded, analysed and named in a social scientific study. Most of the people I spoke to enjoyed their jobs most of the time. The efforts I made at interviewing people who hated their jobs were in vain: understandably, these people did not want to talk a stranger for an hour or more about jobs they hate. To compensate, I listened to people *everywhere* I went—at parties, on the bus, in the supermarket checkout, at the dog park, and in restaurant. But in missing their whole stories, surely I have given up something important.

Judging by the small number of narratives I heard from recent immigrants to Canada—from Morocco, the former USSR and China—I am certain there is another perspective, with markedly different values around work and making a living, of which I only caught a glimpse. Stories that begin in one culture and end in another are strong witnesses to the contours of our cultural values and ideals, and so with more resources and time, I would have sought more interviews with recent immigrants.

But the most significant limitation has to do with the fact that only one interview was conducted with each participant. Follow-up interviews would likely yield new insights, might contradict the state of affairs I've found in the data, or add more weight to the hints of themes that are presently underdeveloped. Looking at the lifelines of interviewees from this single moment in time, it is clear that life can change dramatically, in an instant, and had I caught any one of the people in this book on a different day, month, or year, I would have heard quite different stories, and I reflect on this likely possibility throughout the analysis that follows. But as Frank, Plummer, Doucet and Mauthner have all underscored, these stories are only part of 'the' story anyway.

GENERATION AS DISCOURSE IN WORKING LIFE STORIES

In Chapter One, I showed that most sociological approaches to studying generation(s) operate on the assumption that generations are 'found' in social life as definitive groups or categories of people. I argued that this assumption leads sociologists to the problem of where to draw categorical boundaries between generations, a problem many of them solve by equating generation with birth cohort. Not wanting to do this, I proposed an alternative approach: the treatment of generation *as* and *in* discourse – an open question rather than an *a priori* categorization of research subjects.

In this chapter, I reintroduce the idea of *generation-as-discourse* to the developing argument. ('Generational discourses', on the other hand, are dealt with in the next chapter.) I use it to highlight what people think generation is, and where and why it matters to them, by examining the instances where participants referred explicitly to generation(s). Generation turns out to be a legitimate and apparently reliable idea for many of the people I interviewed, on which they draw in various ways to make sense of their experiences around making a living. Most often, generation-as-discourse is tied in participant narratives to two interrelated perceptions of generation: first as an axis of difference, and second as a socio-historical dynamic. The two can be summarized as follows:

1. *Generation as an axis of difference* :: first, generation-as-discourse is put in service of the belief, held by participants of all ages, that older and younger people alive today possess fundamentally different attitudes about how a person should relate to his or her work. Two related perceptions appear to drive this belief: first, that "the younger generation" has an overblown sense of

“entitlement” about the rewards and conditions of paid work; and second, that paid work was more central to the lives of vaguely-defined older people who ‘lived to work,’ and more peripheral to young people who ‘work to live’.

2. *Generation as a socio-historical dynamic* :: here, generation gets drawn into a larger narrative about social change and progress, primarily in terms of: technological advancements; increasing career opportunities (particularly for women); shifting gender roles; the purported rise of ‘knowledge economy’ jobs and corresponding decline of manual labour; and increased prosperity.

Participants articulate, respond or react to both perceived generational differences and dynamics differently, and in this chapter I make sense of this variation using a conceptual framework provided by sociologist Margaret Archer. Specifically, Archer’s typology of *contexts and concerns* is helpful for describing the aspects of generation participants emphasized in their narratives, whether generation appears to them as an axis of difference, a socio-historical dynamic, or both. Like any discourse, generation is malleable, and its use in narratives has antecedents and consequences that matter to how people relate across *what they see* as generational divisions.

CONTEXTS AND CONCERNS

Archer’s framework for understanding human action revolves around the interplay between “subjective powers of reflexivity” and “objective structural or cultural powers”, a more sophisticated articulation of the quintessential (and contested) sociological binary of agency and structure. For Archer, human action is understood as the outcome of a process whereby people’s reflexivity “mediates” the effects of their environments. Through reflexive “internal conversations”, people weigh their own “concerns” against the “constraints and enablements” of their situations

and, in light of these two factors, determine their “projects.” Success in a *subjectively* determined project – for example getting a Master’s degree, moving to a new home, switching careers, making a friend, learning to knit, raising a child properly or saving money – depends on how well the individual “harnesses” the “*objective* [...] affordances and resistances” around them, and reflexivity is postulated as the mechanism by which people acknowledge and figure out how to do that harnessing; they do this in various ways, with varying “success”.¹²⁸

The language of contexts and concerns in particular proves useful in assessing, analyzing and synthesizing the many different uses of generation-as-discourse in the narrative data discussed below. Accordingly, the concepts will be woven into the analysis throughout.

GETTING AT GENERATION

It was a deliberate choice not to use the word ‘generation’ in recruitment posters, letters, and consent forms. The interview guide was structured so that I would ask questions specifically about generation(s) at the very end, once the issue had a chance to come out naturally as interviewees reflected on their experiences as working people. I only brought it up on my own at the end of an interview if I felt like interview subjects were dancing around it. In the wide majority of cases, generation either came up as interviewees mentioned it explicitly, or it did not come up (by name) at all. I have indicated in the text below if I used the word “generation” before the research participant did.

Following the Listening Guide method outlined in Chapter Two, I analysed interview data through multiple readings, coding transcripts and reading passages in context, and pulling passages out of context and grouping them together thematically. While for the most part I concentrate instances where research subjects explicitly say the word ‘generation’, I do point on occasion to

¹²⁸ Archer, 2009:9, 17.

instances where they hone in on themes and ideas with which generation is associated in popular discourse, sociological research, and centuries-old philosophy.

GENERATION AS AN AXIS OF DIFFERENCE

"Their entitlement is unbelievable!"

I broke my own rule and specifically mentioned "generation" to 60-year-old William, a retired public servant. It was near the end of his interview, and I asked him if he noticed any age-related *or* generational differences in the way his coworkers approach work. William nodded vigorously, but he struggled to put his affirmation into words.

It's a tough one because there's - it's true of all generations all the time. It just seems to be more particularly visible now, but I'm not sure if it's because I see it more because of my age [...] because... I don't know how to put this... hold on a second.¹²⁹

Seconds passed, and then the remainder of his interview, and then a full day, and *then* he emailed me asking me to call him because he had figured it out. The change that he found "more particularly visible now" was, in his words, *credential arrogance*. The younger people he worked with in recent years seemed, to him at least, to think that their degrees alone should confer seniority upon them in the workplace. They did not have much respect for the experience of older employees, nor did they understand the concept of entry-level positions and the need to start at the "bottom" of an organization and work up. William's words provide the first example of generation-as-discourse used to construct generation as an *axis of difference*.

¹²⁹ Quotations and excerpts have been lightly edited for clarity, but in such a way as to preserve what I believe to be the intent of the speaking interview subject, and/or the meanings of their accounts. "Ums," "uhs" and "you knows", in some cases, have been edited out if they detract from the meaning in the quotation, as have repetitive or redundant sentences, if they do not appear to be crucial to the feeling and meaning of the text, Wherever full sentences or strings of words have been edited out, they are replaced with "[...]". Actual pauses where no words have been edited out are denoted with "...". Places where the interviewee changes tracks suddenly mid-sentence are denoted with "-".

Others toed a very similar line. Fifty-one-year-old acupuncturist Don, for example, told of the difficulties entailed in working with younger employees who “want it all delivered to them.” While sympathetic to younger people, having teenage children of his own, the hard part for a business owner like Don was showing them that the real world of business and employment will not “deliver it all” to the employee. Danielle, a fifty-year-old esthetician, recounted similar dealings with young coworkers and employees. “It was always ‘Oh it’s just not busy’, or ‘this industry, you can’t make money,’” she said. “They don’t think they should have to work for their success.”

This view was not limited to the oldest interviewees in the study – nor, more generally, is the inclination to look at younger people and call them a distinct generation. Thirty-one-year-old Christine, whose age places her in the constructed category of “Gen Y”, seemed to describe William’s idea of “credential arrogance” when she reflected on her junior coworkers in Hospital Administration. I asked her whether she noticed any *general* differences between her and her colleagues’ approach to work – their expectations of employers, for example. She said:

Well I... I don’t know if this is what you mean but one random observation that several of my colleagues and I have – so people that are our age, so you know the early thirty-something – and now two younger students have come into our office, so 24-25, and we notice a huge difference between them.

At this point, I noted to Christine that some writers place 31-year-olds like her and 24-25 year-olds like her colleagues in the same ‘generation.’ She nodded as though she had heard this before, but continued her point.

One of them is one of my very good friends so I hear even more so her complaints and things about it all. [...] You know, she should get paid more for what she does and I look at [...] her starting salary to mine is like \$13,000 more and yet she’s still

feeling like she's entitled to more, which is kind of funny. [...] It's a different sense of... being able to come right from school and start something, which really typically isn't the norm.

Like William, Christine made the case that young people today – those who are fresh out of university, the 24-25-year-olds – are out of touch with the way the working world operates. Their expectations are off-target, and their perceptions of what they are *entitled* to are overblown. That word – *entitlement*, which came into focus in the introduction to this dissertation – surfaces here as a way of saying that young people entering the world of work want too much, and are in for a rude awakening because they will not receive the things they expect to. Their *concerns*, to borrow from Archer, are judged to be out-of-sync with their context(s) – that is, if their critics devote any attention to their contexts at all.

Sixty-four-year-old Kathy, a retired social researcher, implied that “all of us” – not just younger people – have developed overblown or undesirable expectations, but in the end she settled on “young people” as the most guilty of this. “When I first started,” she said,

there was less, it seems to me, there was more separation between work and home, work and family. And the technology [was different], to the extent that it just didn't exist to do anything differently about that [the work/family separation]. Today all of us expect to be in touch with our families, our husbands, our parents, our kids at all times and we expect our employer to facilitate that. It seems to be – and I don't want to put the young people down – but I think the pendulum has swung toward individual needs, individual wishes, and not recognizing the limits that an employer has to place [...] there has been, I think, quite a substantial change in society and in technology [...] and I think it's harder for the young people to recognize that the employer is not there to meet their individual personal needs.

Kathy, like the others mentioned so far, focused on the implications increasing entitlement would have for the individual young people who, upon finding out how the world *really* works, will inevitably feel cheated out of something they deserve. But others worried about the effects it would have on employers. For example, Dan, a public servant in his mid-forties, lamented the “dearth of people who want to move into management” – the result, he thought, of young people who “have more going on outside of work and can compartmentalize” work and life. He was not critical of young employees’ priorities, but he predicted that they would be a “huge problem” for government in the future.

In the late stages of writing this dissertation, I was treated to the perspectives of actual employers. On a visit home, I was in the room when some family friends started discussing the difficulties they had, as small business owners, with “the younger generation.” There were two couples in the discussion, both in their mid-fifties, and each husband and wife worked together to run small professional firms. Their joint perception was that their younger employees—who were actually in their early forties—had “no work ethic.”

The couples commiserated over their similar experiences with these employees: they came in at 9 in the morning and left as soon as the clock struck 5, regardless of whether there was work to be done or deadlines to meet; they did not understand – or did not care – that their employers would have to finish whatever work they left behind. Partly, the couples admitted, the employees left because they needed to pick up their children; and one had recently adjusted his schedule because his wife went back to work, creating serious productivity problems at their office. When I suggested that perhaps this was understandable in a dual-earner family – and that maybe we should all have more time with our children and partners – the couples were unmoved.

The reality for them was that there was work to be done, and someone had to do it. As small business owners, their livelihoods, and their ability to pay employees in the first place, depended on

getting a certain amount of work done. They felt like their employees did not realize the incredibly fragile connection between their paycheques and the number of clients the business served. Their exasperation was intensified because, as self-employed people, they had to plan and save for their retirements and the other benefits which would have been collectivized if they were employed by larger organizations. Thus, they felt the impact of lower-than-ideal productivity. But through the lens Archer provides on human action, it is evident that their frustration stemmed from their near-exclusive focus on the *concerns* (e.g. wanting family time) they saw as directing their employees' behaviour and attitude toward work, and their disinterest in the *contexts* (rising cost of living outpacing average income; the need for two earners; documented increases in working hours) that may have shaped those concerns in the first place.¹³⁰

Explaining entitlement

A number of participants, likely drawing on public generations-management discourse as much as on their own experiences, made note of younger people's entitlement and unrealistic expectations but tried to account for them sympathetically, connecting those qualities to a contextual factor: the well-intentioned miscalculations on the part of parents. Don, for example, said of parenting older children that "you do kinda have to push them out – I think a lot of this generation has been spoiled [...] a lot has been given to them quite easily". He told me he wanted his kids to suffer - just a bit – so that they would have to struggle to find a way to be successful. He saw struggle as a way of building

¹³⁰ Although some statistical reports show a *decrease* in average working hours, critics have convincingly argued that any decreases are likely the result of increases in part-time work, much of it on the part of people who want full-time work but are unable to get it. Miranda, Veerle. 2011. *Cooking, Caring and Volunteering: Unpaid Work Around the World*. In *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, no. 116*: OECD Publishing. See also Turcotte, Martin, 2007. 'Time spent with family during a typical workday, 1986 to 2005'. *Canadian Social Trends*. February; On the US, see Gilson, Dave. 2011. "Overworked America: 12 Charts that Will Make Your Blood Boil". Mother Jones. San Francisco, CA. According to the OECD, Canada ranks 4th (behind Mexico, Japan and Portugal) in average number of hours worked (paid and unpaid) per day. See OECD, 2011. 'Who's Busiest: working hours and household chores across OECD. Accessed September 23, 2011 at http://www.oecd.org/document/60/0,3746,en_21571361_44315115_47567356_1_1_1_1.00.html

character and resilience. But he did not see this as a problem faced by parents at all points in history. "It's increasing in recent generations," he said; "the post-war baby boomers [...] all worked hard and were very profitable" and they wanted to hand it on to their children. But their children, he said, are spoiled as a result.

Nicole, a former librarian with a remarkably politically-conscious career, said the same thing: "It was the previous generation's desire to bring up their children with a sense of self-confidence... but their entitlement is unbelievable!" She sympathized both with the desire of these parents to make things comfortable for their children, and with the children's desire to draw lines between work and not-work. But, she said, "I guess it needs to be reasonable lines. There's a difference between having a sense of what's fair and [...] a totally egotistical [...] attitude." Citing an example from her days in education, where a student walked in and demanded an A grade based on effort alone, she continued: "That sense of entitlement, I think is going to be a real problem in workplaces. I agree that it's gone in a healthy direction" but, she concluded, only to a point.

Danielle saw the same "sense of entitlement" among the younger estheticians she had worked with over the previous few years. "It almost seems like they feel like... it's a sense of entitlement. Almost like, well 'It's a given - you should pay me just because, and I shouldn't have to do [things I don't want to]'. " Echoing the sentiments of others, she said that her young coworkers and employees did not realize that "It's *not* a given, you have to earn what you want." But she traced this mismatch between young workers' entitlement and employment realities back to parents.

I know people my age who've had kids and stuff, it's almost like they're trying to be more friends with them. So their kids feel like 'well my parents just gave me whatever'.

Teachers, Danielle said, were complicit too, because “now you can’t fail a student.” Danielle’s tone was more bewildered than angry, but she was critical of what she saw as a culture of entitlement, incubated by parents and teachers, and spread by young people like the younger estheticians she worked with.

Penny, the administrative assistant whose words opened this dissertation, had grown children of her own. When she disparaged the culture of entitlement and lax parenting she saw around her, I asked whether and how she and her husband had tried to do differently in raising their own family. Penny pointed to a combination of deliberate parenting practices (Sunday dinners, conversations about social issues) and socio-economic factors (albeit at the family level) which preceded those practices – namely, having one earner in the family while the children were growing up. Ostensibly because of the values Penny tried to instill in them, her children each traveled with humanitarian organizations to developing countries and gained an understanding “that they are not the only ones [in the world] and there are many that do without.” Her children were aware “that they only had one income because we couldn’t afford the extra dance lessons and the swimming lessons”, but rather than feeling deprived, they “realized the economics of having a mom at home.” According to Penny, these experiences – financial hardship or limitations, plus the example of socially-conscious parents – are what kept her children from the entitled, selfish behaviour of their peers.

In a way, the discursive balance between contexts and concerns is somewhat shifted in these accounts, away from young people’s whims toward the impact of parenting practices and increasing affluence. But looking closely, the focus is still largely on concerns - parents “wanting” to give it all to their children and the “desire” for confident children. Moreover, the picture Penny paints is atomistic, where the burden of shaping the next generation falls to individual parents and their practices raising their own children.

The difference between "what's fair and a totally egotistical attitude"

Penny's desire for her children to recognize "they they are not the only ones" hints at an important point subsumed within the discourse of generational "entitlement." Specifically, while Penny at first focused on young workers' expectations about trivial perks such as coffee machines and ice cream at the office, she was arguably more incensed by self-centeredness or ignorance on the part of young people who did not view themselves as "global citizens". In other words, ironically, she was dismayed at the culture of atomism she pinned mainly on people younger than herself, even though she took an atomistic approach to global citizenship herself: "individually it's really up to me to give back," she said when explaining her charity work, "because I've really got so much."

Kathy, the retiree who thought the "pendulum" had "swung too far toward individual needs" in the workplace, also went on to connect this perception to a wider culture of atomism (as opposed to interdependence) developing in the world around her. She used the example of a TV show she saw once about a group of "young brits" trying to find out where their clothes came from. The group went to India and worked in sweat shops, but to Kathy it was clear that they did not appreciate the meaning of what they were doing. One of the girls kept going for smoke breaks when she was supposed to be working, which Kathy said was a sign that young people don't realize "that other people are affected by their behaviour."

The changes Kathy and Penny were most worried about were changes toward what they saw as a more individualistic, self-centered way of moving around in the world. Nicole's remarks, also already discussed, spoke to a similar idea: she worried that young people did not see a distinction between "having a sense of what's fair" and having "a totally egotistical [...] attitude." The point that the three women seem to be making is that, while they (Nicole and Kathy in particular) shared young workers' desire for fairness and balance, they have different conceptions of what fairness and balance are.

The problem, for Kathy and Nicole especially, was that to them the young people they had in mind were resisters – not crusaders. When Kathy was dissatisfied with the state of the world, she threw herself into work, trying to be the person “on the inside” asking questions, getting involved with social justice movements, publishing books on the state of income inequality and welfare in Canada. Nicole crusaded too, during her time with radical political groups in the 1960s and 1970s, and in her profession as a librarian. There is, thus, a rift or tension between “fairness” as an overtly political concern which demands public, political, community-oriented action, and its manifestation as an individual withdrawal from the aspects of work and society one feels disenchanting with. This theme will be picked up again in later chapters.

“Work is not the essence of life the way it was for us...”

Although William initially organized his articulation of generational differences around the concept of entitlement, he segued into a commentary on the work habits of younger colleagues, which he took as a sign that work’s centrality to life was different for them. “They finish at five and then they go off to their other lives,” he said – “except the ambitious, ambitious, ambitious [ones]... but they’re still not as ambitious as our generation.” William did not come right out and say that the old way of doing things was more virtuous, but his narrative suggests that he felt that way. “Work is not the essence of life the way it was for us,” he told me, attributing this in part to the “struggles” his “generation went through.” He and his contemporaries knew that their “grandparents got through the depression”, and this knowledge made them deferent toward both older people *and* work, as a privilege and an obligation. Younger people – people my age, he said – were less cognizant of their position, as another interviewee put it, “standing on the shoulders of giants”. “How much praise do you give the feminists who came before you?” William asked me, smiling and friendly. “We had to work that hard to make things happen.”

Forty-two-year-old lawyer Raymond perceived the same kind of attitude toward work on the part of younger co-workers – evidenced in their inclination to leave work on time and draw rigid boundaries between work and home. But where William appeared bewildered, if not critical of his younger colleagues' behaviour, Raymond praised his for their sensibility about work and life and the putative need to separate and balance the two:

People who entered into the workforce after me are just inherently more self-aware and wiser. You know I think that uh, the uh, that people are attuned to the kind of work-life balance, like early, really at the onset of their career. [...] I didn't have a work-life balance, like my life was work, and it didn't seem strange. [...] You can kinda see where different people hit a wall where they say 'is this all there is?'

Raymond contrasted the attitudes of the "self-aware" and "attuned" junior colleagues with the habits of his senior colleagues, his mentors at the firm. He recalled when he and his wife were preparing to buy their first house. He knew at the time that a senior lawyer at his firm lived in the London neighbourhood in which they intended to buy, and he asked this fellow what it was like, living there. "I couldn't really tell you," his colleague answered. "It's dark when I leave for work in the morning and it's dark when I come home." Raymond's position on this was clear: the senior lawyer's life was not ideal, and yet it was the model he had followed in the beginning of his own career. He had since loosened up and recognized his own imbalance as "strange", but he thought that lawyers coming into the profession after him were much quicker to recognize imbalance and resist it. The narratives of younger participants – people around the age of Raymond and Williams' junior colleagues – support the two men's interpretations of the importance young workers place on subjectively-defined notions of "balance."

"Our goal is mainly to do well in our lives, but our work isn't our life"

Many of the younger people I interviewed – people in their twenties and early thirties – were keenly aware of the accusation that they are a “spoiled generation.” Their responses to it (usually unprompted by me) involved positioning themselves, and young people in general, as the vanguard of a new way of doing things, soon to be the dominant mode of doing things for all people. They rarely denied the early-life struggles of their elders, but they directed attention away from work and career goals toward “life goals”, definitions of happiness and success, and other ends.

I asked Caroline, a 27-year-old Personal Care Worker, if she thought there were any differences between the way she approaches work and the way her parents did. She responded with a general statement: “They were so driven to do well in the business world or well in their careers and I think our goal is mainly to do well in our lives, but our work isn’t our life.” We were in a group interview with two other twenty-something women, who piped up and said ‘yes!’ as Caroline made this point. One of them – 25-year-old Lila – added that “the baby boomers [...] “had a *real* strong desire to do well,” but people in her generation were “starting to choose a lifestyle instead of working their holes out for material comforts.” In a separate interview, 30-year-old Cameron, the research scientist, offered a similar interpretation. “Younger professionals recognize the importance of trying to balance work and things outside of work,” he explained, while a lot of older professors, by contrast, “forgot to balance their lifestyle and all they have left is work.” On surface, these articulations of perceived generational differences call to mind the notions of “central life interests” and “work orientations,” setting work in opposition to “home” and, interestingly, *life*, which is constructed as what happens outside work.¹³¹ While this could be taken to support those older theories, the argument that will develop in subsequent chapters will reveal that it is not so simple.

¹³¹ Dubin, 1956; Goldthorpe *et. al.*, 1968.

Moreover, not every person who advocated a “work-life balance” celebrated or defended it unequivocally. Alice, a 29-year-old illustrator, pointed to the undesirable side of the “younger generation’s” approach to work. She saw some value in departing from the ways of life demonstrated by her parents, but also felt like some of the people her age took this departure to a detrimental extreme. “You’re not going to love your job 24/7,” she said, and this is the misconception she saw propelling her peers to switch career tracks incessantly. She worried about these friends, who jumped from degree to degree, never settling into a job. “In the meantime they’re just working meaningless jobs, and you think you could probably find something *more* meaningful than the part-time job you’re working. Maybe not go to school for the rest of your life.” I asked her why she thought people did this, and she said,

I think there’s a lot in the sort of society and our parents’ generation saying to us, you know, ‘you should go to school, and find out who you are and what you really want to do’ [...] and there’s also a lot of other... like job security is not [good]; it’s harder to get like a full time-job that has some sort of upward trajectory. It’s more like ‘I could do this and it’s not going to go anywhere, so maybe I’ll do something different.’

For Alice, her generation’s challenge (contrasted with “our parents’ generation”) and its ideal strategy, is to find a balance between doing exactly what you want and just doing *something*. In other words, a person should fall somewhere between the perceived generational trend toward prioritizing leisure pursuits, identities and relationships, and the persistent necessity of earning money within structural constraints. A commonly acknowledged way to do this, as will be shown in Chapter 4, is to find a career or job that enhances, rather than limits, one’s life outside paid employment.

GENERATION AS A SOCIO-HISTORICAL DYNAMIC

Having introduced the discursive framing of generation as an axis of difference, I turn now to a discussion of the other prominent usage of generation-as-discourse – namely, as a device for articulating perceived socio-historical change.

Technology: "It's changing people. It's changing the way people think."

Wherever social change was concerned, interviewees often immediately brought up technological advancements in the world of work – seemingly the most obvious changes they could put their fingers on. In many of these instances, young people and younger “generations” were positioned as the experts on technology: quick to adapt to it, and notably more comfortable with the impact technology appears to have on social relations, as well as the relationship between work and home, public and private, and other contested dichotomies.

William, who was cited earlier deploying the idea of generations in his explanation of credential arrogance, remarked about the way young workers seemed to be at ease with rapidly-changing technology, as well as rapidly intensifying expectations about constant, real-time telecommunication. He saw technological advancements as opening up new opportunities, but also presenting new challenges, and threatening or cheapening certain experiences and tasks that William believed should be slower and harder to complete. He illustrated this as a generational matter with the following story:

I don't... I'm not sure how I should put this. I'll give you an example. When I went to regional headquarters for the first time, I was working for the first time in a new open cubicle, an open workspace. I wasn't used to that because I in the past I used to have my own office. [...] So I wasn't used to an open office concept. And... this is so old that I had one of the first walkmans. So... I brought my walkman to work and

plugged myself in. So the director general walked by and saw me with my walkman. He didn't say much but he kinda looked and he talked to my boss, then he went to his office and then put out an edict that wearing walkmans was unprofessional.

Now, this was in the early eighties, now I didn't have anything to do with the public, ok, I was working in a cubicle... and I mean this is the time when you didn't even have the computers of today and emails and whatever it was – you picked up the phone. I was still typing [on] an IBM electric! [...] Now, I hire [name of intern program] students – I have for the last couple of years – they wouldn't work without their iPods! OK? They work - the whole idea of multi-tasking and all this other stuff, I mean I fundamentally have a problem with that; I say multi-tasking is a computer function, not a human function. [...] You have seen, probably, the texts that say, as a generation, attention deficit is much greater than it was before. [...] I just read [...] 860 pages about Charles Darwin and Captain Fitzroy. I haven't *seen* people of that generation with really big books! It's like, 'give me the Cliff's Notes!' I'm not saying this to be offensive, it's just that the observation is there [...] from my perspective, I'm being an old fogey... but to see people pulling their phones out every five seconds and checking, it's like 'what is on there that's so important that you need to do this?' And it's not work-related. But on the other hand as a manager I have a Blackberry that I found useful but I didn't spend all my time on it and I certainly didn't look at it at night. I was very disciplined on that.

Esame, a 31-year-old marketer at an art gallery in London, described a similar connection between younger workers, technology, and the expectation to use technological advancements to increase productivity – but she was decidedly more positive in her assessment:

It started changing when I was in university, like since we got the internet and you know, productivity just went up and that people are required to do the same amount of work or even more – I think if anything there's more expectations especially when it comes to customer service – there's a lot of people who had secretaries and have been working there for sixty years and some of them can't use computers and get frustrated you know, because we're so fast at it.

She went on to share that her father, who had moved from an operations-focused job at a plant into a managerial role, was recently given a Blackberry. He was slow to learn how to use it, mechanically, but he was also very slow, according to Esame, in getting comfortable with the culture of mobile communications – carrying it with him, checking it, and responding to emails and messages immediately.

Even 41-year-old Jake was flummoxed by the ubiquity of cell phones in Canadian society. (At the time, for the record, neither of us owned one.) His take on the situation is interesting because he acknowledged, and then consciously *resisted*, the tendency to pin technological changes on young people. Thus while he did not wish to use generation or discursively related ideas to make his case, he knew that he could, and it would make sense because so many people do it.

It's gonna be like – you need [a cell phone] – I am going to need one, and to just write it all off as 'ohh, those young folks' is just stupid, like I don't wanna be one of those old people. So it's dangerous but I do see – there'll be a table of people and they're all on the phone talking to someone else who's not there and I'm thinking 'this is wrong'; or I'll see a couple on a date and I'm thinkin' 'Buddy... what are you doin'? You can't possibly relate to someone.' And that's why I keep going back to these people [bush people he met in Belize]. When you meet them on the trail they take your hand with both hands like this [*he demonstrates on my hand*] and they

look you right in the eye and go *'wah. Wah. Wah.'* There's this human... not like 'I'm gonna get something from you' or anything like that – it's just, I'm a human being on the trail, greeting you as a human being, and just... *hello*. And we're getting further and further away from that.

Farouk, a 35-year-old stay-at-home father and former business owner, thought that younger people's fluency with technology made them less present at work, and highlighted a very different approach to work from that of older people. "Obviously the use of technology in their lives" is different, he said, thinking of "some young clerk texting while he's standing at the cash register where older people would never do something like that. They take their jobs a lot more seriously, although they can be lazy in their own ways." But Farouk also noted that technological advancements could make for even tighter connections between people and their work. Of experiencing the advent of email and computers while he was already a young adult, he said "I think that's a generation X sort of thing," which he contrasted to today's "kids" who "are growing into" computers and email and smart phones:

That's where it's going [...] that's where money is being dedicated to so these kids are going to be much more [adapted]. I think you're going to get less and less families [...] people are going to be married to their jobs, maybe they won't be married to Google or to Yahoo, but they will be to work in general.

Farouk worried about what this would mean for the future of families and societies. As is clear from Jake's comments on technology as well – his disparagement of a decline in face-to-face, truly "human" interactions – research subjects could embrace technological change or they could view it as a threat to the values they held dear. Additionally, it is evident that social and technological changes are visible to these interviewees in the behaviours of individual people rather than on some other, supra-individual level.

Opportunity: "Other women flung open the doors."

Technological change was definitively the most commonly referenced change or shift in participant narratives, but it was not the only one. Particularly among post-secondary-educated interviewees over fifty, the notion emerged that the range of career opportunities for young workers had exploded since their own entrance into the world of work. Often, this theme came up as older women reflected on younger women's increasing opportunities.

For example, 59-year-old Phoebe, retired from a career in the Canadian Navy, explained her entry into that occupation at the "propitious" moment when a government report had just publicly pushed the military to open its doors to women:

Now the reason I joined the forces, and this is I guess significant – [it was the] end of third year, I'm looking through the things for 4th year and thinking 'this makes no sense – it's a waste of my time, it's a waste of the university's time, it makes no sense.' So this was nineteen-seventy... four... and in 1971 or 2 something like that the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was formed; 73-ish they tabled their report, which slam-dunked almost every federal institution, the forces among them, for being not at all hospitable to women, not an equal opportunity employer, and so the forces was told – they were not *asked*, they were *told* – to get on with it. [...] So I walked in at a most propitious moment.

Phoebe's personal narrative, from beginning to end, was braided with a larger cultural narrative of the gender revolution, as well as a family narrative about strong women in her lineage. "I stand on the shoulders of giants," she said, proudly. "Would I have forced my way in? I know women who would have, but I was not one of those women. So I was blessed to come along at a time when other women had flung open the doors that I was then able to walk through unimpeded." Phoebe was

thus very aware of what it meant to have come of age in an era when women were working outside the home in great numbers (a point I believe she wanted to convey to me, in case I might not recognize my indebtedness to this accomplishment). The undesirable alternative to working outside the home had been conveyed to Phoebe through one of the “storylines” running through her family’s house:

My grandmother on my mother’s side was the only one of my grandparents who did not go to university. She apparently went to a finishing school. When she was in her mid to late thirties, her husband died of appendicitis. She had no marketable skills. He had an insurance policy, and that’s what they lived on. And basically it was running out just about the time she died. [...] She was adamant – she had two daughters and a son, in that order – she was adamant – *adamant* – that the girls would go to university and that they would be able to support themselves, whether they needed to or not.

Setting aside for the moment the important point that women *continue* to face occupational barriers and earn less than men almost across the board, this emphasis on women’s increasing opportunities surfaced in other interviews as well; it is there in William’s question to me (“How much praise do you give the feminists who came before you?”), as well in the following, somewhat humorous anecdote from Michelle, a 67-year-old retired teacher. When I asked her about “changes in the world of work” over her lifetime, she said:

First of all I’m amazed at the choices your generation has. I remember students coming up to me and saying, ‘Miss, [...] I can’t decide whether to take environmental science or environmental engineering’ [...] I said ‘I’m afraid [I can’t help you], I’m from the ‘teacher, nurse or secretary’ era.’

Michelle laughed as she recounted this story, and went on to use the word “amazed” several times in highlighting the changes between the world of work she entered when she left high school and the world in which today’s young workers are starting out. Mary, a 36-year-old donations organizer for a charity, said that her mother had her career opportunities delimited as a woman who was “too tall to be a flight attendant,” and therefore “settled” for being a secretary. In all of these examples, generation-as-discourse played a central role in articulating social change. That is, having been asked about changes in the world of work, participants zeroed in on gender, but they used the language of “generation”.¹³²

Gender roles

Gender was not only salient in discussions of increased career opportunities. It also emerged alongside generation in participants’ reflections on related changes in the way heterosexual couples negotiated the demands of raising a family vis-à-vis each partner’s career aspirations. Brad and Jody, both in their early thirties, brought their first child home a few months before we met, and decided together that Brad would stay home and raise their son while Jody returned to work.

Brad touched on generation as he tried to explain the reactions he received to his decision to be a stay-at-home dad, and in so doing he wove in the earlier-discussed theme of generational differences in work’s centrality to life. “The older... well I shouldn’t say that...” he began, and then he said that the forty-to-fifty-year-old men he encountered had been a bit cold about him staying home while Jody worked, but *older* men, in their mid-fifties and up, were often very enthusiastic

¹³² In other women’s stories, the effects of gender and gender inequality vis-à-vis employment income, the division of household labour, the responsibility for caregiving etc., were plainly visible to the researcher, but conspicuously un-reflected upon. Helen, 69, experienced a rupture in her mid-30s, when her then-husband left her suddenly to care for two children on her own. She had been a supporting breadwinner while the husband was out of work, and she was faced with the obligation then to be a primary breadwinner supporting the family by herself. She did not articulate this experience as a gendered one, nor did she situate her career and opportunities within or alongside the wider narrative of a “gender revolution”, like Phoebe or Mary did.

about him being a full-time Dad. "After fifty," he surmised, "it seems like people have a bit of a shift in their thinking and they're more open to the idea of people not having to work or not wanting to work and spending more time with their families."

Thirty-five-year-old Farouk was going through a similar experience. Having only recently begun staying home with his two children while his wife went to work outside the home, he felt like he was at a crossroads. He was confused about whether to return to paid work, and if so, where to do it. "The only thing I have really clear in my mind is creating a family unit for my kid to grow up in properly," he explained. "I don't wanna work like, I don't wanna work 50-60 hours a week. I wanna see my child grow up. I wanna see him..."

Farouk said this in response to a specific question: I had asked him about whether having children had changed his perspective on work. I was expecting something along the lines of a realization that a family needed stability and provision, or that he started to see his work as a contribution to his family. Instead, he explained that he saw it as a tricky balance between provision and not being around:

I think financial, obviously financial support is important but I'm not that one guy that thinks - I mean, I'm meeting [...] parents who, in pre-kindergarten are thinking Harvard and Yale for their kids, you know? And... I just don't see it, you know? And I'm not even there yet for myself but I'm trying to raise my child in a way that I'm present and maybe that's because my father was always working so I never saw him that much so I never really knew who he was. [...] I don't wanna be that guy and I know that that's not me so I can't be that even if I tried. [...] My point is my wife's got a steady job with the government right now, my role [...] has changed [...] she'll probably be the main breadwinner and I'll probably be a supporting breadwinner to that... whatever our family needs.

He continued this thought again later in the interview, when he talked about his future aspirations, and like Brad he connected these gender-related considerations to the wider shift toward what Raymond called “being attuned” to the need for a balance between work and not-work:

I think about getting involved in politics [...] and working my way through, you know, the sort of political career. I find it interesting, I find the issues interesting. [...] But I find it too consuming. And then I go back to [...] what it is I wanna do [...] for my family. So there's always that conflict. I always find that. I don't know how many jobs are out there that you can find that work-life balance, unless you're someone who owns your own business or you're a professional like a doctor. [...] I think we're going crazy we're just working these hours and we're not enjoying it.

Computers and Brains: Witnessing the Growth of the Knowledge Economy from the Outside

In addition to technology- and gender-related shifts around work, other interviewees pointed to the (perhaps overstated) shift toward a so-called “knowledge economy.” The best examples of this narrative came from 82-year-old Victor, a retired power plant worker, and 50-year-old Roy, an electrician. Victor's narrative was loosely structured into two parts: the first took place in the small town in New Brunswick where he grew up, a place he left as a teenager looking for work, returned to on the hopes of establishing a career, but ultimately left again, this time for good, when he was in his late twenties. He worked a series of jobs in Ontario – as a gas station attendant, at an appliance factory – before finding his “best job” at the power plant. But toward the end of his career there, he noticed a change. The company started hiring engineers – younger people who had been to university and gotten degrees. “The more brains that went in the place, the worse it got,” Victor told me. “The good workers, the old guys, they would find out the shortcuts, by workin' together,” he explained – that's why they could “do a big job [...] in a day or so”, while the engineers took three

days “doing it the engineers’ way.” The “engineers’ way”, according to Victor, involved always saying “that’s not safe, you can’t do that.”

Roy described a similar shift in his working life story. He had worked as an electrician all his adult life, since he was 17. While his own entrance into the trade seemed normal at the time, he noted that the “young guys” who started apprenticing lately were going against the grain of a dominant push into “computer-oriented” jobs – jobs that happened “at a desk”. Roy emphasized that the young people, like him, were “mechanical grunts” – they were still smart and *could* use computers, but they simply did not want to. He worried that if young people continued to be encouraged to work in professional or knowledge-based fields, society would lose the ability to build the infrastructure needed to support those very fields:

Too many people out there lookin’ for computer jobs. We need hands-on people, because the hands-on people make the machines that make the computers [...] machines make computers. If you don’t have anybody to make the machines to make the computers [...] that’s what I think is gonna happen.

Victor and, to a lesser extent, Roy’s accounts support well-established findings about class and work restructuring, for example from Sennett and Cobb’s now-classic *Hidden Injuries of Class*. These authors argued that “de-industrialization” and the de-valuing of manual labour engendered strong negative reactions against white collar work among blue collar workers, and equally strong defences of the virtue and value of working class jobs and manual labour. But at the same time, Sennett and Cobb argued that these changes inflicted scars on the lives and psyches of working-class men (and some women). Victor and Roy’s words highlight the way such changes get attached, discursively, to the wave-like introduction of new “generations” – “these young guys” – to the workplace. The whole world of things and institutions, norms, values, expectations, politics and social structures around Roy and Victor is changing, but in their narratives it is evident that such

changes are experienced through interpersonal interactions with new coworkers who carry the seeds of social change, or are in all of the important ways the embodiment of it.

The way generation is used here differs from how it is used in the more vitriolic condemnations of one generation or another discussed earlier, which tended to wrench individual behaviour out of context or, at best, place it in the still-individualistic realm of relations between lax parents and spoiled children. Where participant narratives focus on social change they tend to attempt, in Archer's terminology, to hold objective structural and cultural enablements and constraints (*contexts*) in the same frame as subjective, individual *concerns*.¹³³ Interestingly, generation appears as a discursive tool to accomplish this task.

However, participants normally tended to overstate both the extent of social progress (particularly when it came to women's increasing opportunities) and, relatedly, the power of individual choice; in other words, they focused their attention on changing *concerns* as a site or driver of social change, which they thus envisioned and articulated in voluntaristic terms. Even some of the younger participants – who are presumed to have benefited from the “giants” who came before them – maintained that making a living seemed like more of a struggle today, but at worst, they saw their trajectories (their ‘projects’, in Archer's terms) as limited only by what C. Wright Mills called “private troubles.”¹³⁴ At best, interviewees skimmed over structural/cultural enablements and constraints, framing their working lives as a series of voluntary choices, driven mainly by subjectively-determined concerns. The following quotation from Lila, 25 (a snippet of which was presented earlier), illustrates this well:

¹³³ Archer, 2009.

¹³⁴ Mills, 1959/2000.

Most of the baby boomers grew up quite poor when their parents came back from the war and they *really* had to make do. They wiped their asses with the Sears catalogue... literally. So I think they had a *real* strong desire to do well, to be successful and [...] they rejoice when the fruits of their labours kind of paid off - so I think there's definitely a really strong work ethic there - you know, work hard and sacrifice, and provide for your family. [...] So that's changed. Now, I think there's kinda like two levels now, like, so one big thing that's changed is in their generation [...] a single parent income would suffice and in our generation it's just not [enough]. And I think we've been in that kind of time period for some time now and I think we're starting to see a little bit of rebellion towards that, because it's just, I mean, before you could have a single parent income and a car and a nice house and a cottage and a boat [...] maybe [people] are starting to choose a lifestyle instead of working their holes out for material comforts.

Two things stand out here. First, unlike most of the participants quoted thus far, Lila points out that significant structural changes are occurring, particularly around what she understands as a growing disparity between costs of living and wages. Pointing to these socio-economic shifts is, in a sense, an appeal for understanding from others who might judge her "generation's" approach to work negatively. However, she also advances the idea that there are more voluntaristic cultural shifts happening too, in terms of what "people" will and will not accept as a life well-lived. In her account, young people are positioned against these changes as more attuned to the new way of doing things - the way people are "starting" to "choose" to live, albeit in light of circumstances they did *not* personally choose. Lila's words are a reminder that although generation-as-discourse *can* direct attention to the life-shaping intersections of biography and history, it is malleable enough that it does not always do so.

"In our day": generations, time and social change

Some participants who drew on generational discourse used it to convey the sense that individuals have "a time" or "a day" to which they belong, or which belongs to them. Victor, for example, began more than one story with the words, "in our day..." Interestingly, this turn of phrase struck Julian Marias, whose interpretation of the early 20th Century work of Ortega y Gasset was presented in Chapter 1, as a salient bit of evidence about generations.

When an old man says 'in my day' he is referring not [to] the present in which he actually lives and peaks but to some past time. Although he lives today, it is apparent that this is not 'his' time. To which portion of the past does he feel he belongs? With what zone of his life does it coincide? When an old person speaks of 'my time,' meaning some past period, he seems to reveal that he lives in the present as an exile or an alien. Are not our lives formed by the very subtle essence of a certain period?¹³⁵

Indeed, among the people I interviewed, the youngest (in their twenties and early thirties) generally conveyed their sense of 'belonging' in the present – as was demonstrated earlier, for example, in their proficiency with current technology and surrounding norms. The oldest (those as young as forty up to the octogenarians) relied on generation-as-discourse and its language of estrangement from changing societies to point to certain characteristics and behaviours as patently "generational," and then convey a distance, withheld judgment, guarded neutrality and bemusement. Coming from people who self-identified as "older," setting themselves apart from youth in their narratives, these deployments of generational discourse served as an admission that they felt like "strangers in time."

¹³⁵ Marias, 1970:11

The next several participants support Marias' point, positioning themselves as aliens in the present: curious, but unable to judge the rightness or wrongness of the situation before them. They explained that young people face different challenges today than young people did in the past; they would shrug, laugh, or otherwise signal that young people's responses to challenges seemed quirky, but at the same time, they made it clear that they did not feel in a position to cast any definitive judgment. Lynn, a sixty-five-year-old retired from a career in Human Resources, is a good example. When our interview turned to her children – one of them in her mid-thirties, the other in his early forties – I asked Lynn if she noticed any differences between their approach to work and her own. She moved rather quickly from a description of her children, specifically, to a statement about their "generation" (although she recognized the clumsiness of the concept, in italics):

I think that 30-40 generation [...] because generally their parents were pretty comfortable financially, that – I think that generation, *for lack of a better term*, expect that they will have the ability to have good jobs and that kind of thing and I'm not sure that that's being delivered. I think they're much more respectful of the need for balance than we were in my generation.¹³⁶

Lynn figured that people her children's age want work to be "more than work." I asked where she thought that difference came from, and while she was not sure, she took a guess: growing up, she knew "there was no opportunity" for her parents to help out if she lost or quit her job or was underemployed. Her kids, however, "are pretty aware that their parents could" support them financially if they decide they do not like a job. But Lynn shrugged, stopping well short of the sort of disparagement characteristic of the 'spoiled generation' argument introduced earlier. "Hopefully that won't get in the way of them ultimately resolving their live issues that they need to... and get on

¹³⁶ I used the word "generation" prior to Lynn's use of the word.

with it." Her point seemed to be that young people's work habits were different, and puzzling, but only time would tell whether they were positive or negative.

Jake, the 41-year-old artist based in London, Ontario, was similarly unsure about what young workers *ought* to be doing in order to succeed, even though he could identify some of the key challenges they were up against. Looking at his own field, he said there was "more competition" for artists today, which was hard on young artists who "expect things to happen quickly." That part, however, was "not new" – he expected the same immediate rewards when he began his career – but he said he sometimes wondered if today's young workers would "have the self-discipline" to keep going when success did not come quickly. But, fitting with this category of perspectives, and admitting he was wary of "being *that* old man", he left the last part as a question.

Jake, Lynn and several others drew on the idea of generations – and the discursive alignments therein – to say that they are outsiders to the world young people inhabit, and therefore offered no firm opinion, only questions. Others, like 82-year-olds Victor and Peggy, along with Kyle and Don, both 51, used words like "scary" to describe the world faced by today's young people just launching their careers. At times, they cast themselves as so out-of-place in the present that they doubted their ability to "make it", if they had to start over again today. Michelle, the retired teacher, told me that today's young people had *courage*, and they needed it, because today's world of work was a lot of pressure and rapid change. Consistently, participants who, like her, thought the labour market and economy had gotten tougher in the last decade or so, were more sympathetic and far more reserved in their judgments about young workers' approaches to making a living. They took both *contexts* and *concerns* into consideration, and thus remained somewhat neutral about the latter.

From some of the younger participants, the other side of the “strangers-in-time” story is visible. The next quotation from Ferdinand, a 35-year-old working in TV and audio production, illustrates this idea well.

My parents have different ideas about how much money I should be saving, how much debt I should carry. I don't think they've ever had a balance on any of their credit cards. I recognize the value in that and I'd love to be there. I've been there at certain places in my life but it's not where I am now. It's a goal as opposed to like a 'duh, everybody does this and if you don't it's financially irresponsible and it's morally bankrupt.'

In the above excerpt, Ferdinand casts his parents as “strangers in time” who do not appreciate his concerns or his context – Ferdinand's world. His work arrangements, which are widely accepted and legitimized by his same-age peers, also struck his parents as abnormal. “The idea that you can work from home is commonplace now. Then [in my parents' time] it would have been, 'you're lazy or you're a scammer. Something's going on.'”

But even Ferdinand, along with several other interviewees in their twenties and thirties, felt themselves torn between the “new” ethos vis-à-vis making a living and the “old”, which they associated with their parents. Ferdinand acknowledged that his career broke the mold in some respects. “You know, people are flabbergasted that I stayed at that place for ten years,” he told me, signaling that the confluence of contexts and concerns creates the conditions for very particular relationships to work; in other words, people on either ‘side’ of perceived generational divisions appeared, to Ferdinand, to have different views of what “makes sense” (or is “judicious” in Archer's language) for a person to do vis-à-vis making a living.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Archer, 2009:215.

Liz, a 31-year-old bureaucrat, experienced similar reactions to her work trajectory. She told me that “compared to other people my age and even a little bit younger, heck – the fact that I stayed 2 years with the division is an achievement. By the time I left that group, out of seventeen positions I was in the top two senior”. Generational divisions came to the fore around issues other than job tenure too, and most notably, the sense emerged that members of the “younger generation” hold one another to a generational standard around work-life balance and work effort. For example, 36-year-old Mary, a donations organizer for a charity, had recently “corrected” her approach to work, bringing it more in line with her peers – and, I would argue, her *perceived* “generation.”

I would see people going in at 9 and leaving at 5 and they had a life after work and they didn't think about it [...] I really had to take a hard look at myself because I felt like a burnout was coming on [...] and say 'yeah, you know what? It's a job. Period.'

Twenty-five-year-old Melanie was similarly conscious of the way her approach to work did not jive with that of her same-age peers, and her reflections on this theme are striking. Thinking back on the example set by her father, she used generation-as-discourse to explain her own growth away from him as a “working role model”:

He's like, the one working role model I have, I would say. [...] He always just worked really hard, did what he could and [...] didn't have many friends... his family was always like his support net. I have to say that I probably did follow his model for a long time [...] which isn't very long [...] but I always was like, a workhorse. For what I lack in intelligence I always made up for in working my ass off. I'm trying really hard to balance work and life more now. Because I've realized that I have maybe neglected friendships and neglected relationships within my family because of work in the short time that I have been working since university. So [...] I think that I have been following probably that model, and I'm trying to get away from that now.

Because I do, I am recognizing that it's important. So yeah that's my Dad's generation. I think my generation is more focused on work-life balance. *So I'm just trying to move into what other people my age expect from relationships I have with them.*

The poignant message here is that it feels difficult, uncomfortable, and not very rewarding (in the right ways) for one's *concerns* to be out-of-step with one's same-age peers, with whom one shares, to varying degrees, a *context*. The desire to fit in, and the tension between familial traditions or examples and wider cultural currents, as Melanie's case shows, is articulated in the language of generations.

POINTS OF REFERENCE

Melanie's focus on her father highlights another theme around generation-as-discourse in working life stories. In addition to the leeway the discourse offers in terms of how generational differences and dynamics are explained or understood, it also affords a degree of freedom in terms of the sources of evidence people are able to draw on in their reflections on generation. In other words, people offered as many different interpretations of what generation *is* as they did interpretations of *why* generations apparently differed.

While some participants had direct experience working with people they categorized as belonging to other generations, others, like Melanie, rooted their understandings of generations in the realm of kinship, reflecting primarily on themselves as parents and/or children. While in some cases, participants pointed to or implied *continuities* or *similarities* between their working lives and those of their parents or children, discussions of generation were most vivid and central wherever participants felt rifts between themselves and their parents or their kids vis-à-vis the way they approached and thought about work.

Fifty-one-year-old Kyle's remarks also point to this. "I grew up in the 60s and 70s", he told me. "What I grew up with when I was very young was my father having back pain and being in a bad mood because he hated what he was doing." His father, an insurance salesman, eventually went back to school for a teaching degree. "There was such a change [...] he really loved what he was doing, finally, and it made all the difference in our family life." This experience led Kyle to pursue what he wanted from the beginning (a career as a writer), which, he said, is essentially what today's young people are criticized for doing:

I don't buy it [the 'this generation has no work ethic' argument]. I'm the end of the baby boom and the baby boomers were famous for not having a work ethic – for going off and doing you know traveling in Europe and whatever before settling down. And certainly I grew up with those ideas but I think kids now are an awful lot more focused and they're a lot more worried about it than we used to be. I think they work hard.

Seeing the approach his father took to work as a salesman, Kyle was determined never to relate to his own work that way – he never wanted to work a job he disliked, or to put all of his time and energy into something he felt anything less than passionate about, and he viewed this father-son connection as a generational phenomenon, connected but not entirely reducible to kinship. This theme emerged in other interviews as well.

For instance, the complicated relationship Jake had with his father was one of the spines of his working life story. His account of traveling to Europe instead of going to business school as a young adult unfolded against the backdrop of differences with his Dad. He assured me he loved his father, but he did not want to live like him, and did not feel understood by him. When he recounted his father's death, he said it was "like a weight had been lifted", even though he grieved and missed him intensely. He felt free to pursue his working life "project", in Archer's terminology, without the

judgment or misunderstanding of his father, who could not comprehend his concerns because, as Marias might put it, the “coincidence” of context and the “zone” of their lives was different.

Farouk similarly admitted to “working through my father’s [...] influence.” His perspective on his father made him keenly aware of how and where his own jobs (when he had them) intruded on the time he could spend with his children. His primary focus, when we met, was trying to figure out how to balance what he knows he wants “to be as a person” with what he wants “as the career that defines me, sort of thing.”

Bettina, a 31-year-old freelance journalist, also zeroed in on her relationship with her parents as an instance of intergenerational tension and differences. Wherever she thought about generation, she thought about them and their approach to paid work in particular. As the excerpt below shows, the latter served as a model for what Bettina did *not* want to do – just as it did for Kyle, Farouk, Jake and many others. Moreover, interestingly, Bettina uses the precise language of “concerns” to point to their differences.

I think they’re more concerned about money and making sure you’re settled in the end, whereas I’m more concerned with kind of a day-to-day sort of existence and making sure that I’m enjoying what I do when I wake up in the morning, um and I didn’t see that with them. I don’t wanna poo-poo their lives at all but I could tell that they were suffering on some days. And it’s not that I’m lazy but I just don’t – I don’t wanna wake up doing something I really don’t wanna do just so that forty years down the line I’ll have enough money to do whatever I want or even like buy a house cause that’s... that is not my goal at all and I think that’s what my parents’ goals are to like, to buy a property and make sure you have cars and stuff like that and I have a minimalist approach to what makes me happy in life I guess so... that is not as necessary.

Bettina, Farouk, Kyle and Jake are among the participants who share what I will argue (in Chapter Four) is a *disaffected* relationship to work, and theirs is brought into sharpest relief wherever their narratives turn to their parents. Their parents, in turn, are characterized as having a different sort of relationship to work – relationships I will call *faithful* or *ambivalent*. The next chapter provides a more comprehensive account of each of these three relationships.

CONCLUSION: CAPTURING GENERATION-AS-DISOURSE

Linguists, especially those who translate from one language to another, sometimes face a problem they call “polysemous discourse.” This term denotes words that have multiple meanings and can therefore only be translated reliably and correctly when viewed in context (that is, in a sentence or, even better, the text of a conversation). Polysemy aptly describes the many different ways in which “generation” is used in the narratives introduced in this chapter. Attending to context in order to arrive at the right sociological translation—that is, the right analysis – in this case means not only drawing in the contextual factors in narrators’ lives, but also paying attention to our best estimation of the intent behind the narrative—the answer to Riessman’s question, “why was the story told *that way?*”¹³⁸

When it did come up, generation was used by the people I spoke to in a range of ways. In some instances, it was used as a way of distinguishing between people of different ages. Looking at others, they used phrases like “that generation” or “the younger generation”; trying to explain their own behaviours or values, some told me about “my generation”—that is, their own generation—and described its particular, shared approach to doing things. But many interviewees who used the term later qualified it, most without being prodded to do so, by asserting that not every person of a given age could be made sense of according to generational divisions, and that divisions themselves

¹³⁸ Riessman, 1993:2

were hard to draw and defend. In other words, ordinary people feel the clumsiness of generation in their hands when they try to apply it to themselves and others. To resist making assumptions about it as a category of people, then, is not to say 'ordinary people are wrong', but that they are *right*. It supports their suspicion that generation is not an obvious or infallible category of the social world.

Nevertheless, drawing on the work of sociologist Margaret Archer, I have argued here that generation-as-discourse, as a 'mental structure', *can* allow people to grasp and articulate the interplay of "subjective" and "objective" forces in human life – Archer's "contexts" and "concerns," which refer in the crudest terms to structure and agency. Where generation-as-discourse does this best, it supplies subjects with a vocabulary for understanding that the "constraints and enablements" they and others face depend in part on their location in biographical and historical time. They draw on generation to advance the idea that actions and ways of life cannot be judged without attending to "objective" circumstances. Wherever participant narratives foreground the cultural and structural facets of generation, they point to the compatibility that the idea of generation has with Archer's terminology – namely, that what participants call a "generation" is, on one level, a group of people with similar concerns who encounter similar contexts (affordances and resistances) at similar points (what Marias would call "zones") in their lives. When they encounter others with different combinations of concerns, contexts and biography, generation appears as a useful discourse for articulating the difference. But in some instances, *only* the subjective side of generation-as-discourse appears in working life stories, and it is in these instances that generational conflict comes strikingly to the fore.

This raises a crucial question: are there indeed different intersections of *contexts* and *concerns* evident in the working life stories gathered for this dissertation? And if there are, how might they connect to or correspond with perceived "generational" divisions? In other words, now that we have heard how people talk about generation in their narratives, it is incumbent upon us to

ask how their perceptions map onto the 'reality' depicted by all of their working life stories combined. This is the task of the next chapter, where I introduce three dominant ways of 'relating to work', as captured in three distinct types of working life narratives, and ask how they line up with the rough generational boundaries identified by interviewees, social scientific literature and popular discourse.

GENERATIONAL DISCOURSES AND RELATING TO WORK

PEOPLE DO NOT WISH 'BY NATURE' TO EARN MORE AND MORE MONEY. INSTEAD, THEY WISH SIMPLY TO LIVE, AND TO LIVE AS THEY HAVE BEEN ACCUSTOMED AND TO EARN AS MUCH AS IS REQUIRED TO DO SO. WHEREVER MODERN CAPITALISM BEGAN ITS TASK OF INCREASING THE 'PRODUCTIVITY' OF HUMAN WORK BY INCREASING ITS INTENSITY, IT CONFRONTED, IN THE PRECAPITALIST ECONOMY, AND INFINITELY OBDUROUS BARRIER IN THE FORM OF THIS DEFINITION OF WORK.

MAX WEBER, *THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM*
(1904/2002:23)

In one of sociology's most influential works, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, German sociologist Max Weber made a major, eloquent argument: that work had "moved to the centre" of modern life through a "long and continuous process of education and socialization". This process was originally rooted in, but had since been detached from, Protestant theologians' belief that "this-worldly work" was a sign of salvation, and labour an end in itself.¹³⁹ Weber argued that "the idea of an 'obligation to search for and then accept a vocational calling'" which was central to modern people's lives at the time of his writing was not rooted in human nature, or some in-borne motivation to work for money, power and prestige; rather it was "the ghost of beliefs no longer anchored in the substance of religion."¹⁴⁰

This ghost, Weber wrote, formed a new economic ethic – a modern economic ethic – in which work was elevated above "the 'worldly' realm of pragmatic considerations [and,] to the devout, endowed with subjective meaning." It marked a significant and pivotal departure from the

¹³⁹ Weber, M. (1920). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (T. Parsons, Trans. 2002 ed.). New York, NY: Routledge and Sons, p. 24.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xlvii.

previous, “traditional” economic ethic, in which work was seen as “necessary drudgery,” “to be avoided as soon as customary and constant economic needs were met.”¹⁴¹ In other words, Weber painted a picture of two modes of what I have been referring to as “relating to work”, modes which, in his view, confronted one another in modern working life – that is, before the modern ethic overtook the traditional.

Weber was, by his own account, concerned with people’s “motivations” and “beliefs” and not (explicitly) their narratives, nor did he view the two “ethics” as matters of *discourse*. But his typology arguably points to two competing discursive constructions of work’s place in human life (and its place in the metaphysical or spiritual world). My interest in this chapter is developing, on the basis of patterns in participant narratives,¹⁴² a contemporary typology of relationships to work, grounded in two epistemological foundations: first, that people’s personal narratives are built from (and in turn contribute to) discourses “which are not infinite in number”;¹⁴³ and second, that discourse is the thing that supplies people with the “unconscious mental habits” that construct the social world as much as they represent or interpret it.¹⁴⁴

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE SINCE *THE PROTESTANT ETHIC*

The foundations identified above are not entirely at odds with Weber’s, nor has the world he wrote about completely disappeared. He knew in his time that the changes he identified were not obvious to the people living through and after them; their interpretations were indeed “unconscious”. “If

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xix

¹⁴² On patterns (i.e., genres and genericness) in narrative, see Bruner, Jerome. 1991. The Narrative Construction of Reality. *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1):1-21

¹⁴³ Vaara, Eero. 2002. On the Discursive Construction of Success/Failure in Narratives of Post-Merger Integration. *Organization Studies* 23 (2), 218. See also: Foucault, Michel. 1973. *The order of things: an archaeology of the human sciences*. New York, NY: Routledge; Somers, M. (1994). “The narrative constitution of identity: a relational and network approach.” *Theory and Society*, 23(5), 605-649.

¹⁴⁴ Purvis & Hunt, 1993:494. Similar claims are made about narrative – see Bruner, 1991.

one were to question these people," he said, referring to his contemporaries, "regarding the 'meaning' of their restless hunt, [...] they would at times answer (if able to answer at all):

'to care for the children and grandchildren'. [...But] they would more frequently offer the simple and more correct answer: with its stable work, business is 'indispensable to life.' This answer is indeed the single actual motivation, and it immediately renders obvious the *irrationality*, from the point of view of one's personal happiness, of this way of organizing life: people live for their business rather than the reverse.

Here, we see the seeds of a well-worn mantra of *today's* world of work: "work to live, don't live to work." For some, they are words to live by. They have been linked to or exclaimed by different so-called generations of workers over the last several decades. And although few people would claim to have "lived to work" and even fewer would say that they *want* to do so, evidence suggests that working to live is easier said than done.

Studies of workers' early career experiences have found that "concern for career success" leads to an increase in working hours, even where workers express a desire to work less and, ostensibly, "live more."¹⁴⁵ Building on or responding to the academic tradition of 'work orientations' and 'central life interests'¹⁴⁶ introduced earlier, studies of mid-career men and women have highlighted gender differences in orientations to this question, wherein men in households with traditional gender divisions of labour appeared to have "lived to work," and men in less traditional

¹⁴⁵ Sturges, Jane and David Guest. 2004. "Working to live or living to work? Work/life balance early in the career." *Human Resource Management Journal* 14(4):5-20.

¹⁴⁶ Dubin, 1956; Goldthorpe, 1968.

gender divisions of labour emphasized that they “worked to live”.¹⁴⁷ Statistical evidence, meanwhile, suggests that we spend more time working for pay – about one-fifth of every year, on average - than we spend doing most other things, and there is a widely-held view that today’s working people are “overworked.”¹⁴⁸

It has been over 100 years since Weber pointed out the “irrationality” of living to work, and asked what it was that *motivated* people to organize their lives around their work; but the question “work to live or live to work?” has not faded from social scientific curiosity, nor evidently has it disappeared from the ordinary person’s vocabulary.¹⁴⁹ The stories in this chapter show that many working people still confront this question in daily life; many are self-conscious about how they answer it, and whether they actually follow through with their actions.¹⁵⁰

But while Weber’s presumptions hold true in some cases, regarding people’s (in)ability to articulate “the ‘meaning’ of their restless hunt,” the narratives that follow suggest that there are a *variety* of standard articulations – cultural scripts, in a sense – about work’s meaning in life. These different narratives are connected to the ways in which people relate to (think, feel and worry about, approach, prioritize, etc.) work, and they are also built from a limited and “generic” supply of discourses about work, workers, employers, earnings and economic life. These discourses and

¹⁴⁷ Emslie, Carol and Kate Hunt. 2009. “‘Live to Work’ or ‘Work to Live’? A Qualitative Study of Gender and Work–life Balance among Men and Women in Mid-life.” *Gender, Work & Organization* 16(1):151-172. The latter men who “worked to live” had to exchange money for domestic labour or squirrel more of their earnings away to enable a comparatively early retirement and shorter working hours.

¹⁴⁸ Bunting, Madeleine. 2004, *Willing Slaves: How the Overwork Culture is Ruling Our Lives*. New York, NY: Harper Collins; According to OECD statistics, the average employed Canadian worked 1739 hours a year, over the ten years from 2000-2009. Across all OECD countries, there has been a decline in average working hours over the last century, but that decline has slowed significantly. Moreover, the main reason it has continued at all is that there has been a concomitant rise in part-time employment. See: Veerle, Miranda. 2009; OECD, 2011; OECD. 1998. “Employment Outlook.” Paris, France (Chapter 5 especially).

¹⁴⁹ Emslie and Hunt, 2009; Sturges and Guest, 2004.

¹⁵⁰ In Margaret Archer’s (2009) formula, this sort of consciousness would be called an ‘internal conversation’ and could be classified according to her threefold typology of ‘reflexives’.

narratives are connected, I argue, to a different typology than Weber's "traditional" and "modern" economic ethics.¹⁵¹

As I will show in this chapter, there is a convincing case to be made now (today) for a three-fold typology of relationships to work, evident in the working life stories of contemporary Canadian workers. They are, on one level, the economic ethics confronting one another in our day, similar to but different from Weber's twofold typology in important ways. Most importantly, they are uniquely about work in a post-industrial, advanced capitalist economy, where "work" is usually taken to mean "employment," and employment means having to sell one's labour in return for wages or salary. On another level, they are three dominant discursive answers to the question of what people "wish to do" by working. If they do not "wish, by nature" to earn more money, what *do* they wish to do through their work? If they wish "to live as they have been accustomed and to earn as much as is required to do so", what are the daily and lifelong negotiations they make in order to do that, given that most *must* sell their labour for pay? Each of the stories in this study tends toward one of three dominant narrative/discursive 'answers' to these questions: there are narratives of *ambivalence* about work; narratives of *faithful* relationships to work; and narratives of *disaffection*—again, not from work on its own, but from work as it is presently structured. On one level, these are types of personal narratives – and that is how they are explored and presented here. But taken together, I argue that they bear evidence of three distinct *generational discourses*.

In what follows, I elaborate each of the three generational discourses, using two exemplary "composite narratives" to illustrate each.¹⁵² Each narrative belongs mostly to a single participant, but details from other narratives of the same type are woven in, in order to protect participants'

¹⁵¹ On "cultural scripts," see Wierzbicka, Anna. 1994. "Emotion, language, and cultural scripts. Emotion and culture: Empirical studies of mutual influence." In *Emotion and culture: Empirical studies of mutual influence*, eds. Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel Rose Markus. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

¹⁵² I am following the model provided by Siltanen, Willis and Scobie (2009).

anonymity and to offer information and examples relevant to the argument being built. Following this, I will explain how the distribution of ambivalent, faithful and disaffected narratives among participants suggests that “relating to work” is a generationally-patterned phenomenon, rooted in and animated by what I have termed generational discourses.

AMBIVALENCE

The ambivalence narrative, in Weber’s terms, has the traditional economic ethic’s emphasis on work as drudgery, but it lacks the clause about only working until “constant and customary economic needs are met.” It includes a reverence for prestige and economic power, but it is dogged by a warranted skepticism about the reliability of the conventional formula (work hard, get noticed) for achieving them in our present economic system, and the logic according to which such prestige and power are doled out. It is a narrative about feeling two ways at once about advanced capitalist work: accepting it as an inevitable, essential obligation which only a person who lacks character would shrug off, while failing to find the promised fulfillment and purpose inherent in just *doing* it. The working life story of 82-year-old retiree Victor is a prime example of this narrative.

Victor (82): “All my life I figured I should be workin’.”

Growing up in rural New Brunswick, Victor and his peers had a relatively short list of employers to choose from when looking for a first job. Victor got his start at a hardware store on his town’s main street. He worked there the last few years of high school – from about age fifteen – and full-time through the summers.

In our day down home just – well you couldn’t think of affording to go to college or higher education... you get through grade eleven and you think well I guess I’ve got to get a job, help the family along, pay a bit of board a week if you’re going to stay at

home... that was just the main thing – just get work. Doesn't matter where or how long as long as it was a job that you could do and bring a few dollars in. It brought very few dollars in!

After the hardware store, Victor went a slightly different route. He considered owning his own hardware store, but he had grown tired of it in those three years of working while he was in high school. Intrigued by older boys' stories of striking it rich in other provinces, he and a friend made the long bus ride to the big city - Toronto, Ontario – in search of a "small fortune." The allure Victor recalled was irresistible; it was also false:

The people who were coming home, all the guys would go up there one year and they'd come home, you know, nice new car and everything – you know what it's like when you're younger – most of 'em were rented cars! They'd rent a car, come home, drive up and down the street, talk to the boys – 'oh yeah, doin' good up there [in Toronto]'.

Victor and his companion spent 1951 in the city, pursuing work in a series of harebrained schemes, from trying to get a job flying planes – for which they were underqualified – to attempting to "strike it rich" at a grocery warehouse. They gravitated toward the latter because they saw it as a chance to "get away from serving customers" as they had done in the hardware store back home, and it seemed like "good money." On the day they went there looking for work, he remembered that there were "dozens and dozens of guys lined up waiting to be interviewed." He and his friend Freddie were among the five asked to stick around, but to their dismay, there were no "good jobs" left in the warehouse, and they were offered jobs inside the store, serving customers. They accepted, reluctantly, and stayed there for three months, but they were broke and looking for better jobs the whole time.

“That’s the first time I have ever been completely broke in my life,” Victor told me, shaking his head. Only a gift of twenty dollars from a friend’s father got them through. When the young men’s boss at the hardware store in New Brunswick called and offered them their old jobs back, it seemed like their only option – and even then, they had to work an extra week to afford the train fare home. “That was our first experience in Toronto. We came up trying to make our way and we came home broke.”

From there, Victor’s story intersects with a tragic piece of Nova Scotia history: the Springhill Mine disaster in 1956, and “the bump” which followed in 1958. When Victor and his friend returned to New Brunswick from Toronto, they did not return to the hardware store. Instead, they found work in the neighbouring province at the Springhill Coal Mine, figuring it was “the thing to do” in Springhill. Victor’s job then was an “awful” one, shoveling coal onto screens all day, breathing in the black clouds of coal dust, retiring at the end of the day with blackened face and hands. But, thanks to a request from his miner father, who was owed a favour by the mining boss, Victor’s job was above ground and thus safer than the jobs carried out hundreds of metres below the surface. On November 1st, 1956, Victor was visiting the post office on his day off. His conversation with a friend came to a halt when they heard and felt a distant rumble and saw a mushroom cloud with flames coming out of it, billowing up from the mine. The men, both members of Springhill’s Volunteer Fire Department, darted to the mines, suspecting that the boiler room had blown up. What they found was much worse:

The whole top blown off the mines there and uh... we were kinda one of the first trucks there and they were just getting the ambulances there and those guys come up – [...] one of my neighbours – well you wouldn’t recognize them there, they were all burnt black – come crawlin’ up out of the ditch there, skin hanging off their faces

just in sheets, clothes all burnt off. Some had their belts on with the lamps but their clothes were all burned off.

Victor carried friends and neighbours away on stretchers – all of them disfigured, one of them pleading not to let his children see him – but all of them died before they reached the hospital. The mine reopened a few months later in January of 1957 and Victor went back to work, above ground again in the lamp cabin, which was a cushy job compared to many of the others: filling out time sheets, keeping lamps charged and ready for use, being able to stand inside. He liked this job, “the money was good,” and he felt like he could tolerate it as a career. But again, his stint there was short-lived. “I had that job ‘til she blew up,” he said, recounting the “bump” in 1958.¹⁵³ Seventy-four miners died in the bump, and over 100 more were injured. Victor and the other surviving miners were employed, two weeks on, two weeks off, for two years after the bump, but eventually the affected mine shaft was sealed up for good, and Victor lacked the seniority to get a job in one of the others.

From there, Victor moved to Edmonton, because without the mine, Springhill had very little to offer, especially where Victor had only a high school education. He told the story of the rest of his life in Edmonton as a series of jobs, usually acquired through the recommendation of a friend or former coworker. His primary consideration throughout was, as he tells it, money. Whether he was working alone at a gas station for a slightly overbearing but benevolent boss, on the factory floor at an outdoor equipment plant, or out in the field with a power company, Victor said he was aware of one, true thing:

The only thing I figured I was good at was nothing. I figured I have no trade, I have nothing. Any job I get I’m gonna have to do my best or I won’t keep the job. You

¹⁵³ The “bump” refers, essentially, to an underground earthquake.

always have that in your mind and it paid off. Seemed like as long as you're honest with people and you do your best...

Of all of his jobs, Victor said that working at the power company outside Edmonton was "the best" he ever had, but it was only great for a time. Eventually, the man who was the boss when Victor started left and "they brought in a new guy." The turning point for Victor, in his feelings about this job, was when he noticed that the company was overpaying for one of its most frequently used parts - he figures they were losing tens of thousands of dollars each year. He spoke up, but the new boss, afraid to rock the boat, told him to keep quiet. Feeling like the old employer-employee relationship was irretrievable after nearly twenty-five years of working at the power company, he took an 'early' retirement package at age sixty-four. "It worked out," he said.

That's one thing about it. I liked workin', I liked it, all my life I figured I should be workin'. But once I had that feeling, yeah, after the last few months there, the way things were goin', I said 'wouldn't it be nice to be away from all this?' You know? And uh, I 'member gettin' up that Monday morning and thinkin' 'oh man, this whole week's mine: I [can] do what I wanna do!'

Victor's ambivalence is clear here, as it is throughout his story. He disliked a lot about work. When he worked, he felt like his time was *not his*. But he apparently assumed that work was just that way, and the best he could do, from the very first job he worked up until the last, was "just get work", "do my best" and keep the job as a result. The payoff - a salary, eventually, and a pension to support his retirement at age 64 - was enough. Victor could not imagine having done it any other way.

Victor's story, in content and in the way it is told, illustrates the way many people in contemporary Canada and beyond relate to work over the course of their lives: work is framed, discursively, as an inevitable obligation they have to themselves, and to significant and generalized

others, to work hard, make a living and be productive (i.e., not idle). Victor's struggles to make ends meet sometimes struck him as unfair, but he believed that if he just stuck with it, he would fulfill his obligation and just *might* see the fruits of his labour. This relationship to work, as a general obligation and inevitable part of life, is one I came to recognize for its ambivalence – that is, its two-sidedness – its mixed feelings about work, the obligation to do it, and the pros and cons of fulfilling that obligation.

People whose stories and reflections looked and sounded like Victor's tended to convey that they believed that hard work paid off, even though their own lives suggested that there were limits to this formula. As a result they seemed simultaneously fed up with work, anxious to retire, fixated on vacations and pay and benefits, *and* emphatic that if given the option to *not* work, despite often not enjoying it, they would continue to do it, and often in the job they already had. Victor's narrative speaks even more specifically to another quality of ambivalence about work – and a central thread of the discourse of ambivalence: namely, the conviction that hard work is virtuous and will pay off if one simply sticks with it – despite biographical evidence that it does not always work that way. People who bear an ambivalent relationship to work, as is clear from Victor's narrative, believe that individuals are meant to put in their time, even if work is boring and even oppressive, and confine their flourishing, expression and joy to evenings, weekends and – at long last – retirement.

Stacey (54): "It's all foreplay to retirement!"

Stacey also grew up in New Brunswick, although she was born and raised closer to the urban centre of St. John than Victor. She started working at 15 because she simply "wanted a job". Her father passed away when she was 12, and the remaining family of six struggled to make ends meet on his pension. Her first job was at a large department store, where she stayed "right up until my full-time adult job" in the provincial government. She never left New Brunswick; her husband, who worked as a property manager, brought in a supporting income, but Stacey's job was their main source. It

was near the end of our interview when I asked her, looking back, if she was satisfied with her career in the public service. "Let me see," she said.

There were times when I thought the work was absolutely essential and I was an absolutely essential employee and all of those things and then it moved to not essential at all, anybody can fill in, and now I'm at a stage – and it's just the phases of your life – I'm at a point now where I've taken on a different philosophy – part of it is because of the way my career has been handled over the last I'm gonna say 3 years; it hasn't been a smooth process for me, and uh, I'd say the last *four* years, and um, I'm back in the job *level* that I want to be at – it's purely about pension for me right now, because I can retire very shortly - so it's, I'm really being um... They say people don't work for money, yes they do, and that's what I'm doing. I'm working for money and benefits.

Granted, Stacey did not mean she was working *literally* for money and benefits alone. "I do like the idea, and I feel satisfied by the idea, that we can be innovative, create some new products," she said,

but the key to me right now, I've learned [...] and it comes through the school of hard knocks, that like gratification comes from what I can do for the staff that are reporting to me that makes their work life more fulfilling and more comfortable because we're in a difficult time in the department, and... um... So my job satisfaction isn't really from a deliverable. It's really nice but I know that in 6 months time it could be completely gone, because it's changing so quickly, so I don't invest myself in – I do everything I need to do, I take all of the steps I need to take, and I continue to be creative and try to inspire that in the staff that report to me but um, my goal is more around dealing with them, understanding their needs and making them into the best they can be in their job.

Thus Stacey did see more to her work than monetary rewards, and she recognized that her efforts were rewarded with things other than pay and a pension. But these intrinsic rewards, of helping her staff be “the best they can be,” did not change the fact that if she could, financially, she would have quit on the spot.

I like to say I’m a fraud and I haven’t been caught yet because my first desire would be to be home, and that’s where I wanna be. Not because I don’t like the workplace because the workplace offers something different but I’m very domestic. That’s what I like. From getting up in the morning to going to bed at night. And it’s not for everybody...

When Stacey’s children were born, she stared down the choice between going to work and staying home, and she reluctantly went to work. “I didn’t think about it because it wasn’t an option,” she recalled. “If it would have been an option I absolutely would – I wouldn’t have worked.” She could imagine better jobs, jobs that would not “feel like work” the way her current job *felt* like work. She said she was “happiest [...] doing something for somebody”, and she got a great deal of satisfaction volunteering at a veterans’ hospital, where she fed patients with Alzheimer’s and dementia. “I go in and they don’t even remember me when I go out,” she said—“but it doesn’t matter.” The ‘work’ of feeding those patients was rewarding in and of itself. The world of paid work, as Stacey had experienced it, did not offer that sort of intrinsic reward. She managed to wake up every day and go, but that was *it* nowadays:

it’s really about coming in and doing my work and leaving at the end of the day. It’s not about anything else, really, for me... and it’s not in a sad way, like I don’t dislike being here, it’s, you know, I’m here and I’m fine, you know, I’ve got a lot of really good people that I work with, and I enjoy them... but again, your thoughts change when you hit the years close to retirement um, I’m lookin’ at it saying you’re – I

described it to somebody that your life is almost divided into thirds – so I see up to the time you start work is the first third and then the middle third you're doing career and your family or whatever, and then... it's all foreplay to retirement [laughs] – so that's where I'm at.

She and her husband had been able to afford a house they loved, and it was the life they'd built apart from work that she was looking forward to embracing more fully when she retired. "I wanna have the relief from a job that is constant high pressure," she said. She also felt pressure to see her grown children through the important transitions they were going through – a daughter getting married, leaving a "shitty job," moving away – and she wanted to use her energy on those familial pressures instead of her job. She said she already did whatever she wanted – she had never been a person who said "I'll quilt when I retire", she did it now – but she wanted more *time*:

My sense of retirement is really – I've built a home that I really love, you know we're living in a nice house uh... typical middle class but I love it. I love my house, I love my yard, I love my husband, I love my – everything about my life is good and I just feel like I want to enjoy it... and have more time to do it.

While ambivalence and readiness for retirement appear to go hand-in-hand here, they are not necessarily a pair. Other reflections showed that people can have mixed feelings about work – wanting to do it and not wanting to all at once – and yet be unable to fathom a life without it. Thus interviewees like 59-year-old Ken, 57-year-old Angela, 50-year-old Roy, 51-year-old Penny and 69-year-old Helen had difficulty imagining full retirement and were even a little afraid of it. Although they did not find work especially fulfilling, looked forward to their 'free time' and did whatever they could to maximize vacation and days off, they told me they thought they would be "bored" when they retired; accordingly, they mentioned plans to continue working, as many retirees in Canada do

in increasing numbers, at part-time jobs – consulting, even retail – after they retired from their lifelong careers.¹⁵⁴

The ambivalent narrative and the discourse on which it draws share certain qualities with the next narrative (the *faithful* narrative): namely, the construction around a continuous and seemingly linear career, and the emphasis on the unquestioned importance of working hard. But narratives of faith differ in important ways. The faithful narrative is closer to the protestant, modern ethic, with its discursive emphasis on work as a virtue, upward mobility as the noblest and most rational of goals, and material well-being and occupational prestige the obvious and delivered rewards of working hard. It tells of lives sacrificed to work, although it does not characterize them as such; instead, it tells of the heartening convergence of individual and organizational goals. Although its tellers might claim to have worked to live, the centrality of work to their movements through the world – the relocating for work, the overtime, the search for more responsibilities, better titles and ever-increasing remuneration – tells another story. This is not to suggest that the faithful are dupes, unaware of their devotion to work, nor does it say that these participants unwittingly put work “ahead” of their families and health; rather, it proposes that they do not see work as drudgery, or unfairly demanding sacrifices, even if it is hard and time-consuming and all-encompassing.

¹⁵⁴ Statistics Canada. 2010. "Labour Market Activity Among Seniors." *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 11(7). Accessed September 26th, 2011 at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/75-001-x2010107-eng.htm>

FAITH

Marsha (55): "I really would like to see excellence prevail."

Marsha, a 55-year-old businesswoman, began her working life story by recalling her experience working on her family's farm – coloured by baling hay, heat and hard work. Knowing that she was now a successful business owner, I constructed a rags-to-riches story in my brain as she described her subsequent jobs. That is, until she revealed that the farm was a hobby farm; her father was a successful entrepreneur, and the family was well-off because of it.

Immediately after high school, Marsha worked as a flight attendant – job she "loved" – while also going to university. She graduated, traveled for four months, came back and got a job working in the catalogue department of a major department store. She found the job to be "a lot like university" in that she was constantly learning, but unlike university it was exciting:

And then, from there, uh, I got into expansion planning and research so there was a period that the shopping centres were opening up right across the country, yeah, and all the major department stores were anchors and so um, we had fabulous time researching the markets, doing studies [...] then we ended up changing the company and the catalogue was closing and they said 'do you want to be a buyer?' and I said 'nononono – buying? Not interested.' [*I ask her, why not?*] I just thought, 'I don't wanna be a buyer.' And they said, 'well, you know, the catalogue's closing and there might not be other opportunities.' I said 'absolutely! I'd love to buy.' [*Laughs*]

Although Marsha did not particularly want to be a buyer, the job was "great" – but only for a year. After that, she made a change and decided to go into her father's internationally-connected business. "I really, really learnt a lot," she recalled. "And that's what I think enabled me to make that transition from a large company - which I'm really glad I worked in - to a small firm." She worked

with her father for four years “and then thought, you know, the writing is on the wall: this is not a growth industry – in this country or this continent.” She maintained that “it was a hard decision to make to get out of it,” but her father was supportive.

All of her jobs were described as learning experiences: as pieces in a larger puzzle she was working on, a puzzle which would eventually culminate in her opening her own business. The “writing on the wall”, which referred to concerns about potential business success and financial gains, told her she would not be able to make money and build a successful business in her father’s industry. Thus, she moved on. She took a position as a marketing director of another company, but she only stayed a short time before setting out on her own as a consultant. Again, her narrative revolved around climbing the proverbial ladder, making a comfortable living, and achieving new levels of mastery in the business world. There is a logical quality to the way Marsha explained her trajectory:

After [that job] I thought, ‘okay this is the time’ for hanging out a shingle. And I did. And the next day – I feel as though I was hung with horseshoes – the next day I had a call from a friend that I’d worked with and she said ‘do you think you could help change [company] into a [different] chain?’ And so – ‘yeah that’s right up my alley’ [...] One thing after another, I guess it was [...two years later] I thought, you know, I should teach a course. Part of that was because I’d had to speak at an industry event and be up on a stage in front of 500 people and [...] it was really scary [...] I’d never been scared by anything like this before and I never wanted to be scared like that again, so I thought ‘I’ll just go practice on these students’.

She continued working for herself for the rest of her career to date, but she made it known that she had not reached a plateau. The narrated subject in her story seemed to always, and still, be actively looking for something new, assessing her satisfaction with where she was and contemplating her

next move. "My basic philosophy, bottom line, is having fun," she said. "And if it's not happening, I'm out of there." But it is clear that "having fun" for Marsha is closely linked to building a profile and maintaining a "reputation" as a business leader. In her words, "when you've got your own business, your reputation is what you have. So you always [go for] an A or an A+." When I asked what drove her to work hard and keep trying new things – if she had a "work philosophy" beyond "having fun" – she said: "I guess I've always felt a sense of responsibility to Canadian retail, in that I wanted to see them do better, be more efficient, and more competitive [...] I really would like to see excellence prevail."

Marsha's story exemplifies the second of the three relationships to advanced capitalist work explored in this chapter, which are formed and found in people's working life stories and the discourses on which they draw. The first (ambivalence) was characterized by feeling two ways about work – feeling disenchanted by it while also committing very seriously to it, and being unable to imagine a life without it. It also involved accepting a contradiction between a belief in the functionality of work, as conventionally organized, and a lingering feeling that something was not functioning properly. The result was a lukewarm relationship to work – careful acceptance of it, without excitement. The relationship evidenced in Marsha's story is characterized by enthusiasm about work, business and the Canadian economy; it is, moreover, the belief *without* the doubt. For that reason, I have termed it the "faithful" relationship to work.

Marsha's faith, specifically, is in the propensity of our political economic system – which can be described as advanced capitalist and neoliberal – to deliver exciting, materially comfortable, highly respected lives to anyone who will work hard and play by the rules. It certainly functioned that way in her own working life story, and as such it is no small wonder she believes in it. She was not alone.

Within a few moments of sitting down to our interview, William told me he had worked 24 jobs, had 19 bosses and moved 9 times in his professional career. He said this as a way of preparing me for what he saw as an interesting, dynamic working life story – which it was. Indeed, I think William was attracted to my study because work was important to him, and he was proud of his relationship to it over his lifetime, even if he did admit to being “a workaholic” at times.

He got his first job on a milk truck at age 14. Then he started cutting lawns, a tiny enterprise he set up on his own, on the encouragement of his father. He spent his money on books. At 16, he got a job at a country club, and later he started working for a power company, helping to install phone lines, followed by a stint as a tugboat operator. In each job, William said he worked hard and got accolades from his bosses. While working on the tugboat, William applied and got into university. His boss made him quit when he found out; even though he had made a comfortable living for himself without one, “he had a vision that [...] education was a key to a better life.” William listened to him, and did a degree in Economics. When he graduated, he got a job in the civil service, and he stayed in the civil service for the rest of his career. Granted, he moved around a *lot*.

The way he told it, he was offered promotions and “trendy” horizontal moves based on his performance as a “fixer.” When departments and working groups had problems, they called him in to help them through the restructuring. He played a role in boosting morale. He was also burned in effigy once, but he was comfortable with the scrutiny that authority brought. “I love it. I love all of it,” he said. “And I stood by all of my decisions.”

There is one simple turn of phrase in William’s narrative that subtly but convincingly distinguishes his faith in work from the ambivalence of others like Victor. Talking about one mid-career switch, from the operational side of the public service to the policy side, William said he looked for a policy job opportunity because he “needed, for *myself* to develop some policy ability.” In other words, he saw his investment of time and energy in his career as an investment in himself –

not in the way one woman with an ambivalent narrative said she worked as a “contribution” to herself, so she could have spending money and stay busy, but in the sense that he wanted to learn more and be better at his job, and he saw his gains in skill and mastery as belonging to him. This is in stark contrast to Victor’s view of time spent on the job as not “his” time.

Other things in William’s story pointed to his faithful relationship to work – perhaps more obviously and directly than anyone else’s story. For example, he said that work was “the essence of life” for him and others his age. He framed his job as “a contribution”, to society and to the government as an institution. When asked directly about the rewards of work, he said it was satisfying to be a “go-to person”, but also to mentor younger employees. Specifically, he liked to help others be successful within the system, and move up in the ranks as a result. In other words, he liked to see the faithful relationship to work developed in other people.

William’s obvious dedication to his job – which was matched, he said, by his wife’s dedication to hers – is also why the couple never had kids. He had arrived at the present in his narrative, and I had jumped in to ask follow-up questions. Having misinterpreted a few times when William made reference to plural “people” at home, I said “somewhere in there, you had kids, right?” He corrected me, and explained why:

No. It was me and my wife, and we’d have the discussion about kids every so often – it was not like ‘oh gosh, we’re fifty and we should think of this – it was more in terms of, uh, uh is this a good time kind of thing. It was, you know ‘I’m waiting for an answer from the [department].’ Well, ‘I will be out of town so you’ll be stuck on your own,’ this kind of stuff. Cause we’re not always in the same city – you know, one of us had an assignment here and the other one had an assignment elsewhere. So we had a ‘base’ if you will, but there was a time when it was funny, we had a base but we were both out of town in different towns! But that didn’t last long.

It is not clear what came first – the strong commitment to work or the low prioritization of having children – but it is safe to say that William and his wife could not have raised a family with their schedule. “On a good week,” William worked 50 or 60 hours. “At other times,” though:

I was working nearly 70 hours a week. The volume was fantastic. My day usually was I'd get up at 5:30 in the morning as a habit from way back when. So I was working on files or reports and things of that nature, having breakfast. 7:30 I'd leave, get to work by 8, and [...] I'm not a smoker, like I said, so I don't think of taking breaks. So those two 15-minute things I – I don't notice them. And lunches, I would force the idea because of health to say, 'change of air, go outside', but often times that was like, once around the block and that's it [...] but I work – and I say this candidly - until 10 to 6 because I need to [...] go through the next building to get to the bus and they lock the doors at 6, so I'd have to walk all the way down the block [...] but oftentimes I would bring work and after having had dinner I would walk the dog, I'd sit down, and I'd do some more files until 11 or whatever... so you know the days were like that.

Clearly, being career-focused had an impact on William's life outside work. This is not to say that a life without offspring is wrong or bad, but William's story shows the cracks in the myth, routinely applied to women, that a person can “have it all” when it comes to career and family.¹⁵⁵ But William's faith in the intrinsic value of working, and respect for those who do well in our complex system of paid employment, appears in his story and other faithful narratives as a buffer against the potentially negative impact work can have on normative, conventional notions of family stability.

¹⁵⁵ See Gerson, 2009 and Doucet, Andrea (forthcoming 2012). *Bread and Roses... and the Kitchen Sink*.

Indeed, on weekends, too, William would go to the office. He would wake up before his wife and their dog, and go to work from 7:00 until 10:00, and then come home to have breakfast with the family. "It was crazy!" he said, laughing. The couple's social life was also kept to a narrow sliver of time and energy by their work. "At one time we lost track of Saturdays and Sundays and where we were at," William recalled. He shared a story to illustrate this. The couple had rented a cottage once, with friends, for 5 months. The idea was to go for at least a few days a week, over the spring and summer. They didn't make it up until month two.

Even William's retirement was framed, in his story, as a contribution to his organization. Just over a year earlier, a colleague had asked him if he had retirement plans. At that moment, William said, "It just struck me that I had not thought about retiring." He said "I'll get back to you." He went home, saw his wife and told her, as though only deciding as the words left his mouth, "I think I am going to retire." His reasoning was this: his department needed new blood, and a fresh start. For William, doing his job well at that point meant stepping aside and allowing his former workplace to flourish without him. So he did, and in so doing, felt "such relief."

Next to the ambivalent relationship, the faithful relationship to work is familiar and strange. It shares with the ambivalent relationship an emphasis on hard work as an inescapable and virtuous part of life. But the ambivalent relationships exemplified in Victor and Stacey's narratives above were marked by doubt; here, in the faithful stories, there is less of that. The narrated subjects in these stories are not jaded or discouraged, even though they have suffered their share of setbacks (the experiences of immigrants are especially illustrative of this). The faithful relationship to work seems to thrive on or inculcate ambition and openness to new opportunities. Faith went hand-in-hand with the presumption that, as one young immigrant claimed, "everyone would like to have a better job," and the corresponding puzzlement, evidenced in another young woman's faithful narrative, when others were content with entry-level, presumably un-challenging work.

But the faithful drive for success cannot be interpreted as entirely individualistic or selfish. The faithful relationship to work rested on a narrative and discursive depiction of *the good of the organization as intertwined with the good of the individual*. William and Marsha certainly conveyed this with their stories, satisfied as they were when they steered organizations in new directions or when businesses excelled. Like others with this type of narrative, they often spoke about their successes and achievements in the collective “we”, and traced the highs and lows of their careers on the same line as the highs and lows of their organizations. In the faithful narrative, the organization’s struggles are the individual’s struggles; the former’s triumphs are the latter’s triumphs.

While not everyone with a faithful narrative said, as William did, that work is “the essence of life,” their working life stories suggested that, for them, it is – and not in the ambivalent sense of work being inevitable and obligatory, but in a different way: work gave the people in these stories purpose, it made them proud, it highlighted their strengths and challenged their weaker capacities. Working hard was tantamount to fulfilling a duty, but to someone or something never explicitly named. The final relationship to work, introduced next, will begin to shed light on the enigma to which the faithful display their work efforts.

DISAFFECTION

The narrative of disaffection involves several prominent themes: first, a strong emphasis on the negotiation of a work-life balance; second, skepticism about the ‘point’ – the economic, spiritual or social rewards – of a life dominated by paid work (as it is organized in the Western post-industrial, advanced capitalist system); third, in some cases, a sincere wish for paid work one is “passionate” about, and in others, a wish simply for work that enabled the pursuit of passions outside paid employment; fourth, the refusal to be ambivalent about work; and finally, a critique of the perceived “normal” or “conventional” way of relating to work.

The term “disaffection” encompasses all of these (at times conflicting) facets, at least in the sense in which I use it here, which comes from the writings of Andre Gorz. In a summary of his *Critique of Economic Reason*, he wrote:

Disaffection with waged work has been on the increase over the last twenty years or so [...] Particularly prevalent among young workers, this attitude finds expression not so much in a lack of interest or a refusal to work hard but rather in a desire that work should fit into life instead of life having to fit into or be sacrificed to one's job or career. Workers, particularly young workers, aspire to (re)gain control of their lives and this increases their awareness of and openness to movements which have this specific aim.

This desire to liberate oneself from, or vis-a-vis, work should not be seen as opposed to the traditional union objectives of achieving liberation *in* work. On the contrary, past experience has shown that workers become more demanding with regard to their working conditions and work relations when their work leaves them time and energy to have a personal life.¹⁵⁶

The stories in this section support and flesh out further the idea of disaffection Gorz sets out above. They shed light on what disaffection looks like, in a life story, and how it compares to the faithful and ambivalent relationships already explored. They illustrate that disaffection is a feeling and a way of relating to paid work, but it rests on a specific alignment of discourse around work, employment, income and humanity.

¹⁵⁶ Gorz, Andre. 1989. *Critique of Economic Reason*. London, UK: Verso, np. Summary accessed November 3rd, 2011 at <http://www.vedegylet.hu/okopolitika/Gorz%20-%20Critique%20of%20Economic%20Reason.pdf>.

Jake (41): "I do say to some friends, you know – 'it's not worth it'."

I met forty-one-year-old Jake in his sparse, bright artist's studio in Montreal. The smell of fresh paint hung in the air; a partially painted canvas idled in a sunken area, behind the table where we sat for the interview. Jake responded to a story about my project in a community newspaper, thinking that his perspective as an artist would contribute something interesting, and could shed light on a career that many people did not think of in careerist terms. While it certainly did that, his story also provides one of the best articulations of the disaffected relationship – something that, in his story, seemed to have begun early. He remembered his entrance into the world of work like this:

I went – studied illustration. I was told – everyone told me you can't make a living as an artist. I grew up outside of Hamilton. And um, my high school teachers, my art teachers, friends and family – nobody knew an artist. It wasn't even a possibility. I actually got accepted for business in university and I – I ripped it up before I showed anybody including my parents. I just realized, after high school I realized I can't – this is just not for me.

Right away, Jake advances a version of his working life story that discredits "everyone" who told him he could not be an artist. This narrative "strategy" – of suggesting what most other people do or think, and then contrasting one's own actions against that standard – was one of the most common ways in which disaffected narratives conveyed their critique of the conventional approach to making a living. It continued throughout Jake's story, with seemingly trivial facts contributing to an unmistakably critical narrative, in which Jake was characterized as different from most other people (for example, he mentioned that he did not own a watch or a cell phone). He recounted the one office job he ever had, and how out of place he felt there, "kidding" himself about his suitability for the organization. After describing how he eventually came to make a comfortable living selling

his paintings, he opined that “our society” is built on the equation of money with success, something he “always fought against”.

I’ve always fought against that in that I don’t think that’s the important thing, but I realize that, for a stranger to put down 800 dollars on a piece of work, that represents them doing x amount of their hours working. That’s them saying ‘your work is worth *this*’ [...] and that’s how we feel justified or relevant, and uh, artwork shouldn’t be that way, like, I could paint canoes – I could paint them for the rest of my life and sell them all – people just love them. If I did that I would start becoming a manufacturer [...] and it’s a tough line to walk and I realize certain pieces I paint are going to be more sellable than others. And I do sell my art [...] I don’t get government grants, I don’t get subsidies, I’ve done it all on my own, and I’m proud of that.

Here, although Jake emphasizes his effort, and his individual responsibility for the living he makes, more often his narrative served to question the place of work in a life well-lived. A key part of this questioning was describing what “other people” do, and pointing out, most often sympathetically, the irrationality of those conventions. This is articulated quite clearly in the following passage:

We bought a house. Like, I’m as much a product of this society as I’m talking... but [...] I do say to some friends you know, ‘it’s not worth it’ and ‘well, you know, 5 more years I get my pension.’ Or you know, and it’s like ‘5 more years? What happens if in 6 years you die?’ [...] I didn’t have a house until 38 and a lot of my friends they’d already paid off their mortgage by then and they had their fancy car and their kids [...] and I was really behind my peers, but I see people when you go travel you’ll see the retirees going and then they’re going on with a walker, they can’t go – they may have the money but they can’t really enjoy you know they’re not gonna go hiking up

the volcano but so... it's a trade off, and who am I to say somebody else is doing the right thing, if their RSPs are doing whatever... that's great.

Beyond the basic point conveyed here, that work is not "the essence of life" as William thought it to be, Jake makes an additional point, which ran throughout his story: specifically, he recounted these conversations he'd had with friends as a way of showing that other people – the majority of people – invested more in their work than they *ought* to, and for superficial, materialistic and un-reflexive reasons. In order to reinforce his point, Jake (like others who told disaffected narratives) had to persuade me that he was intentionally not like these "friends" and "peers" who are ostensibly working their lives away. The excerpt below is a particularly good example of how Jake constructed such an image of himself. Like many of the disaffection narratives I heard, this one positions the narrated subject as almost *crazy* by conventional standards.

You know, I had... there's this outdoor show in Montreal, and you get a 15 foot space, and this was my third time doing it... back in 1995, and I painted a 15-foot painting [*laughs*], one big canvas and I had it uh, at my mom's cottage, outside, it wouldn't fit inside [...] and I'm facing this big, 8 foot by 15, 'what am I gonna paint?' And I went down by the lake and this tiny little fish came floating dead. [I said] 'I guess', and I painted this fish. Anyway yeah, so I put it off, like kind of a smart ass, here I am in this show and I have one painting, everyone else is putting as many paintings as possible. And this has to do with marketing you know I was like, my theory was either you're gonna like the painting or you're not... and this is it, take it or leave it. The first day this guy came by and said 'wow, that's a great rock bass.' And I didn't know what kind of a fish it was, I said 'oh, thanks' [...] and then the second thing is my buddy came by and said, 'Jake, how much are you gonna ask for that?' and I said, 'I don't know, no one's gonna buy it,' and he said, 'Well you need a

price', and I said 'well I dunno, I've never painted anything that big,' and he said, 'you can't say \$10,000 'cause that's just ridiculous, so say \$9600'. I laughed and said 'okay, whatever, 9600.' Well, that afternoon this young couple came by, and long story short, he asked how much it was, I told him I said, 9600 and they said, 'yeah, we just came to the show, we're gonna walk around and we'll think about it.' I thought 'think about it?' So he never showed – I didn't leave, I stayed in my booth, I thought 'is this guy serious? He seemed serious.' And about 4 hours later, nothing was happening and this Texan shows up, and, and, you know he's 6'4", big tall guy, and he just says uh 'I'm looking for Jake Travers [and] I'm supposed to buy a big fish. Okay. I've got the cheque, who do I make it out to? Oh wait. There's two conditions. I work for Patrick Perch' – who was the young guy – 'who lives in Chicago and he needs it, Monday morning in Chicago.' This was Sunday and I said 'yeah I can do that. It's still wet.' He said 'okay, second condition is his name's Perch [...] Can you paint in three-foot high letters 'PERCH', in the blue part. And I said 'I can't do that. It's a rock bass.' He looked at me and he says, 'you're telling me you're not going to sell this painting because it's a rock bass. Just paint PERCH on it.' [...] I'm going, was thinking, 10,000 – 9600 – what I made the year before was probably 9200. That was my whole year. And here he was – he like he started writing it out [...] I said, 'I can't. I can't write PERCH across it. That goes against... and I was, you know I was, I'm sure I was sweating and shaking. And he says, 'well, doesn't matter... we'll take it anyway. And I'm sure they took it, I'm sure they got someone to write PERCH on the bottom, but I don't know about it.

I asked if he was tempted – even for a moment. He replied that he had questions whirling around in his head:

What – who are you? Are you just – and this was going through my mind like a roller coaster – are you doing this just to sell it? Is it just all about money? Which you've always prided yourself on not painting to sell? And it was a real test, and it was a real, it was like, OK, here you go buddy – what are you gonna do? And I said 'no I can't do it.' And I'm thinking 'ohhhh,' cause who else is gonna buy that painting?

Jake told the story knowing – emphasizing even – that his actions would have been considered crazy. Indeed they *were* considered crazy by the incredulous Texan, and they would surely have mystified the friend who encouraged him to charge \$9600 for the painting in the first place. From the opening, where he hauls the giant canvas down to the shore and decides to paint a dead fish, of all of the things around his mother's cottage he likely could have painted, Jake's narrated self in the story is decidedly quirky. This and other examples show that disaffection is associated with marginalization and abnormality; the prevailing perception, at least among people telling stories of disaffection, is that to relate to work in this way is unconventional.

But it is more than strangeness or abnormality; in homing in on moments like the art show above, Jake demonstrates his *irreverence* toward work and especially earning. In contrast to the reverence I found in stories of ambivalence *and* faith in work, stories of disaffection revolve around a narrated subject who is *at* work but not *of* it – willing to do it, but, in line with Gorz's view of disaffection, careful about the place it is allowed to assume in his or her life, and the values it is allowed to elevate. The people producing these kinds of narratives appear to be keenly aware that work, unlike many other activities, has a unique propensity to take over everything else, and it is this weed-like, colonizing tendency of *paid* work specifically that the disaffected relationship, and an irreverent attitude about work and earning, functions to keep in check.

In narratives of disaffection, paid work is thus discursively constructed as *just* one part of a larger human project or purpose; it is one significant activity among many, and the goal is to create

as much harmony as possible between it and other widely varying aspects of life (relationships to others, values, family, home-making, environmental stewardship, leisure, self-development, creative and artistic pursuits, cosmopolitanism, politics, etc.). Everyone espousing a disaffected relationship to work shared the commitment to *not* be ambivalent about work. Faith, on the other hand, was often absent from disaffected working life stories because their narrators *could not* make a living doing what they loved (which could be anything from singing onstage to traveling and making pickles) or what they loved to do would never conform to the conventional model of career advancement and success.

But importantly, and again as Gorz also acknowledges, disaffection does not *necessarily* mean disinvestment from work, working fewer hours or relegating work-talk and work-thoughts to working hours; in some cases, as the next story will show, disaffected people pour everything they have into their jobs. The important distinction between their stories and the faithful or ambivalent stories already presented is that they seem to feel like their life's purpose just *happens* to be the thing they get paid to do.

Maia (37): "I wished I could be like that [...] but it just wasn't in me."

Maia took a lot longer than Jake to figure out where work was going to fit in her life and what she would do for a living. I met the 37-year-old bookstore owner on a rare morning off, having contacted her directly and asked her to participate. I had been to her bookstore many times. It was new but rather immediately successful, like it had been in the neighbourhood for years, and Maia was always there, every day, shelving books, running the cash register, or quietly doing accounting near the back of the room; so I was curious about her working life story. In our interview, I learned that she entered the world of work not knowing she would open a business, let alone a bookstore.

Her very first job was working in a relative's corner store, and she "hated every minute of it." When she graduated from high school, she transitioned right into university. She was "convinced" she would be a psychologist, but she realized quickly after entering a degree program that it was "extremely competitive" and not at all what she wanted to do. Maia said she felt pressure at the time to figure things out, but it was "Pressure put on by myself":

Because I just felt like I needed...I wasn't productive in any way. I just didn't feel it or wasn't - and I couldn't find - and I didn't know how to - that's what I should say is I didn't know *how* to find my next, you know... endeavour, I guess.

She left her degree program and moved across the country, a decision that she highlighted as a formative one. Far away from the town where she grew up, she found a new, different way of living, and it stayed with her long after she moved on. She began taking pictures at music festivals, where she "met, like, this second family" of musicians and fans who "completely changed" her life. "It was completely life-changing, everything about me," she said, "from the way I dressed, it just opened my eyes to other ways to live. Yeah. Which I had never been exposed to before, even in university, which is interesting."

Factors external to work eventually pulled her back home again, but she did not settle into a job.

I went travelling, I came back - it was this constant like, start and then end, for like a few years. I traveled in between and then I'd come back and be like 'what now?' My life was like that for a few years.

I asked if she had any sort of plan at that time, and she continued:

I was really hoping that if - well, there was an excitement in it though, of quitting everything and going on these trips but the coming back to, you know, nothing, so

there... so there... it got to the point where it wasn't working for me anymore. In fact my last trip, coming back was a complete disaster. So, I thought - well because, mostly because at this point I was in my thirties and I thought 'Ookay, I cannot keep this up - so, something's gotta give.'

Where Jake described his difference from the rest of society with pride and even indignation, it is a source of anxiety in Maia's story - not enough to make her want to conform, but it certainly shapes the way she narrates her experience. Still, she laughed as she told this story, signaling that while it had been frustrating at the time, she saw the humour in it now. I asked if seeing her friends settling down had anything to do with her finally feeling that "something" had to give. "Oh yeah, yeah," she said,

And I'd wished that I could be like that - that I had, you know that I could just find that 9-5 job and be happy with it already? But it just, it wasn't in me. I couldn't find it. My family was wishing for it, everyone was you know 'come on already' and I thought it's just not who I am but I don't know how to resolve that, 'cause the world's not really designed for people like me. But I - but strangely enough I think there's a few people out there like that and they don't - you know I've had a few conversations, you know like, 'what do you do?' There's no guidance out there for you and people don't wanna hear it and people want you to commit to a job long term, which makes sense, I completely understand that especially now being on the other end as an employer - I want people to commit, but at the same time, I completely understand because I was one of those people who thought 'I'm gonna leave here eventually'.

The belief that *"the world's not really designed for people like me"* was central to many of the narratives about disaffected relationships to work; it was not always so clearly articulated, but it

was often there, highlighted in stories about confrontations between the narrated subject and other people. In those confrontations, the narrated subject could not make others understand his or her approach to work. Telling these stories helped participants construct themselves as different – going against the grain. Through key stories about her experiences around work, Maia positioned herself as an anomaly among the city's small business owners, first because of her lax approach to managing employees and her stringent ethics, and second because she was a young woman in a business community of middle-aged and older men. She also told stories that conveyed how her approach to making a living set her apart from her family and friends, whose reactions ranged from not understanding to outright castigation. Remembering when she first decided to start a bookstore, she said:

My mother was the - my family were the only people who said 'don't do this for god's sake'. I think from my mother's perspective it was because she knew how much work it took and she just wants me to have an easy life. She wants all of her children to have really easy lives, but what she just wasn't understanding was that easy didn't mean *happy* for me. And, in fact easy meant *really* boring and unfulfilling to me. So I just – there was no way of me making her understand that. Um, so, you know she really begged me to not do this. And um, which she's never been vocal about before. She, I've done crazy like, 'I'm quitting my job and traveling for a really fun month, 'kay? I might move there - I don't know'. And she's like 'alright I'll be here when you get back.' She's always been really supportive of those crazy things that I did, but this one thing that was – like, you know, hopefully going to actually have – it'll be a career for me, the one thing she's always wanted me to have, she didn't want me to do; it was all very ironic. I was surprised that the siblings didn't want me to do it either.

This part of Maia's story suggests that her feelings of being different, misunderstood and on the outside of things stems from having different ideas about what is right, good and worthwhile in life. Regarding work specifically, Maia told stories that showed that she had different ideas about the relationship a person ought to have to his or her job and to money, and how a person's work ought to contribute to society. The excerpt above does this, but it also supports Gorz's notion that a disaffected relationship to work is not necessarily detached or weak. Disaffected relationships do not revolve around upward mobility (like the faithful relationship) or the construction of work (especially paid but also unpaid) as a duty (as in the ambivalent and faithful relationships). In fact, disaffection tended to go hand-in-hand with a rejection of those ideas. But a disaffected relationship could also be a dedicated relationship, as Maia and Jake's narratives showed. They poured themselves into their work – Jake went to Europe with nothing in his early twenties, just to paint, every day, far away from everything he knew; Maia worked day and night to keep the bookstore going – but both of them felt like they were different, because they had found a labour of love.

In all, twenty-three of the fifty-two stories I heard in interviews are stories of disaffection from work. There is great variability among them, but there are also plainly obvious similarities. Interestingly, despite the fact that this group represented the most common story type, they all felt as though their approach to work made them different from most other people. They honed in on instances where their work decisions were called into question by the people around them. They felt like their parents and friends did not understand their reasons for working the hours they worked, choosing the jobs they had when they could have chosen differently, changing jobs when they could have stayed put, turning down prestigious jobs and promotions other people ostensibly would have taken in a heartbeat.

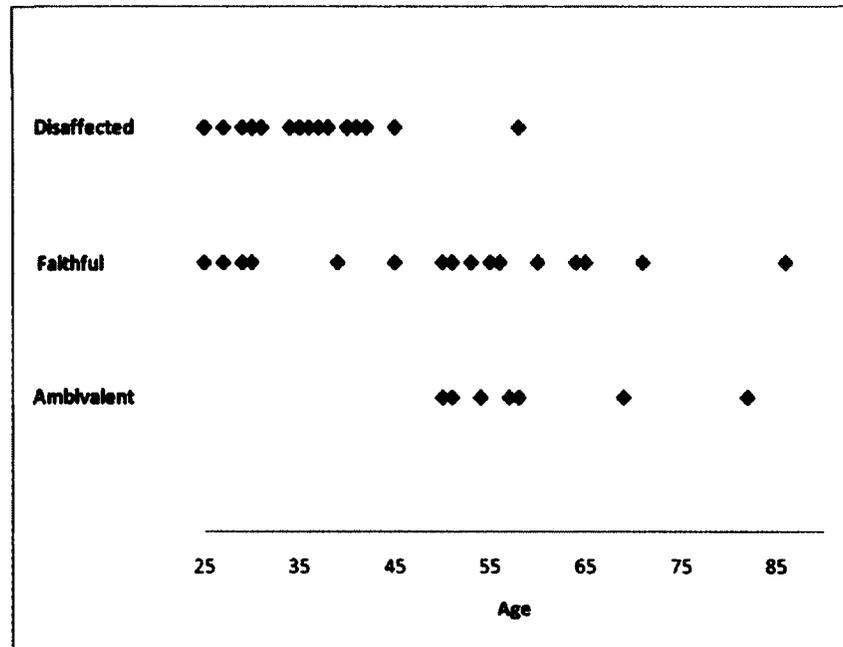
Most of them showed an irreverence toward work and its conventional rewards – mainly money, power and prestige – and they seemed to feel as though they were *required* to emphasize

this point in telling their story, because it would make their approach to work appear rational and thought-through. They emphasized fulfillment, balance, knowing what was “really important” in life, “values”, contingency, flexibility, and happiness. They felt like most people worked too much, were too concerned about money, and fell into the “traps” of complacency and comfort. Despite having, on the whole, no more personal experience with layoffs, downsizing, overwork and underpay than people with ambivalent or faithful relationships to work, they seemed especially attuned to the potential coldness and inhumanity of bosses and workplaces. Many of them were drawn or pushed toward self-employment and freelance work.

Many of them, moreover, were young.

AMBIVALENCE, FAITH AND DISAFFECTION AS GENERATIONAL NARRATIVES

Looking at a table of the fifty-two interviews, organized first by the participant’s age and then by the relationship their narrative seemed to depict, it is clear that the disaffected relationship to work is far more common among the youngest participants – those under forty – and the ambivalent relationship is exclusively found in the narratives of participants aged fifty and older. The faithful relationship falls somewhere in between on the age spectrum, although it is somewhat dispersed between the youngest and oldest interviewees. More specifically, of the eight narratives I categorize as ambivalent, *all* came from participants aged fifty and older. Of the fourteen narratives I categorize as faithful, ten were from participants aged fifty and older, whereas only five were from younger participants: two from twenty-somethings, two from thirty-somethings, and one from a 45-year old. Of the 22 disaffected narratives found, only three were told by participants aged fifty or older. The rest were from people in their forties (5), thirties (12), and twenties (4). The following visual is a powerful representation of these age-based patterns:



I argue that this pattern points to very real, age-based differences in the way contemporary workers relate to work, as regards their own specific jobs and the place of work in life in general. This pattern supports the idea that there are generational differences complicating the work done in multi-generational workplaces, straining relationships between parents and children, and impacting the way the whole world moves from one era to the next.

But it does so in a way that is crucially different from the age-based categorizations deployed in generations-management literature, and it depicts generational divisions on a different level of 'reality'. Specifically, the graph above points to the distribution of different narratives; it comes from an epistemological perspective that holds that narratives can be ephemeral, fragmentary and multiple, and therefore it does not present generational patterns as necessarily lasting, definite or singular. It supports the argument that there are indeed generational divisions and differences which are embodied – put out in the social world of encounters, interactions and conflicts – in the form of discourse about work and how a person ought to relate to theirs. It certainly fits with Karl Mannheim's argument, introduced in Chapter One, that "generations come to

possess a certain mentality” with “certain definite modes of behavior, feeling, and thought” and restrictions on “the range of self-expression open to the individual.”¹⁵⁷ However, as a pattern which hinges on research subjects’ present age, it only speaks to immediate and potentially temporary differences between *cohorts*. Alone, it does not conclusively say much about the intersection of biography and history, that busy and ever-changing intersection of cultural, social, psychological, embodied human, material, metaphysical, ideological and discursive lines that makes generation different from cohort or age.

Nevertheless, I argue that this *is* a generational pattern, and I do so based on two additional points. First, the three narrative types and the discourses on which they draw are demonstrably at play in the conflicts and differences participants called “generational” in Chapter Three. Second, when viewed with an eye to contextual factors – the socio-historical moment to which these narratives correspond – faith, ambivalence and disaffection are shown to be linked to very particular intersections of “lives and times.”¹⁵⁸ The second claim will be explored and supported in Chapter Six, but I take up the first one now.

GENERATIONAL DISCOURSES, DIFFERENCES AND DIVISIONS

In Chapter Three, participants’ reflections on how their own approach to work differed from their colleagues, family members and friends showed that generation (as discourse) is often used as an explanatory and interpretive tool as people consider and try to make sense of their interactions with others at and around work. Near the end of that chapter, I proposed that the differences a number of participants identified between themselves and their parents were attributable to

¹⁵⁷ Mannheim, 1952:381

¹⁵⁸ For a Life Course Paradigm perspective on this intersection, see Elder, Glen H. Jr. 1994. “Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course.” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 57(1):4-15.

differences between opposing or competing relationships to work; their parents, in every case, are depicted in their narratives as having faithful or ambivalent relationships to work, whereas their own narratives fit the disaffection type. Indeed, most of the *clashes or divisions* identified as generational revolved around the friction between disaffection and one of the other two relationship types – and, in some cases, a rift was visible between different narratives of disaffection.

WHEN NARRATIVES COLLIDE

Although they are accompanied by very different levels of respect and sympathy, depictions of younger people's "courage", "self-awareness" and idealism about work converge with reflections on their "entitlement," naivety, and irreverence for work on a similar perception. Specifically, when participants spoke about generation, they gravitated toward a perceived *disaffection* on the part of younger workers. When William lamented the way younger workers "finish at five and then [...] go off to their other lives," he was, then, talking about a disaffected attitude toward work: the desire to put work in its place, to nurture those "other lives" – to have "other lives" at all. The two self-employed couples I overheard discussing their uncommitted employees were also taking issue with the attitude that work should fit into life and not the other way around. When Danielle, 40, expressed aggravation in Chapter Three over the approach some junior estheticians took to their profession – their ignorance of the requirement to "earn" their promotions and income – she too was talking about disaffection. Sixty-seven-year-old Lynn and 42-year-old lawyer Raymond (Chapter Three), surmising that younger people were more "attuned" to the need for balance between work and life, again described disaffection nearly in Gorz's terms: the desire to either limit work's encroachments on other pursuits, or to love it so much that it seems to need no separation from the rest of life.

When Penny said, in the introduction, that younger coworkers lacked a sense of “loyalty” to their organization, she revealed that disaffection has an opposite – an attitude that, when it confronts disaffection, is challenged and offended. She alleged that younger workers thought “the company should be there for them”, with the corresponding implication that the opposite is true: that is, Penny believed that employees should “be there” for the company. This belief, I argue, is part of a different way of relating to work: instead of disaffection, Penny has at least some *faith* in work (even in ambivalent narratives, there was faith) and sees value (and obligation) in committing to work fully.

Conversely, narratives of disaffection revolved around a rejection or skepticism of the premise of faithful relationships to work (that hard work will ‘pay off’ even if it is not intrinsically rewarding or morally fulfilling) and, importantly, a *refusal* to be ambivalent about paid employment. The refusal to be ambivalent is what Kyle exemplified in his reflections on his father working “a job he hated” for the pay alone (Chapter Three). It is there in Cameron’s narrative, when he points to his friends who “went for the money” but found nothing else of value in their work, and to his older colleagues who “forgot” to tend to the rest of their lives, letting them wither while they toiled away in their jobs. It is what Lila meant (in Chapter Three) when she lamented the people who “worked their holes out for material comforts” and praised the ones who “chose” to live fuller lives. And in each of these contrasts, generation was at the centre, serving as the fulcrum point between ambivalence or faith on the one side, and disaffection on the other.

But in several cases, generation appeared as a division *between* disaffected narratives – that is, participants whose own relationship to work fit the disaffected type criticized certain qualities of disaffection, which they perceived in the behaviours and attitudes of younger co-workers, significant others and cultural stereotypes. This happened most prominently in two interviews: Kathy’s and Nicole’s. I argued in Chapter Three that Kathy’s account of the “young brits” on a

television show, and Nicole's distinction between "what's fair" and "a totally egotistical attitude", were both indicators of a view that young workers today are more individualistic and self-centered than previous generations. But they pointed to some qualities of disaffection – disenchantment with work, a desire to draw boundaries between work and not-work, and a weak or contingent commitment to employers – qualities that actually ran through their own stories. Both women had been critical of the worlds of work they moved through; they were skeptical of employers' good will, worried about the effects of capitalism, and prepared to blow the whistle when they saw abuses of power or neglect of disenfranchised people.

Nicole was irreverent about conventional success and conventional jobs early on. She got involved as a university student in radical student politics, and worked for pittance at a revolutionary newspaper. "It made career choices totally unimportant," she recalled. "My justification for living was the contribution I was making to a better society for all." She continued:

the rest of it was for selfish bourgeoisie egotists – materialistic young people who just wanted a house in the suburbs. I was extremely contemptuous of all efforts of people my own age who I had gone to school with, to fit in and get a nice house in the suburbs. [laughs]

She remembered "sabotaging" job interviews as a young woman, and later turning down promotions to administrative positions as a librarian, because she knew she "would not have lasted a day in that regime", even though it would have come with prestige and a higher income. She "led the rebellion" against an insufferable school principal, "jumped ship" at one point to undertake a Master's degree, and returned to her job under new conditions (in the neoliberal political era of education cutbacks in Ontario) "and pretty much only endured" her work from that point on. She believed that people *could* get "enormous pleasure" from their work, but only if they were provided with "at least a minimum of facilitation of them doing what they consider to be a good job."

Kathy, meanwhile, said she had “always been a rebel” when it came to work. She told stories about standing up to bosses, quitting jobs (even well-paid ones) as soon as she recognized they were not for her, and “asking questions and saying ‘It shouldn’t be this way, things should be better, it should be more fair’”. Indeed, Kathy’s whole working life story was oriented toward the belief “that people should be treated better”, although other concerns – earning enough to care for her daughter, for example – occasionally pushed her toward jobs, usually clerical, that were not in line with her desire to make society better. Without a high school education, she did not think she could hope for much more than a decent wage and satisfactory working conditions. But even when material concerns took over, Kathy said that she was always inclined to sacrifice good pay if it meant “doing the right thing” in her work.

One job in particular brought this inclination to the fore. Kathy responded to an advertisement for a job at a transport company, because “it was good money... and the shift was fine.” But when she showed up for her first shift, she remembered, “This woman handed me a big stack of flimsies and said ‘go photocopy these. So I finished it in about an hour and eagerly I went back and said ‘what’s next?’ and she said ‘that’s it. There’s more’. So the job was photocopying. I lasted a day and a half. [...] Even for the money – I couldn’t deal with it.”

Unlike Victor from earlier in this chapter – who, as a high school dropout, figured the best he could do was find “any job”, do it well, and be honest – Kathy “couldn’t deal with” just any job. Even though she knew she lacked the credentials and experience to attain fulfilling (for her) work, she was not willing to settle for less. On one level, this difference between Kathy and Victor is a difference of ambition: Kathy was driven to aim ‘higher’ in terms of job satisfaction. But on another level, this is a difference in relationships to work. Victor maintained an ambivalent relationship with his work, seeing it as a privilege and a curse; Kathy, in contrast, was determined to flourish in her work.

But, like Nicole, Kathy was critical of young people who demanded better of their employers and who were unwilling to bend too far to meet work obligations. This is a perspective they share with some of the more critical voices in this study – Penny and William, for example – but the difference is that while Penny and William criticize young people’s approach to work because they see it as a threat to established orders and the integrity of the system of work they know, Kathy and Nicole seem to say ‘yes, critique the established order, but do it for the benefit of others – not yourself.’ As I argued in Chapter Three, Kathy and Nicole were disaffected but they depicted themselves as crusaders; the young people they criticized were disaffected too, but they were resisters who sought individualistic solutions to what was, for Kathy and Nicole, a collective disenchantment with work in their contemporary economy.

Their critique is both different and similar to the one advanced by Penny and William (among others), and the similarity is important here: I argue that these participants all share a difficulty in accepting disaffection when it is presumably not borne out of experience. That is, disaffection is presented in their narratives as an attitude or relationship to work which has to be *earned*, by experiencing injustice and hardship and *then* working to break free of it. Disaffection is thus an attitude or relationship with multiple possible manifestations – some apparently desirable, others not.

To be fair, it is clear from the narratives of disaffection I heard that many of the research subjects telling them – no matter what age – resisted individualistic thinking; they emphasized the importance of community, interdependence, sustainable living and business practices; they thought about the “common good”; and they saw work as a “social contribution”. But to some extent, many of them also demonstrably retreated *away* from the working conditions they took issue with. Research subjects like Jake, Bettina and Lila seem, on one level, to be cultural heroes – rebellious people who go against the grain, resisting dominant ways of approaching work, rebels worthy of

admiration. But these disaffected participants have also taken the easier of two possible routes to rebellion. Specifically, when things struck them as unfair or undesirable, instead of directing their work toward the resolution of the inequities and injustices they identified, they sought individualized solutions.

Another participant's narrative illustrates this distinction well. Thirty-four-year-old Ginger was a manager at a natural food store, a job she arrived at after nearly ten years of moving between post-secondary programs and jobs in social service organizations. She had considered being an academic, but realized after several failed attempts at graduate school that she was "not an academic anymore" – she simply enjoyed reading and learning as a hobby. She worked as a personal care worker in a group home for several years and discovered that she was "really good at taking care of people's needs", but the experience was draining and she "burnt out" like most of her co-workers. She moved to Kingston, Ontario on a whim, and got the job at the natural food store through a friend of the owner. She said she had come to truly enjoy and appreciate her job even though it was never a goal of hers to work in retail. She liked it, she said,

Because I can go and I can do my job and I can do it really well; I don't take any responsibilities home with me at night, and I still have all this time and energy to pursue things that I am really passionate about – that I'm learning, you know I did my yoga teacher training a couple of years ago, I'm studying herbal medicine right now, um, and yeah... it's just – it's such a great work-life balance, um, that I really appreciate. Some people... spend you know, most of their day working and have very little time at the end of it for leisure and other pursuits, and I just feel really grateful and lucky that I have this part that I work at in this great place that I really like and I really enjoy – you know there's enough different elements that happen every day that I don't feel that I'm bored [...] and there's this whole other part of my

life that I have the time and the energy to do all these things that I'm really passionate about – that give me that sense of meaning and purpose.

Her other pursuits – “which for some people would seem like, like chores” – were things that she said “I wish I could spend my whole day doing.” But she knew she would never get paid to preserve vegetables, to read classics, to make her own medicine, and to learn – not for her whole life, anyway. So she saw her job at the store as a way to enable her to do what she loved the rest of the time. “I don't feel like I'm sacrificing anything or giving anything up” by having the retail job, she asserted, but

my role as store manager doesn't define me as who I am... that's just one little part. I have all of this stuff that I don't get paid for, and that's where my vocation is – what my call is. [...] Have I found my life's work? And is it my life's work if I'm not getting paid for it? Should I find something that I can also get reimbursed for?

She had decided that the answer to the last question was “no.” She liked the arrangement she had made. Like many of the others who told narratives of disaffection, she emphasized the relative unimportance of money and material things. Her decision to work less than she could – like others – was sometimes misunderstood.

I mean, people tell me that I should get another job that pays more money. That's probably the biggest thing – is to make more money. And uh, I've never, ever, ever been motivated to make money. That's never been my desire – to be rich for the sake of being rich [...] and that's a hard concept for people to understand. Family and friends, they just [...] I kind of put it aside and people just sort of know me so [...] it's interesting though because these misconceptions I think that I hate money or I wanna be poor – and I'm like no, that's not the case at all, I just wanna be happy.

I wanna be content and fulfilled and I want to be able to do that with or without a lot of money. It's just that [...] a lot of money isn't my goal [...] I have a whole lot of priorities that come way before making money.

Although Ginger worked to the point of burnout as a caregiver and friend to adults with intellectual disabilities, she later retreated to a quiet life of meditation, gardening, reading and working in a small office. Jake, too, had a lot to say about the culture of materialism and privacy he saw around him, but he focused his energy on his art; he did not speak about political or community-driven change – just personal, individual resistance. Nevertheless, I argue that disaffected narratives do constitute a coherent, separate narrative type from narratives of ambivalence and faith, and there is enough connecting stories like Nicole's and Kathy's to those of Jake, Ginger, Lila and Bettina to justify their placement in the same category.

CONCLUSION

The boundaries between the narrative types elaborated here are, in some instances, blurry. People who told narratives of disaffection emphasized their constant effort to balance “working to live” with “living to work”, and like the ambivalent narrative, they emphasized doubts over the veracity of the idea that one will get out of work what one puts into it. There is a corresponding *irreverence* toward work and its material or reputational rewards is perceptible in their stories. But narratives of disaffection could also revolve around the importance of finding a “labour of love”, and therefore certain iterations of this narrative were distinctly close to the traditional economic ethic, the people in them investing in work only insofar as it enabled their lives to flourish in non-working hours. Others were closer to the modern ethic, the narrated subjects therein finding purpose in their work.

But two qualities set these narratives apart from the ambivalent and the faithful: first, the disaffected *refused* to be ambivalent about work. Either they would find a labour of love to commit

to fully, something that they would have done for little or no money at all, sheerly for the intrinsic rewards, or they would find something they could feel almost *nothing* about, but which demanded a minimal amount of time, energy and emotional investment. There was no in-between. Second, disaffected narratives were consciously told against the grain, constructed as a reaction to or rejection of the “normal” way of approaching and relating to work. There was, in other words, an element of critique always at the surface of these narratives, and an insistence that the narrated subject’s relationship to work was arrived at with eyes wide open. Moreover, the disaffected drew attention to the instances in which they put being happy, contributing to society, lessening their environmental impact, and being in control of their own lives ahead of money, prestige, and power.

It is these central qualities – irreverence, the refusal to be ambivalent, and the rejection of normal or conventional approaches to work – that set disaffected narratives apart from faithful or ambivalent ones, and which appear to cause the most friction between the people telling each of them. And, as I have argued here, the three narratives (or more accurately, the discourses on which each of them relies) are connected to generation in that they cluster along age lines *and* underlie the differences and conflicts people identified as generational. This second point has been explored in this chapter, through a discussion of the way disaffection, ambivalence and faith collide in accounts of generational divisions. But there is additional analytical work to be done with regard to the age patterns evident in the distribution of narrative types. Specifically, in order to make the leap from age to generation, it is necessary to explore the socio-historical contexts that intersect with age-based “zones” of participants’ lives. I take this up in the next two chapters, first (in Chapter Five) asking *why* (i.e., because of what contextual factors) these generational discourses exist as such.

WHY NOW? EXPLAINING GENERATIONAL DISCOURSES AROUND WORK

"IF MEN DEFINE SITUATIONS AS REAL, THEY ARE REAL IN THEIR
CONSEQUENCES."

- THOMAS & THOMAS (1928)¹⁵⁹

What sense can be made of the way disaffection, ambivalence and faith – as types of narratives and dominant discourses about working life – appear to cluster along age lines? Why do narratives of disaffection come primarily from the study's youngest participants, ambivalence exclusively from participants aged 50 and older, and faithful narratives mainly from participants in their fifties and sixties? If, as I have maintained up to this point, this pattern points to generational differences, what might explain the existence of differences? Surely, the pattern is no coincidence of psychology or personality.

In this chapter, I argue that the pattern can in fact be partly explained by some key political economic shifts that have occurred in Canada (and elsewhere) within the lifetimes of the people I interviewed. Importantly, although this is an argument in support of the idea of intergenerational differences and divisions, it takes *generational discourses* as the manifestation of difference that shapes people's encounters with one another, the course of their own lives, their relationships to work, and the sense they make of all three. This analysis links generational differences to discursive shifts, revealing a novel way of viewing the connection between human agency and social change.

¹⁵⁹ P. 572 in Thomas, W.I. and D.S. Thomas. 1928. *The child in America: Behavior problems and programs*. New York, NY: Knopf, 1928.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I summarize the most prominent work-related changes identified by political economists and sociologists (among others) over the last century, focusing specifically on the rise and decline of the standard employment relationship.¹⁶⁰ In a sense, if Chapter Three highlighted the distinction between contexts and concerns in people's use of generation-as-discourse, this chapter zooms in on the actual contexts shaping generations. In the second section, I present two exemplary narratives from each of the three narrative types, drawing attention to the way the lives depicted therein intersect with the key changes in the organization and meaning of paid and unpaid work identified in section one. In the final section, I argue that these intersections of biography and history are accompanied by – and help to forge – distinctly generational discourses (and, in turn, narratives) about the meaning of work and how to relate to it. The implications of this argument for our understanding of social change and human agency are compelling.

CHANGES AT AND AROUND WORK

As established most recently in the previous chapter's introduction, my analysis and interpretation of participants' stories is rooted to a set of epistemological assumptions about the relationship between narrative, discourse and sense-making. Specifically, narratives are built on and contribute to discourses which are available in limited supply, and narratives allow us as humans to understand, make sense of, and in turn *act in* the world(s) around us. In this chapter I add a third and related epistemological assumption: that the "world(s) around us" are bigger and prior to our

¹⁶⁰ Vosko, Leah. 2010. *Managing the Margins: Gender, Citizenship, and the International Regulation of Precarious Employment* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

personal narratives; our experience and location in those worlds have a profound (and reciprocal) effect on the discourses available to us, and the kinds of narratives we produce.¹⁶¹

Complicating this assumption is that our social worlds and locations therein are always in flux. But as much as this complicates things, it also provides an opening for an interesting and insightful analysis into the relationship between changing worlds, changing lives, and the narratives and discourses that mediate between them. It is to the topic of changing worlds that I now turn.

There is by no means a consensus in the social sciences about the severity, scope and nature of changes in the organization of paid and unpaid work over the last century, but there is a general agreement that things have changed, locally and globally, when it comes to the way societies organize and complete the work of sustaining and reproducing themselves. In Canada in particular, four key changes dominate in social scientific accounts of work-related shifts over the last 100 years; all are visible at the national level, but also embedded in wider transnational or global political economic transformations. Importantly, key shifts in all four of the political economic dynamics outlined below are traceable to one common period from around the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s.

There is a rather widely-held belief that the last forty years are marked by a decline in job stability and tenure – the end of “jobs for life” or “the company man”, in colloquial terms. But in Canada at least, job stability and tenure appear to have remained relatively stable over the last thirty to forty years.¹⁶² However, more rigorous examinations have pointed to the fact that

¹⁶¹ The distinction between “making sense of” and “making” reality is a slippery one, and the implication that narratives construct reality as much as they represent it is accepted here.

¹⁶² Heisz, Andrew. 2005. ‘The Evolution of Job Stability in Canada: Trends and Comparisons with U.S. Results.’ *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue canadienne d’Economie* 38 (1):105-127.

temporary, casual and contract work has *spread* into sectors where it was not before, has risen in key industries and among certain populations, and may be difficult for conventional survey instruments to capture.¹⁶³ In interviews, moreover, the *perception* of a decline in job stability was widespread, and affected the way participants thought about work and generational differences.

With this caveat in mind, the first transformation marking the narratives in this study is the creation, rise, zenith and subsequent decline of the “standard employment relationship” or the SER. Although a debate continues to simmer around the angle of this decline, there is significant and convincing evidence that the SER – a constellation of job permanence, working on-site for a single employer, and the 40-hour work week – has given up considerable ground to non-standard employment relationships, characterized by temporary contracts; freelance, home-based or agency-mediated work; and irregular or part-time schedules.¹⁶⁴

As political economist Leah Vosko has shown, the SER can be traced back to early 20th-century international labour legislation, which established what she calls the “three pillars” of the SER through a developing regulatory framework designed to hold the international community to a specific standard in employment relationships. Those three pillars – standardized working time, employee status (i.e., paid instead of self-employment) and continuity of employment – were maintained as the dominant structure of employment relationships and “reinforced” through regulated and normalized collective representation and bargaining; they were also cemented in the gendered organization of social reproduction, where women bore responsibility for domestic labour and childrearing, and men were presumed to be the primary breadwinners whose main (or only) responsibility was paid work.

¹⁶³ Vosko, Leah (ed.). 2006. *Precarious Employment: Understanding Labour Market Insecurity in Canada*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, p. 18-23.

¹⁶⁴ Vosko, 2010. For a dissenting view, see Fevre, R. (2007) ‘Employment insecurity and social theory: the power of nightmares’, *Work, Employment & Society* 21(3): 517-535.

But around the late 1960s and 70s, and continuing from the 1980s, the SER was partially (albeit significantly) “eclipsed” by other, non-standard work arrangements. The percentage of full-time paid employment (as a portion of total employment) declined in Canada, just as it did in the US, Australia and the majority of European Union (EU) countries.¹⁶⁵ The regulations that had upheld the SER as the dominant employment relationship relaxed, there was a concomitant decline in union activity, and new technologies allowed businesses to operate (and capital to flow) in patterns that were increasingly “disembedded” from time and place as conventionally understood.¹⁶⁶ There is, then, a jagged historical faultline around the late 1970s and early 1980s, separating the world of work (and the organization of its paid and unpaid manifestations) of the immediate post-war era from the world of work as we know it today.

The statistical evidence around this shift is significant, but mixed. For one, the drops in full-time and permanent employment have not been particularly steep. In Canada in 1983, 78% of all paid jobs were full-time positions; by 2006, the percentage had fallen to 72%.¹⁶⁷ From 1986 to 2006, the percentage of jobs that were *permanent* full-time dropped from 67% to 63%, while the incidence of temporary work grew “rapidly” from 1997 to 2005.¹⁶⁸ But in 2011, the percentages of both permanent and full-time work appear to have risen again, while the percentage of part-time work and the incidence of temporary jobs have fallen.¹⁶⁹ However, the direction and size of these changes depend on the age of the workers in question. From 2006 to 2010, the over-25 age group

¹⁶⁵ Vosko, 2010:74-75.

¹⁶⁶ On the decline in trade unionism in Canada and the US, see p. 225 in Jackson, Andrew. 2010. *Work and Employment in Canada: Critical Issues*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. On late modernity and disembedding, see Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity.

¹⁶⁷ Vosko, 2010:75.

¹⁶⁸ Statistics Canada. 2010. Study: Temporary employment in the downturn. *The Daily* (November 26th).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

experienced gains in full-time employment, while the 25-and-under group experienced losses; all three saw increases in part-time work.¹⁷⁰

A second and related change commonly identified in social scientific research is the rise in women's labour force participation. A look at Canadian statistics on this subject shows a mostly steady increase in the percentage of women in the labour force (versus those who are not working or looking for work). In 1953, fewer than one-quarter of all Canadian working-age women (14 and older at that time) were in the labour force. By 1975, the participation rate in this group had doubled, and in 1993 it was 57%.¹⁷¹ The percentage of women aged 15 and over in the labour force has continued this climb, sitting at 62.4% in 2010.¹⁷²

Of course, this dramatic shift in the gender composition of the labour market affected not only women, but men, children, families, employers, and the Canadian economy as a whole. Moreover, it is not a story of women suddenly "deciding" to enter the labour market in great numbers. As Vosko has documented, the influx of women into the workforce has deep roots in earlier political and legal struggles over the place of women vis-à-vis paid employment, and the role they ought to play in social and economic reproduction. One significant piece of this historical story, according to Vosko, is that the changes in employment regulations that allowed or encouraged women's increased participation neglected to address who would be responsible for social reproduction – that is, if women began working outside the home for pay in greater numbers, who

¹⁷⁰ Statistics Canada. 2010. 'Full-time and part-time employment by sex and age group.' Accessed October 4th, 2011 at <http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/labor12-eng.htm>

¹⁷¹ Basset, Penny. 1994. Declining Female Labour Force Participation. *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 6 (2).

¹⁷² Statistics Canada. 2011. 'Labour force, employed and unemployed, numbers and rates, by province.' Accessed October 3, 2011 at <http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/labor07a-eng.htm>

would bear the responsibility for domestic work and childrearing?¹⁷³ This neglect has arguably contributed to increasing pressure on families and governments (which often download the burden to families) to figure out how to raise children without withdrawing partially or completely from the labour force and incurring the social and monetary costs of that withdrawal.

Women's increasing labour force participation was accompanied by their enrolment in post-secondary institutions in greater numbers, but there has actually been a rise in post-secondary enrolment across the board. This is the third political economic dynamic of relevance to the working life stories in this dissertation. Specifically, enrolment has *doubled* in Canada since 1980, adding yet another dimension to the picture of the historical shift developing here, around the beginning of that decade.¹⁷⁴ There is one final layer to add – the fourth area of change marking the lifetimes of participants. Specifically, it is important to note the rapid polarization of wealth taking shape in Canada. According to Conference Board of Canada statistics, there was a sharp increase in income inequality beginning in the mid-1980s, reaching a pinnacle in 2004, and leveling off somewhat after 2005.¹⁷⁵ Although the “average Canadian” is “better off” today, the richest quintile of Canadians (i.e., the wealthiest 20%) own nearly 40% of the country's national income, while the bottom quintile have just 7.2%.¹⁷⁶ Armine Yalnizyan of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has compared this present situation to the Gilded Age, showing how “incomes are as concentrated in the hands of the richest 1% today as they were in the Roaring Twenties.” But she also notes that

¹⁷³ Vosko, 2010:69.

¹⁷⁴ Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. 2011. Trends in higher education, Volume one: Enrolment Ottawa, ON. Accessed October 4th, 2011 at <http://www.aucc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/trends-2011-vol1-enrolment-e.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ Conference Board of Canada, 2011. *Hot Topic: Canadian Income Inequality*. Accessed October 4th, 2011 at <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/hot-topics/canInequality.aspx>

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

in the 1920s, “Canada’s elite didn’t experience as rapid a growth in their income share as has occurred in the past 20 years.”¹⁷⁷ In fact, she points out

Canada’s richest 1% — the 246,000 privileged few whose average income is \$405,000 — took almost a third (32%) of all growth in incomes in the fastest growing decade in this generation, 1997 to 2007. [...] The last time the economy grew so fast was in the 1950s and 60s, when the richest 1% of Canadians took only 8% of all income growth.¹⁷⁸

Thus, within the lifetimes of most of the people in this study, a set of salient shifts have occurred in the Canadian social, political and economic landscape, as the normative model of employment (full-time, continuous work done for an employer) has given way to new forms (part-time, casual, agency-mediated and self-employed); as women have entered the workforce in increasing numbers; as post-secondary education has become the dominant mode of moving from mandatory schooling to the labour market; and as incomes have rapidly polarized and wealth has concentrated in the hands of the country’s richest inhabitants. As I will argue below, the intersection of participants’ lives with various points along this historical timeline of events shapes their narratives, and the *generational discourses* from which they are constructed. Generational discourses make sense, in other words, when socio-historical context is made central to their interpretation.

¹⁷⁷ P. 3 in Yalnizyan, A. (2010). *The Rise of Canada's Richest 1%*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

¹⁷⁸ Yalnizyan, 2010:3.

NARRATIVE INTERSECTIONS

The analysis below is organized according to the three narrative types or generational discourses of ambivalence, faith and disaffection. I present two exemplary narratives of each, highlighting the contextual factors that are explicitly named or implicitly woven into the stories. The point throughout is to show that the four political economic transformations over the last century have an impact on the way people narrate their working lives and which discourses help them do it. More specifically, the point at which individual biographies intersect with wider histories appears to correlate with the three distinct discourses about how a person should relate to the ongoing task of making a living.

Ambivalence***Ken, 59***

Ken's narrative, and the ambivalent discourse holding it together, can be partially explained by the fact that the major economic shifts identified earlier cut right through his early career in the 1970s and 1980s, and have had lasting ramifications for his working life story. When we met, he was nearing retirement – sort of. He was born and raised in a small fishing town in Newfoundland. His father, a fisherman, died at sea when he was 13, leaving Ken's mother to raise Ken on her own. He had three much older brothers, who'd moved away by the time their father died. Before that, Ken delivered newspapers, weeded gardens and mowed lawns for his neighbours, just like his older brother had done when he was younger, just to make a little spending money his parents "didn't have to provide." Then, when he was 13 or 14, he got a "real" job at a fish processing plant. It was one of the few jobs a young man could do in town at that time. "If you weren't working in the fish plants," he said, "you were working on the boats." And the fish plant, as Ken recalled, "was awful."

Well, at the fish plant we used to process herring. Herring coming off [...] the boats and then the uh, women cleaned them, cut them, um fillet them, and the fillets would go into the brine and they were pickled. [...] The herring would pickle for three or four days, and then on that fourth day you'd go in and pick the skin off the herring. So, it was awful. You have these big long, probably as long as this house, table, like a big tray, full of herring. You'd stand there and pull the skin off, throw it on the ground - well, there was actually a conveyor belt you'd put it on, more often than not you'd miss - and the herring itself would go into a bucket, a small bucket. And you got paid by the bucket. I can't remember how much per bucket, but it wasn't much. Maybe a dime. The more herring you skinned the more money you made. I never made very much at that.

After a year of skinning herring, Ken was promoted to "worker" status - a physically demanding job for "brawny" young men - which involved standing in a scow of live herring. "If it wasn't full of water it was full of herring," Ken explained. "And what we used to have to do would be, you'd have a tub, and you'd put the herring in a tub, and then hoist it up into the fish plant, into a big trough where they used to cut them up." He was paid sixty cents an hour.

Ken knew early on that he did *not* want to be a fisherman like his father. Moreover, he wanted to get out of his hometown. This desire was spurred - and rendered realistic - by the timing of Ken's entry into the labour market: it was the late 1960s, and social and geographic mobility were more commonplace and widespread than they had been in the interwar years and earlier. Rising national wealth meant that Canadians could expect or hope for greater prosperity than any could remember at that time. Although many were excluded from this hope - and, as we now know, most income gains would go to the richest Canadians by the 21st Century - the conditions were set for many people to do (or expect to do) economically better than their parents. Finally, the

“disembedding” processes that would accelerate in the late 20th Century had already begun, making it possible and culturally encouraged for young men in rural places to imagine moving on.¹⁷⁹

So, when he finished high school, Ken started looking for jobs that would take him away. He had his sights set on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). He explained why:

Why I wanted to do that was, well people, we'd all heard of the North West Mounted Police, and the RCMP seemed to be a bit of glamour and [you could be] working somewhere in the rest of Canada, typically or we always thought RCMP officers they very seldom got posted back to their home provinces. So you'd hear about these guys you know you're from [hometown] and they're posted out in Labrador or Saskatoon [...] it seemed like a neat thing to do. [...] It was a steady paycheque, and then it wasn't all that bad. So that kinda interested me and the fact that you could be driving cars and [chuckles] guns and all the things that boys – young men – would like to do.

But Ken did not end up joining the RCMP. “I filled out all the applications and had the medicals and stuff, but I had to be 19. So, 18 years of age,” he said, pausing. “You couldn't wait a year?” I asked him. “I couldn't wait 6 *months!* I wanted to get out of [town]. I didn't want to work in the fish plant and I didn't want to go fishing.”

Fatefully, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) came through town when Ken was 18, as they did each year, recruiting young men. Ken signed up, seeing it positively as “the next best thing” to the RCMP. During training in Ontario, he got appendicitis and went into the hospital. There, he got “homesick”, went home, and upon returning to Ontario he asked for a remuster to the Air Force,

¹⁷⁹ For compelling qualitative insights into the deep-seated trend of youth outmigration from rural Maritime communities, see Corbett, Michael. 2007. *Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Press.

ironically so he could be closer to the hometown he had been so desperate to leave. Granted, he traveled a lot. His first big trip was to Egypt, a posting he volunteered for just for the “excitement” of it.

Ken’s career with the Air Force was a steady upward climb. He progressed through the ranks faster than most – a trajectory which caused him to lose a few friends along the way – until he was commissioned as an officer “ahead of my time.” He remembered the decision to commission as a no-brainer:

To me all I could see was that it was a positive step for me, for my career, because back here [*points to Petty Officer 2nd class on his lifeline*] they promoted a lot of people, and the chances of me, if I hadn’t commissioned, I probably wouldn’t have made it up to [the next level]. [...] So I thought, ‘why not commission?’ Education’s better, I’ll get something for it, and the pay’s better.

He continued as an engineer and stayed rooted on the East coast, where he wanted to be; he and his wife had three children. Up to this point, the message from Ken’s narrative is that the military took care of him; he committed to them and they returned the favour. Then, in the early 1990s, Ken experienced some chest pain and, having lost his father to a heart attack, went to the doctor. He was told that his arteries were clogged and he would need a bypass. It was successful, and he continued working and playing sports as usual. Then it happened again. And again. Ken described what it was like, having three bypasses in the span of only a few years – and the unfortunate effect it had on his career:

In January when I had a third one, that’s when I was thinkin’, ‘boy, am I doomed here or what?’ So the third one, I was kinda, that’s when you start thinking about your longevity – or that’s when I started thinking about my longevity, I think. Wondering

if I was going to be around here for long. Like I said, the first one didn't bug me, the second one was kinda 'hm, well, we know that this happens', so I'd been warned about it, but I didn't think it would happen the third time. Yeah, I was apprehensive about what's gonna happen to me down the road, and of course I had [a 10-year-old daughter]. And of course [my sons] were a little older, so yeah that played on my mind quite a bit.

But then I proceeded to do all the things they'd asked me to do, I had my medicals and after however long it was they gave me pretty much a clean bill of health with the exception of... they downgraded my medical category just a bit, uh I wasn't fit for service all the way around but I could still go up in the air and do my normal job. I couldn't go into extreme conditions. Plus... I mean I kinda wouldn't want to do some of the stuff anyway! But anyway I had a clean bill of health, I was uh, considered fit for air, I had a job to go air training, I was already earmarked to go. Approved by the Admiral here on the coast.

About the same time as all this was happening, they restructured the Air Force. They restructured the coast, and he [the Admiral] ended up going to London. And my file kinda followed him up and what he approved down here he shot down up there. But it wasn't because of him. It was because of the Director General of health services or whatever it was up there in London. Nope, they said that my medical category was such that I was considered unfit. So I got the message saying that, you know, you're outta here in however many months. In 1995, November.

Here, Ken's biography intersects with a key moment in Canadian economic history, and it impacts his working life story and the discourse underpinning it. The public service, including the military,

underwent massive layoffs and restructuring through the 1980 and 1990s “neoliberal” reforms.¹⁸⁰ Ken’s biographical details – the heart problems especially – made him a candidate for “early retirement.” He was worried, he said, “about what was gonna happen to – you know I was gonna have a pension, but still, I had a young kid here,” and a son going to university. “I had a lot, you know a *lot* on my mind. Family. So, yeah I was kinda worried what was going to happen to us.” I asked if he felt sad, too, about being unemployed, or about being away from the Air Force in particular. “Yeah,” he said. But “that was secondary.”

Yeah I miss the Air Force; I still miss the Air Force at times, especially the camaraderie, the goings-on, the community. I miss that community. I don’t miss it to the point that I wanna go back and join it again! But, uh, I still miss them. Nope, it was just, uh, I was just worried about what was gonna happen to us, and whether... Especially when you’re in your – well it was 1995, I was 44 years old, turning 45... you know. I was [thinking] how many people are going to hire a guy 45 years of age? Especially in my military profession there’s not a big call for [...] Engineers. So yeah, I worried about that.

Thankfully, Ken did not have to worry for very long. “I got a call here, stewing in my own juice” from a person he used to work with in the Air Force. The job they hired him for was temporary – he was tasked with setting up a government-funded centre, a gig Ken called “the best thing that could have happened to make a transition from the military to the civilian world.” When that job ended, he had another anxious few months, applying for “anything I could find in the paper,” but again his old Air Force network came through, and he was asked to join the office of an air engineering testing

¹⁸⁰ Clark, David. 2002. ‘Neoliberalism and Public Service Reform: Canada in Comparative Perspective.’ *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 35 (4):771-793.

facility – a great match for his skill-set and experience. He was still working this job when I interviewed him. He liked it, and found parts of it rewarding, especially the travel it involved. Since he left the Air Force and started there, he said,

The milestones and the things that stick out most are not so much from a professional side, it's from visiting the – going to all these different countries, the travel, seeing the different cultures, or experiencing the different cultures, seeing these places, working with a lot of foreign nationals, I mean that's kinda... most people don't get a chance to do that. So I find that quite rewarding. That part of it. That's why I still like going to work. [...] I *enjoy* the travel.

But beyond the several trips he took each year for work, Ken admitted that the rewards of his job were harder to define now than they had been in the military. It took some thought for him to pinpoint what he was working *for* or *toward*. "Other than better pay?" he asked, chuckling. He described the motivations he had in the military – personal evaluation reports (PERs), getting on the merit list, gaining a good reputation in the military community through voluntary associations and sports teams – and then reflected on his current motivations.

Well, you still have PERs, but they're not the same. And I still get a pay raise every year whether I did enough work for it or not. But I don't think my work ethic has changed. [...] I try to do the best I can with the limited talent that I have. So I still try to do well. And the reward is sometimes you do get some favourable feedback. Recently I was in [Europe] [...] And I was only over there for a few days. I looked at their systems and did some recordings and kind of twiddled my thumbs, but I also pointed out all kinds of things that were wrong with their system that they should be aware of, that they hadn't been told about by the people they bought 'em from,

and I got a good 'atta boy' from the folks in [the US]. So when I get that kind of feedback, I go 'yeah okay, still doing a good job'.

As a 17-year-old entering the CAF, Ken said he did not think he had found a "job for life." Granted, he imagined *he* would quit after five years – not that the job itself would terminate. But Ken stuck it out, and demonstrably enjoyed and excelled in the military job. However, he admitted that lately, he sometimes woke up not wanting to work, something he did not "recall ever feeling like" before, in the Air Force. He had also entertained new doubts about what his work did for the world around him. "At times," he said, "I mean, I think about the end result if the weapons were ever fired in anger. Yeah. Or, you know, if we were ever doing something other than just trials, tests and trials. Yeah it would have a serious impact on a number of people." But doing his job, day to day, Ken said,

I don't think about it – whether I'm contributing to the greater good – the defense. [...] I mean, that's my work, I work in a war-mongering field, I mean that's it. But it's not offensive or defensive. It's to protect people like you. In the big scheme overall. I'm still supporting that ideal; I'm helping that in some way. But if you want to follow the missile to where it ends up... it's not a pretty picture.

While there is something more reasoned, more deeply considered about Ken's thinking here, it does bear *some* semblance to the "job's a job" perspective held by Victor in Chapter Four, and most others telling stories of ambivalence. Jobs could be boring or unfulfilling or unfair; they could do damage and pose danger to others, like the military, even though it also protected people; they could be dirty, like the fish plant; *but they had to be done*, and no one could argue with that. Moreover, Ken shared the same general feelings about retirement as most of the people with ambivalent narratives – he was not sure if he would ever *really* do it. There were practical concerns – "that's a common – or frequent – conflict... how much is enough [retirement income]?" But the other concern revolved around the question "do you really want to stop working?" Ken continued:

If you quit doing what you're doing here [...] what are you going to do? Are you going to find something else to do or are you going to sit on your thumbs. I don't want to sit on my thumbs but I don't want to work [here] either.

He thought he might want to work part-time – not in retail as many retirees do, but perhaps at a golf course. He also thought retirement might be a good time to go back to school. He had already started taking courses at a nearby university, one per year at most, and figured he might continue to avoid being “bored” and because, he said, “you *have* to keep your mind occupied.” Like his ambivalent peers, the prospect of doing nothing was hard to grasp, if not downright appalling.

This feeling of *needing* work (and not financially, as Ken was provided with generous pensions) but not being particularly enamored or fulfilled by it appears in Ken's narrative as a late development, originating around the time that he was let go from the military. This is arguably where the decline of the SER dovetails with Ken's biography, when concerns about the predictability and security of work come to the forefront of his own “project” and find expression in the discourse of ambivalence – a discourse that makes sense to people who have seen the SER in the lives of their parents, but witnessed its fall in their own lives. Ambivalence in particular makes sense in lives where the promise of reciprocal loyalty and commitment between employers and employees was believable in the beginning, but is eroded by the evidence of personal experience – and this is a common feature of working lives that begin near the pinnacle of the SER and span its long and gradual decline.

Angela, 57

Similar themes emerged in 57-year-old Angela's working life story. Although she grew up in a family of seven, where money was tight, material things were few and there was never any hope of going to university, Angela said she always felt like she was ‘born to be rich.’ But as a woman with

no financial support from her parents – a widower father and stepmother, who married when Angela was a teenager – Angela entered the labour market directly from high school in the 1970s, and did not enjoy the same explosion in women’s opportunities as her middle-class, same-age peers (like 56-year-old Phoebe, the research participant who graduated from university and worked her way up in the ranks of the Canadian military). The outcome of the intersection of Angela’s biography with what Phoebe described as a “propitious moment” for women shows that while timing matters, so do other factors related to class and gender and earlier life course developments.¹⁸¹

After high school, Angela took an accounting course and got a job doing cataloguing for a storage business. Then she met her future husband at a dance. When they married, Angela’s career took a backseat to her husband’s, and because he was in the military, she never had a chance to build up experience and climb the career ladder. In one of their many homes, Angela landed a job in the provincial government. “I thought I’d made it,” she said – and had she been single, or married to a man with a job that rooted the family, she might have. But her husband got posted to another province, and Angela had to leave the job. “Where we moved around a lot I had to keep changing jobs [...] my whole working life was jumping from job to job,” she said. But, echoing Victor, she figured “that was just life to me.”

If Angela was trying to tell me one thing with her working life story, it was that she took things on the chin. She was not one of those people who needed to feel “fulfilled” at work – that was wishy-washy and out of touch with the hard, simple fact that work had to be done. “I never thought of work as important,” she said: “it was just something that I had to do.” This was similar to a particularly “sticky” line from my interview with 69-year-old Helen, who had been very matter-of-fact and even blasé about paid employment and career decisions, despite announcing at the outset

¹⁸¹ See McDaniel’s (2004) thoughts on “generationing gender” for more from this perspective.

that “my whole life has been work, really.” At first, I interpreted both women’s articulations as containing lack of reflexivity about work; the absence of values and contemplation. But over the course of the Listening Guide’s multiple readings, I began to see that they did have fairly obvious positions on work, and how it ought to be approached and understood as a part of life. For Angela, people who dithered about or got too caught up in questioning work’s larger purpose were treading close to what she, like others who had a similarly ambivalent relationship to work, believed was one of the worst things a person could do: be idle. As is shown in the excerpt below, Angela allowed that work had a purpose, but the purpose was inherent, already there, in the sheer act of being productive instead of lazy. To look for anything more was over the top.

Um... [work is] important to me that it gets me out of the house, it gives me a little bit of spending money, um... gets me in with—it made me some new friends, um, but important to me as I’m doing, I’m, you know, having a contribution to... the community or, you know... no... not really. I’m doing it for a contribution to *myself*, so that I’m not sitting at home becoming a couch potato. I tried that before and how many times can you clean your house? How many times can you vacuum in a day? And... you know so that’s just not for me. I don’t mind having little stints at home, but to be a stay-at-home person... I don’t really have any hobbies. So no. Just... and I wouldn’t go so far as to say that it gives me *purpose*.

When I asked how she felt about this connection – whether she wished her work offered that specific, individualized sense of purpose – her answer was telling: “maybe if I was younger I would be tryin’ to go higher in the office or something but no, not now. I’m ready to retire in a year or so.” From this, we can gather that Angela may have wanted a stronger, less ambivalent relationship to work, but her social position as a woman from a lower-class family, without post-secondary education, seemed to her to have closed off avenues to jobs where a stronger relationship could

flourish. In the perceived absence of viable alternatives, Angela worked hard for money she said she didn't really need, toward a retirement she was simultaneously looking forward to and dreading, at a job she liked and didn't love. The alternative was *not* working, and it was simply not an option.

Angela's attitude toward work – and the ambivalent narrative and discourses that convey it – reflect the experience of a life where women were encouraged to pursue career success, but the traditional gender division of labour and wage differentials could make such encouragement moot. Angela had clearly been privy to discourse that constructed work as a calling, as a vocation in which one should flourish, but such things had been closed off to her, and thus she dismissed them as concerns.

But Angela's ambivalence also solidified, I argue, around one key event: she was let go from a job she held for nearly twenty years, after the business's owner died and handed the operation over to a younger employee. When Angela re-entered the job market, she was confronted with an array of low-wage, contract jobs with few or no benefits, and the "good jobs" (the kind she had been fired from) now required some form of post-secondary training. The expansion of college and university programs and the increasing emphasis on credentials – one of the four shifts identified above – ran straight through the middle of Angela's career, but instead of opening opportunities it sheared off a whole realm of jobs and channeled Angela toward a very specific sector of "precarious" work, increasingly common amongst workers with comparatively low levels of education, when she found herself unemployed in her fifties. That Angela felt only lukewarm about work, while also maintaining that it was an absolutely essential obligation, is unsurprising given her position in relation to these economic movements. The impact of socio-historical context on her narrative, like Ken's, makes even more sense when compared to narratives of faith.

Faith

Lynn, 65

In her career as a Human Resources professional, sixty-five-year-old Lynn had worked for large companies as an administrator and personnel manager. She rooted her working life story in what she described as a humble beginning: her father owned a men's clothing store, but even as a child she had the sense that money was limited. She also figured that her father's approach to work had rubbed off on her early. As she shared her memories of his job, she displayed the reverence for work which is central to the faithful relationship to it.

I watched him kind of manage his own thing and never ever got the sense that work was drudgery – always that there was something interesting or new or different – he started when I was a little bit older, meeting with the different [...] salesman on behalf of various clothing lines, and he always enjoyed doing that, selecting what he would bring into his store, and he had a reputation as being someone who had quality goods so I guess that was probably the... the enduring message was 'go for quality'. Quantity, not so much, because we certainly weren't [rich] by any means.

I think that was probably the main sense of 'if you want something, you need to work for it', and that – although we try and, I think quite successfully instilled that in our own kids, with my parents there just wasn't anything to give out – it was a pretty tight budget [...] 'Take responsibility for yourself' was another piece of it. I think there was always a sense from my parents that the effort was worth it.

From her mother, Lynn said she learned that "you can do whatever you like" for a career – a lesson she called "a gift." The lessons or "messages" from both of her parents comprise most of the basic themes connecting faithful narratives to one another – a reverence for work, a respect for conventionally successful people, a belief in the parity of work effort and reward, and an emphasis

on financial independence. These are constructed in Lynn's narrative as biographical elements, rooted to family values and very personal experiences, but I argue that the believability of these tenets (and the achievability of the priorities they espouse) has much to do with where Lynn's life intersects with larger historical and economic timelines.

For example, Lynn came of age *just* as the rise of women's labour force participation was becoming evident. She had one foot in the "old world," where women could count their career possibilities on one hand, but she was stepping into a new world, where women were told they could do, as her mother said, *anything*. The contradiction between the old and new is plainly evident in Lynn's story. "I think I had kinda wanted to be a doctor," she said, but she "had *lovely* science teachers who said things like, 'why are you bothering with science? You're just gonna grow up and get married and never work.'" She was incredulous looking back, but Lynn's teachers' defence of gender divisions had a small effect on her.

I think I was aware that there were some areas that were not as easily accessible to women as others. But I didn't feel that I was really severely limited at all – and all of the social stuff [in university] is great and I ended up co-editing the yearbook and having lots of social experience – silly stuff.

Still, Lynn gave up on her early aspiration of being a doctor and "looked at psychology as the back-door way" of entering medicine. In the end, she found that she enjoyed "the experimental stuff" in psychology "way better than any counseling or consulting kind of thing." In the end, she did not pursue psychology beyond the undergraduate degree. She got married, had two daughters, and then began taking classes at a business school. She did a one-year diploma then stayed home with her daughters for two years while her husband, who ran a consulting business, worked outside the home. When she was ready to return to paid work, she got a job at a new, booming telecommunications company.

The company had employees scattered all across the world, and was sending new ones away regularly. Lynn's job was to figure out everything the company would need to know about working overseas – taxes, where to employees' children would go to school, visa requirements, standard of living and fair remuneration – and she found the work “*very interesting.*” She continued to do it for over a decade, until she got her own chance to work internationally, in South America. She and her husband lived there for seven years, followed by two years in the U.S., and then they retired. Lynn's family followed her career because her husband was “flexible”, due to the fact that he was self-employed and mobile.

Like others with faithful narratives, Lynn spoke about her work as a “collective” effort; she narrated her work experience at the telecommunications company in the “we”, and the approach she described taking was always centered on the success of the company, and not her own personal advancement. This is not to say that she did not care about her individual success, but that she framed her well-being and the company's growth as one and the same. When asked about her work ethic – and what constituted a “good” work ethic, in her view – she said it was a matter of “being prepared to see the bigger picture”: asking “what's the goal here? How much can I do to make sure that we as a collective reach the goal?”

She also shared with other faithful narratives a certain constellation of biographical and historical factors. The faithful lessons she inherited from her parents – whose working lives unfolded during the heyday of the SER – actually rang true in her own life. She worked hard and was rewarded, and this she regarded as a necessary foundation for a strong commitment to the workplace and the internalization of organizational goals. Lynn also rode a wave of women's increased labour force participation and benefitted from her access to a post-secondary education. Finally, she retired just before the telecommunications company she had worked for imploded, laying off thousands of workers nationwide. Therefore, unlike Angela, Lynn was not impelled to

find another job with an outdated diploma. She had a glimpse of what the world of work was like now, through the experiences of her children, but it was second-hand and did not change the way she related to work over the course of her life; it did not change the fact that *faith* was more fitting for her than ambivalence or disaffection in conveying and making sense of that relationship. .

Corbin, 86

Eighty-six-year-old Corbin might have come of age in a very different business world than the one Lynn moved in, but his narrative bore some similarity to hers in terms of its overriding drive toward business success. Like many other faithful narratives, it was a very matter-of-fact rendering of a climb to the top of the corporate world ladder. The eldest of the people I interviewed, Corbin was born in Europe to a physician father and concert pianist mother. "It was expected" that he would go to university, because "everybody in the family did," and he "couldn't be different." So it was that he went to accounting school.

Because there was mandatory military service in his country at the time, Corbin joined the army for a few years while also working for a small manufacturing company. When his military service came to an end, he said he realized that there were "greener pastures elsewhere" if he wanted to carry on in accounting. His "future wife," whom he had just recently met, had already decided she wanted to move to Canada. "She had no trouble convincing me to come," he said. At 29 years of age, the couple began making arrangements for their transatlantic move.

So, my Canadian visa, I got it instantly without any problems, and we both terminated our jobs and we went [...] to book our passage to Canada. Of course, we wanted economy [class] and when I had mentioned that, and they asked me when I wanted to go and I said, in about a month's time, they said, 'oh we are sold out for one year.' We looked at one another and, and started going back and then said 'what

about first class?' [and they said] 'you can go whenever you want.' *So we've been fortunate because we came to Canada on first class and we've lived first class ever since.*

"Fortunate" is an accurate description of the narrated self in Corbin's story; he certainly worked hard, sacrificing some household stability to follow career opportunities in new cities, but he also had the good fortune of beginning his career at a time when it was the norm for a man's wife to prioritize her career lower than caregiving and domestic work. Connected to the shift toward increasing inequality noted earlier, Corbin's early career also benefited from the fact that it predated substantial declines in the incidence of upward mobility in Canada.¹⁸² Faith in work's propensity to deliver rewards to those who put in the effort was thus not a hard sell.

After some initial hurdles getting his references sorted out, he accepted a job at an office equipment company "selling machines" (early computers), an occupation he considered "paying penance" along the way to his end goal: getting into management. Still, he worked hard and "did very well." Just over one year in, he said, he seemed "to have beaten all the sales records in the area," he and his wife had had their first child, and they were both ready and able to settle down. "We ordered our house to be built", he remembered, but "lo and behold we didn't get to move into it, because somebody from the other office came in and said 'congratulations, you've been given a promotion.'" The inconvenience of that particular promotion aside, the rest of Corbin's story was peppered with similar mentions of ever-increasing successes, and the material and prestige gains that came along with them.

¹⁸² Morissette, Rene, and Xuelin Zhang. 2005. 'Escaping low earnings.' *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 6 (4).

Corbin's storytelling style is worth noting here. He spoke for long tracts of time without taking a pause, and nearly every coherent story ended with a summative sentence, such as "my life was extremely interesting and rewarding." While he narrated events, he would weave in other details that seemed sort of out of place, but they were usually, intentionally or not, a way of signaling his status and wealth. For example, when he received another promotion and moved his family to Halifax, he said, in a single run-on sentence, that they moved to Halifax and it was "a beautiful city and I liked to sail so we had a sailboat and we enjoyed life." Recalling a later move, from a firm in Toronto to a branch in Belgium, he worked in the additional fact that their children gained some cultural capital in their new home:

They hired me and after about 2 years they asked me if I'd like to go to Europe as Vice President of the Operations. In 1973, we went to Brussels, and uh, it was very nice. [...] Brussels was highly acceptable – we had a wonderful 4 years in Brussels. We put all of our 3 children in French schools and they had become bilingual and they had all good time.

At the end of the 4 years in Brussels, the success story took a bit of a turn. Corbin's company "promoted" him to a job in the US, but when he got there, the US subsidiary downsized and he was fired. Alas, this was only a small setback, he said, as it took him just three months to find another job at a high-tech start-up at age 55. Narrating this plot twist, Corbin turned it into yet another demonstration of his penchant for success. "I brought that company to life," he said, showing me a newspaper article about the business. It expanded into Europe under his leadership, subsequently purchased an even larger company, and continued to do business under that larger company's name. That was the last job Corbin had, aside from a consulting gig or two, and he and his wife retired to a country home. When she passed away, Corbin relocated to a stately house in the city, where he would be closer to his grown children.

Throughout Corbin's narrative, the narrated subject was confident, proud, and sometimes *almost* arrogant. For example, he remembered when an old boss who had once fired him asked him to come back; "Herb, you couldn't afford me," he proudly recalled saying. But mostly he seemed to have what was probably an accurate sense of what he was entitled to, based on his experience and abilities, and he weighed opportunities according to whether or not they were "on my level." When he finished his story, he asked me to stand up and look at a picture on his wall – his "favourite picture". It was of him, shaking hands with Juan Carlos, the King of Spain, whom he met on a trade mission. He called the picture *The King and I*.

Looking back on his career, near the middle of the interview but clearly at the "end" of what he considered to be his working life story, he began to talk as though I had asked him to give me advice on how to be successful.

That was a very brief overview my business career. In order to be successful in business, you have to meet people, you have to communicate, you have to be able to find items of mutual benefit. It doesn't matter whether you have a written agreement or not, because if the business is good it is going to last. If the business is lousy, it'll be broken. So, that paperwork is not really – it is important because it gives you the guidelines [...] – but it's not the goal in itself.

Like Marsha from Chapter Four, Corbin's narrative is held together (made coherent) by his business success. Decisions and actions are portrayed as the rational answer to a repeated economic question: will this improve my material wealth and/or my reputation? If the answer to that question was yes, Corbin, like Marsha, saw a green light. Corbin only retired fully, he said, when his health began to slow him down and he could not keep his commitments. "I make few commitments, but the ones I made I always kept", he told me. When this got harder to do, he bowed out before jeopardizing his reputation.

There is another quality Corbin and Marsha's narratives share: their lives are described as having unfolded with ease. That is not to say that they do not emphasize effort – long hours, personal sacrifices – but they tell of each new step as though it was simply the most logical one, and thus the “easiest”, from a psychological point of view, to take. They did not wonder if what they were doing was fair, or right; they (or the narrated subject, at least) simply *knew* and trusted that the world was a logical place where effort was rewarded in conventional ways. To a certain degree, this faith is a function of wealth and comfort – it showed up especially strongly in the narratives of the wealthiest participants.

But the faithful narrative was not limited to the business leaders and well-off professionals. Rather, it was clustered mainly among the “middle-aged” and older participants who came of age in an era when the SER was *assumed* to be the conventional employment relationship. In fact, the assumption that the SER dominates is central to faithful narratives, and this assumption is, I argue, mainly tenable for people whose lives unfolded at its high-point, or who were by some circumstance shielded from its decline.¹⁸³ Those whose life contexts brought the SER's decline – or the contingency of its promise – into full view, either through personal experience or witnessing the plight of significant others – were markedly affected by it.

Disaffection

Melanie, 25

Twenty-five-year-old Melanie experienced a pivotal moment within the first few years of her career. Her family, and her father in particular, had told her from an early age that the key to

¹⁸³ For instance, 25-year-old Dean's narrative fit the faithful type. His family owned a restaurant, where he had always worked. He was attending business school and planned to also go into small business ownership. The 'own-account self employed' are differently positioned vis-à-vis economic restructuring and changes in employment relationships. See Vosko, 2010, particularly Chapter 6.

success in life was to work hard, because “you’re not irreplaceable.” The seeds of a reverence for work (and an ambivalent or faithful relationship to it) were thus planted early, and they affected Melanie from the moment she started working as a teenager. This was clear as she recalled her first job, as a hostess at a restaurant.

It was super intense cause I’d never really worked-- like I’d worked for my Dad and stuff just helping him out here and there but this was my first job where I got paid. And um, I worked my balls off, and it was so funny cause I remember like clearing tables and sweating and making a total spectacle because everyone else was – you know – taking ‘er easy.

At the end of those first spectacular two weeks, her manager took her aside, gave her gift certificates to the movies, and said “Thanks for working so hard... but you don’t have to work hard *all* the time.” She worked there through high school, did a year of exchange abroad, and applied to a small journalism program, which only accepted 40 people each year. She was accepted, and started “working [her] ass off” immediately. She “had no fun” while others were socializing, and her “intense” effort paid off when she was among the 50% who actually graduated.

After graduation, she worked shift work for 10 dollars an hour, and then took a job in another province even though she really wanted to work in her home province. “It was general knowledge that if you did go to a bureau, you were waiting in line to come back,” she said. But Melanie waited. And waited. She was made into “a workhorse,” as was every junior person at the bureau. Her work was always rushed, and she felt like she was “sacrificing a bit of the craft.” She was eventually rewarded with a tentative offer of a full-time job in another city. She moved and worked for the station for four months before they actually gave her the permanent, full-time position as a reporter.

Not many women or young people had reporting jobs like hers, because the job involved lugging around heavy equipment and traveling to remote locations, a fact that made Melanie work even harder. "I thought I really needed to let everyone know that I was not just good at my job but super-tough as well." In a case of 'right place, right time', Melanie was assigned coverage of a historic flood, which presented her with her first opportunity to file nationally. Between covering the provincial legislature, a military base and the flooding, she said, "I worked a lot, and I actually had the best probably career year I've ever had, but I had zero personal life, and that bothered me a little bit." Not long after, she saw a vacancy in another city, where she knew more people, and applied for it. She got it and moved, and that is where she constructed the crucial turning point in her story, where she re-evaluated, and then remade, her relationship to work. She remembered it like this:

I got in this car accident where I ended up flipping a work vehicle. I was on assignment. I was driving home [...] and there were snow drifts all over the road. [...] We were really used to driving in bad weather [but] because of cutbacks um, I was actually at the time of the accident driving an all-wheel drive vehicle with no snow tires. I didn't know that until I flipped it. No one told me that we weren't getting snow tires that year. And yeah, maybe I should have asked, but I didn't really notice. It was just kind of – it was always something I never had to worry about [...] I ended up getting in this accident. I didn't get seriously hurt – I had a concussion and I had to take a week off, no big deal.

And then after the accident I started fighting for snow tires again. [...] Our management [...] said 'no way. It's a money thing – you're not getting snow tires.' And this is like, the second major accident that a reporter had been in, and um... it really upset me. I really started to feel like my well-being wasn't a concern of theirs.

And I actually ended up having to go to see a counselor through the employee assistance program. I had terrible dreams. In my job I was put in a lot of dangerous situations sometimes with people who are not good people, and sometimes in very remote areas. [...] I started being nervous. And between that and my boyfriend strongly suggesting that I find something that would give more of my time to him and to our friends, I decided to stop. To apply to school. And I got in. And I thought, 'wow, this is really happening – I'm not going to be a journalist anymore.' And it was scary, because I identified *strongly* with being a journalist. [...] I felt bad for not being as strong as some of the others [who] kept going. But I took it personal. I really did. And so although sometimes people do comment that maybe I couldn't hack it, um, I still feel smart for getting out when I did.

The experience Melanie narrates above challenged her faith in the correspondence between work effort and reward – the formula at the heart of the narratives in the previous chapter. Melanie invested everything she had in her job, risking her relationship with her boyfriend and her safety, and sacrificing her time; what she got in return appeared seriously out of balance with what she put in. While the salary was never great, it was the lack of recognition from her employer, and their lack of concern for Melanie's well-being, which finally signaled to her that her job was not worth the effort. There were, quite simply, more important things on which to take risks, and spend time and energy. Moreover, without the ability to perform her job like a "craft", Melanie could not find fulfillment in her work.

Still, Melanie "felt bad" and worried what people would think about her decision to leave a high-stakes, respected profession – the one she'd worked hard to succeed in, and had wanted to be in since she was young. She relied on the turning point narrative above, and seized on the same discursive themes as many other disaffected narratives ("waking up", taking control, sacrificing pay

for happiness) to make sure her decision was understood; she framed her exit from journalism as the “smart” decision, and highlighted the detrimental impact the career was having on her personal life and her well-being.

These discourses around questioning the point of hard work are not evident in the other two narrative types; just as Weber pointed out regarding the traditional and protestant work ethics, to question the value of work was, in the heyday of those ethics, tantamount to blasphemy. But younger participants especially were *open* to the question of how to balance work with life, how much to give employers given their demonstrated disinclination to give much back. They were also more skeptical about the positivity of other shifts, including women’s increased labour force participation (that is, they doubted the narrative of sky-rocketing success and greater equality) and higher post-secondary enrolment (i.e., they doubted the payoff of post-secondary education). Moreover, as exemplified in Lila’s reflections on generations in Chapter Three, disaffected narratives were generally keenly attuned to rising inequality. In a way, then, disaffection involves the uptake of critical or pessimistic discourses about social change, supported by the experience of detrimental impacts of the four changes identified above.

Dan, 45

Many stories of disaffection revolved around concerns about control over *time*: how work was temporally distributed, how much time participants had “left” for “home life”, when they worked and what happened when they took time off. Expenditures of time went hand-in-hand with expenditures of energy, such that some participants felt like they had “nothing left” when they put down their work and went home to their families. Forty-five-year-old Dan, who had a “9-5 job” was actually in a very similar time bind to people who worked more irregular schedules. His story also reflects other themes from narratives of disaffection: he felt like he lacked the resources, freedom and control to do his job well; he doubted the correspondence between effort and reward; and he

questioned the place of work in a life well-lived. I argue that his disaffection with work is largely attributable to his experience as one half of a dual-earner household, in which his wife valued and prioritized her career as highly as he did his. While this experience is on one level a personal, private matter, it is also a public issue stemming from a dramatic (albeit “unfinished”) reorganization in the gender division of labour.¹⁸⁴

Dan grew up in a small town in Ontario. His father was a doctor and the family was well-off, although Dan’s parents were not inclined to give him or his brothers money for nothing. Dan worked on a farm, then went to university on a sports scholarship. Academics were a secondary consideration at the time. On his choice to enroll in a Business program, Dan recalled thinking “career-wise, ‘well I have to do something I guess, so that’s what I’ll do’.” But at the end of his degree, Dan went to Belize with a youth volunteer organization and, as he tells it, the “experience really changed my life.”

After his summer abroad, he returned to Canada and looked for jobs at non-profits. His first one was with another volunteer organization, and he stayed for a year. Soon, he said, “I recognized with my degree that [...] I thought I needed more education.” Not wanting to be pigeon-holed based on his Business background, he went for a Master’s in Social Planning. From there, he moved onto jobs in health and social services, including one job at a busy inner-city health clinic, but eventually he started to think that “where my strengths lay personally [...] I could make a bigger difference if I moved to a higher level.” He set his sights on the public service, where many of the hurdles he had to deal with daily in his social work originated. He thought if he could bring his knowledge of what it was like “on the ground” up to the level of planning and funding, he could improve the delivery of social services.

¹⁸⁴ See Gerson, 2009; on public issues versus private troubles, see Mills, 1953/2000.

He got the kind of job he wanted, in the policy wing of a federal government department. At first, he found the work “really interesting,” and he was relieved that it did not entail “the same pressures” as he had dealt with at the community level. “For three months,” he said, “it was heaven.” He moved quickly up the career ladder, and became assistant director of his division. His workload increased, but he managed to keep it together. Soon there was a vacancy at the director level, and Dan took it.

But the position, which he had occupied for the last two years at the time of our interview, was beginning to wear him down. He was working too many hours, his home life was suffering, he was not as present with his children as he wanted to be, and he felt like he was unable to do his job well. He declared that he felt like he was “at a crossroads” in his career as a result of these pressures, and he returned to that point several times throughout his narrative. Indeed, his feeling of being on the precipice of a big change was, in part, what led him to participate in the study; afterward, he surmised that it had been valuable for him to talk things through. He described his “crossroads” as follows:

Where I’m trying to go with this is that um, how I managed work was, as things get busy, I would just come to work earlier and earlier, because I couldn’t stay later, um, which is a real challenge, uh, one cause you’re exhausted all the time – I get up at 5 in the morning to get to work, you know, if it’s really busy I’m there at 6:00 and if I’m not – if it’s not busy I’m 6:30-7:00, which is okay, I’m an early bird type of person so I can manage that.

But it does make you exhausted at the end of the day, you know when you... when you come home after work there’s a whole bunch of other work that – like living with three kids, by the time you get to making dinner – by the time you pick everybody up! Get home, make dinner, clean up, do homework, do lunches, if it’s

bath night, do that, it's 8, 8:30... so, pretty much lumped down on the couch, get up the next day and start all over again.

So it's challenging that way, and um... it's sort of making me think - and I'll come back to sort of, how I got to where I am now, in a bit - but it is now really making me think about, you know, 'do I need to do this? Is this really how I, how I want to live my life? I'm tired all the time, I'm pretty cranky with my kids, I'm picking up more of the load at home because my wife is busier and she doesn't have the same, you know when she's just working part time it was easier and she could take more of the load but as her business is growing and quite frankly for the last 8 years she's put her career on hold for the kids, so it's probably time for us to reset that balance. So that's why I'm exploring what I should be doing now.

He expanded the story later, emphasizing the themes common to most narratives of disaffection: feeling like there is "no time" for anything other than work, feeling like one lacks the resources and leeway to do one's job well, needing to find an alternative narrative to make sense of "taking a step back", and wondering whether it is actually "worth it" to put so much time and energy into work when the payoff, no matter how substantial it is in dollars and cents, seems trivial compared to the "more important things" in life. Dan's story also underscores Gorz's point that disaffection from work is not necessarily the same as not wanting to work, not liking it, or wanting to be able to live without working. It is about working conditions, and the nagging sense that work under one's present circumstances is not inherently worth doing - it is not a social contribution, or a reason for living, in and of itself.

The work is great - I really like the work, and in the most part I can manage the work of my division in my, in my hours, in my 6:30-4 type of deal, so from that perspective it's ok. It's still stressful and it's still, you know I am, I'm still dealing

with being really grumpy with the kids because I'm exhausted and stuff. Um, so that's part of the reason why I wanna make a change now. [...] Um, I feel guilty about not being there – I mean, I can work a 10 hour day and feel like I'm sneaking out of the office. at you know, I'm supposed to leave at 4 to pick up my kids, oftentimes it's 4:30, quarter to 5, so I'm like, *racing* to get them, and my youngest is like, sitting there, not all alone but you know, it's guilty. 'Late again? Why are you late?' It just kinda tears you, it tears you apart.

I am looking to make a, to make a change, I'm going to sorta bite the bullet and go back to something where I'm not the boss, uh, hopefully something like I had before. [...] I don't feel like I have a choice, um... but it's very, it's very confusing for me at this stage. So I guess it's kinda, it's – I guess a question of, I'm still really looking to find something interesting, something where I feel like I can make a contribution. I guess the biggest thing is where I can feel good about the work that I'm doing, I can feel like I'm doing it well, but at the same time that I can balance it out with the rest of my life.

Dan felt like he needed to make a change urgently, and while this was in part driven by his guilt about the way his work schedule affected his children, it was also exacerbated by a recent trip to the doctor where he found out that his "blood pressure was through the roof – and it had never been." He shook his head. "Forty-four years old and having to take blood pressure medication is not where I want to be. Particularly for a job that I don't feel like I could do really well." The diagnosis reminded him that his father had also suffered from a similar, stress-induced condition, and this upset him. He did not want to relate to work the same way his father did, and looking at his life story one can ascertain that unlike his father, Dan was subject to the pressure of a dual-earner

household with young children and arguably *could not* relate to work like his father even if he wanted to. The single-purpose working man of Dan's father's era – like his attendant faithful discourses and life narratives – is a mirage under the conditions ushered in by the four changes identified in this chapter.

Indeed, I argue that all three narratives are complemented by specific historical conditions. Because we are dealing with discourse, there are no solid, impermeable boundaries confining certain ways of relating to work to certain lives or times; there are, however, patterns and indications that as economic conditions (including the organization of paid employment, the “total organization of labour”,¹⁸⁵ gender divisions of labour, the normative life course and the distribution of wealth) change, so too do the discourses people use to understand and act in their lives. The dynamic of changing discourses, animated as it is by successive ‘waves’ of new inductees into the world of work, *is a generational matter*.

GENERATIONAL DISCOURSES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The four changes identified earlier, particularly around the decline of the SER, are notable, but they are not *total*. The SER is still the dominant form of employment; a new graduate can still hedge his or her bets on a permanent, full-time job performed for a single employer on the employer's premises.¹⁸⁶ But the *perception* that the SER is disintegrating and giving way to new forms of employment was pervasive in the interviews gathered here (as well as in wider public discourses) regardless of age or other measures of social location. People, it seems, believe that that the “job for life” is a thing of the past. As proposed in the Thomas Theorem – the adage that opened this Chapter – beliefs or perceptions of reality can be self-fulfilling prophecies. Because discourses around

¹⁸⁵ Glucksmann, 2006.

¹⁸⁶ Vosko, 2010.

relating to work are built on perceptions, they are demonstrably very powerful in shaping people's responses to their environments – evidently more so than economic trend line data.

Moreover, the make-up and distribution of such discourses appear to be changing. The findings of the present analysis fit with Andre Gorz's idea that "disaffection with waged work" has increased, and is more prominent among "young workers". Even though the data alone do not confirm an *increase* in disaffection – just a prominence among younger participants – there is reason to suspect that this is the case. As an imperfect experiment, one can read the narratives in Studs Terkel's *Working* and see that ambivalence and faith are the primary modes of moving around in the world of work. The opening chapter to his book, where Terkel reflects on the stories he has heard, and what they tell him about the world in which he lives, points to the prominence of ambivalence especially, set against faith, in 1970s America:

"More or less", that most ambiguous of phrases, pervades many of the conversations that comprise this book, reflecting, perhaps, an ambiguity of attitude toward The Job. Something more than Orwellian acceptance, something less than Luddite sabotage. Often the two impulses are fused in the same person.

"There are, of course," he wrote, "the happy few who find savor in their daily job"; he wondered if those satisfactions "tell us more about the person than about his [sic] task," but he proposed that the "common attribute" of satisfied people was "a meaning to their work well over and beyond the reward of the paycheck."¹⁸⁷ In contrast, he told of the many for whom "there is a hardly sealed discontent." But he noted that all of them – the ones who loved their work and the ones who merely

¹⁸⁷ Terkel, 1972:xi

suffered through it – were under the same “scriptural precept”: “No matter how demeaning the task, no matter how it dulls the senses and breaks the spirit, one *must* work. Or else.”¹⁸⁸

Terkel saw the flickering of a “sacrilegious question” in his time – a questioning of the “work ethic,” and a hunger for something more than dull, meaningless work. The question he saw percolating is the same one I see fully developed – and often answered – in narratives of disaffection. There was Melanie’s leap from a prestigious and potentially high-paying journalist’s job to the low-key, but ultimately more satisfying job of a librarian. There was Lila’s restless hunt for a way to make a “social contribution”, drawn out at the expense of income and stability. There was the 42-year-old Raymond, who turned down high-paying promotions as a lawyer to stay in a position he found challenging and rewarding. But just as Gorz proposed, being disaffected – asking the “sacrilegious question” – could be a matter of questioning the ends, not the means, of hard work.

And so we saw Maia, throwing everything she had into work, but only so long as it was on her own terms; she committed to her bookstore to an extent she never would have in a 9-5 job under an employer. There was Jake, too, doing the creative, draining, all-consuming work of an artist, work that followed him from morning to night, rather than experience “a Monday through Friday sort of dying” in an office somewhere.¹⁸⁹ The people in disaffected narratives were different from the people Terkel interviewed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and I would make the tenuous argument that it is because there is a growing *generation* of disaffected people, whose

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹⁸⁹ This phrase is from Terkel, 1972:xi.

biographies line up with history *just so*, who are questioning the place of work in a life well-lived in a way that others have previously been disinclined, unwilling or unable to do.¹⁹⁰

The disaffected narrative is an understandable response from working people who *believe* they have seen the curtain raised on social changes that the faithful have generally benefited from, and the ambivalent *want* to believe in because the counterevidence was not so stark, and perhaps more importantly, the counter-discourses were not so readily available. Narratives of ambivalence come from those who entered the labour force when the SER was the only legitimate employment relationship for most people, but witnessed the material and discursive chipping-away at its foundation in the late 1970s and 1980s, and often felt it crumble in their own lives or the lives of significant others.

The cumulative or aggregate effect of these specific intersections of biography and history, and the shared discourses that furnish people with relevant and tenable understandings of working life, is potentially a wholesale and lasting shift in the way people relate to their work. The stories in this chapter, and the pattern by which the three narrative types are distributed among participants, supports the hypothesis that generational discourses play a significant role in social change, insofar as they represent contextually-grounded *responses* to (perceived and actual) historical, material changes in economic conditions *and* impact the decisions people make about how to make a living. Ironically, as I will show in the next chapter, *generation-as-discourse* has the unfortunate and

¹⁹⁰ There is less support for Gorz's extended argument – that disaffection “increases [people's] awareness of and openness to movements”, such as unions, which have the “specific aim” of helping people “(re)gain control of their lives” vis-à-vis work. Several disaffected workers had experienced union struggles, but they were not entirely convinced of unionization's purpose and benefits. Two admitted they had made a lot of friends while on strike, and that work got a little better for that reason once their union reached an agreement with the employer, but work itself – the tasks, and the actual relationship between productivity and income – did not improve. One was actively looking for another job, and the other had already moved on.

powerful effect of characterizing these discursive responses to social change as individual, psychological and voluntaristic.

EXPLAINING GENERATION AS DISCOURSE

"I WANT TO SAY, IN ALL SERIOUSNESS, THAT A GREAT DEAL OF HARM IS BEING DONE IN THE MODERN WORLD BY BELIEF IN THE VIRTUOUSNESS OF WORK, AND THAT THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS AND PROSPERITY LIES IN AN ORGANIZED DIMINUTION OF WORK."

BERTRAND RUSSELL (1932)

There are two, related spines running through the middle of this dissertation: generational discourses, and generation-as-discourse. The last chapter set generation-as-discourse aside temporarily, focusing in on two questions: *why* do generational discourses exist, and what are their consequences? In this chapter, generation-as-discourse is subjected to the same questions: why does generation-as-discourse exist in the form(s) first introduced in Chapter Three? And what are the consequences of these discursive usages of generation?

Here, I argue that generation-as-discourse exists and proliferates because it provides people with a reliable and relatable way of making sense of, first, the sometimes wide gulfs between different approaches to the commonly-shared requirement to make a living for oneself and possibly one's family, and second, the experience of social change. People using generation-as-discourse are simultaneously contributing to the construction of generation as a real or actual thing. However, the notion of 'construction' may well imply an overly cooperative, participatory and positive project; the discursive uses of generation in people's working life stories point to more of a battle. The work of other scholars in cultural studies and linguistics offers a helpful concept for understanding struggles over discourse: namely, the *politics of representation*.

The first section of this chapter uses the idea of the politics of representation (and the related notion of "discourse strategies") to make the case that generation-as-discourse is a site of

significant contestation over the right or true representation of generation. Moreover, as I will argue in the second section of the chapter, the politics of representation around generation has serious consequences for the organization and experience of employment, the experience and interpretation of social change, and social relations across perceived generational divisions.

GENERATION-AS-DISOURSE AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

In Chapter One, I drew on the work of Purvis and Hunt to introduce the understanding of discourse that guides this dissertation. I also mentioned the related work of Stuart Hall (along with Michel Foucault), who is one of several scholars whose work advances the idea of “the politics of representation”.¹⁹¹ This idea is a concise encapsulation of a characteristic of discourse that many social theorists acknowledge and develop in other terms – Gramsci’s discussions of ideology and hegemony, for example¹⁹² – and it offers a helpful way of framing this chapter’s analysis of generation-as-discourse.

The basic premise of the politics of representation, which is really a basic premise of all discourse theory, is that language is a “representational system” that is “central to the processes by which meaning is produced.”¹⁹³ Specifically, it is by representing things with language that we imbue those things with meaning. However, because language is always ongoing in various forms of discourse, and because it never comes from a single source or develops in isolation in a single context, the meaning of words (and the things they represent) is never “fixed” and rarely “unitary.”¹⁹⁴ Therefore, there is the possibility that meanings will be contested. Hugh Mehan

¹⁹¹ Hall, Stuart. 2007. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p. 277.

¹⁹² Purvis & Hunt, 1993:494.

¹⁹³ Hall, 2007:1.

¹⁹⁴ Hall, 2007:2.

summarizes the implications of this possibility as follows, pointing out the political dimension of contestation and alerting us to the fact that language and meaning are objects and tools of *power*.

Language has power. The language we use in public political discourse and the way we talk about events and people in everyday life makes a difference in the way we think and the way we act about them. This sentiment is captured by Tom Stoppard in his play, *The Reality*: 'If you can get the right words in the right order, you can nudge the world a little' (quoted in Havel, 1990). [...] Words have constitutive power: they make meaning of things. And when we make meaning, the world is changed as a consequence.¹⁹⁵

Mehan cautions that the power "is subtle" – that "it does not hit like a hammer or fist" – but he also shows that 'getting the words in the right order' and 'making meaning' are precious objects and "goals", over which opposing bodies, ideologies, communities, and other participants in discourse do battle. The battle is waged through "discourse strategies": "those linguistic means used to achieve goals in discourse, including the selection of words, topics, modes of representing people, places or events, rhetorical figures such as metaphor and hyperbole and shifts between codes". Importantly, Mehan notes that while "the expression 'strategies' can, unfortunately, connote planful action," people rarely "choose strategies consciously from a roster of alternatives"; rather, "they most often use discourse strategies quite unintentionally."¹⁹⁶

Next, I take this framework of the politics of representation waged through discourse strategies and apply it to the use of generation-as-discourse in people's working life stories. Viewed

¹⁹⁵ Mehan, Hugh. 1997. "The Discourse of the Illegal Immigration Debate: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation." *Discourse & Society* 8 (2):249-270, p. 251

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 250.

as a discursive battleground, generation is shown to be a potent construct shaping social relations at and around work.

Working too much, wanting too much: Entitlement and Materialism as Discourse Strategies

In the politics of representation, the “selection of words” and “topics” is one of the primary “strategies” which “proponents of various views use [...] to ensure that their framing of the nature of a particular issue predominates.”¹⁹⁷ In the interviews for this dissertation, one particularly contested and contrasting set of words and topics stood out, and it is used here to demonstrate the representational politics taking place via generation-as-discourse. The example concerns two opposing “framings” of generational differences around the contributions and rewards of paid employment. Specifically, I explore the battle between the discursive depiction of “the younger generation” as “entitled” and the depiction of “the older generation” as “materialistic” or “out of balance.”

These two opposing views on generational differences were the “hook” in the introduction to this dissertation. On one side, Penny, the 51-year-old administrator, was quoted admonishing her younger colleagues and young working people in general for their “entitlement”. She claimed that the youngest people in her workplace expected “coffee”, “ice cream”, “bonuses”, and “free holidays” without having to “contribute” or be “loyal” to the company like she ostensibly was. Her sentiments were echoed in other interviews as well, where the word “entitlement” came up explicitly several times. Sixty-year-old William said it in the aforementioned follow-up phone call, when he “figured out” what he wanted to say about generational differences. He said that younger people felt entitled to a job, and to a *good* job, and they “took it for granted” that if something went wrong in their present job – if they quit or got fired – they could find another. Kathy’s comments, from Chapter

¹⁹⁷ Wenden, Anita. 2005. ‘The politics of representation: a critical discourse analysis of an Aljazeera special report.’ *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 10(2), p. 91

Three, strike a similar tone: “it’s harder for the young people to recognize that the employer is not there to meet their individual personal needs.”

Although she was closer in age to the “young people” William, Kathy and Penny referred to, 40-year-old esthetician Danielle had many of the same things to say about her younger co-workers. “There seems to be a different motivation for them,” she told me, “an almost lack of motivation.” Among the younger estheticians she’d worked with, she noted “complacency” and a lack of “thinking about repeat business.” She said that these younger, “twenty-something” employees made excuses, like “‘Oh it’s just not busy’, or ‘this industry, you can’t make money’”. She concluded that “they don’t think they should have to work for their success. They don’t see the rewards yet and the effort – and yeah, it’s hard work, but if you love it, it should be fun.” Later, Danielle called this approach “entitlement.”

Buried in that word – entitlement – is the implication that young workers want or expect more than they *deserve*. The interviewees who used “entitlement” to describe what they saw evidently had a sense of what young people *actually* deserve from their employers, and it was based on age, life stage, career level, and usually all three of these factors used interchangeably. At the beginning of a career, it seems, these participants thought that all an employee truly deserved was a *chance* to earn a paycheque – and not too high a paycheque – and the *potential* of continuous employment. New attitudes and habits brought to the workplace were framed, in the language of entitlement, as transgressions and acts of insubordination. Participants invoked negative terms, like “selfish”, “instant gratification” or “spoiled” – invocations that constitute discursive strategies (conscious or not, as Mehan reminds us) aimed at constructing younger people’s expectations as *too high*, and alleging character deficiencies in humility, realism and patience.

But I argue that their representation of “the younger generation” is especially political because it is tied to specific “stakes” in the workplace and economy in general. When Kathy and

Penny said that young workers expect the employer to be there “for them,” they evince that in their reality, the young employee is meant to be servile to the employer, and to his or her senior colleagues. Even in instances where a young worker is technically senior in pay and occupational rank – as evidenced in one of the women’s stories – the age hierarchy is expected to make young workers deferent to older ones. Kathy, Penny, Danielle and William’s higher status on the hierarchy, and their greater access to employment rewards such as pay, benefits and other aspects of seniority, depends on new younger workers having to go through a similar career progression before reaching the same status.

Importantly, the use of this particular discourse strategy around “entitlement” was not limited to older participants. Twenty-five-year-old Dean, for example, pointed to the behaviours and attitudes of the younger workers in his family’s restaurant, where he was the manager, as a source of frustration. “I see a lot more in the younger generation like mine and younger – there’s a lot more excuses made, and a lot more you know like ‘I need this’ and ‘I can’t - I’m sick,’ and like the definition of sick has totally changed like, people with a cough are sick.” He described the twenty-something wait staff working for him – how they went for cigarette breaks at busy times, or called in sick after partying too late the night before. In general, he said:

It’s being pushed further and further away from the rights of the employer [...] there has to be a balance. It’s either you get what you want or it’s, you know, that’s it. And, I think that, it’s, it’s still being pushed further and further, there’s almost no rights for the employer anymore. And I mean you’re the one giving them the job [...] you’re the one doing everything, all the work, while they’re just working *for* you.

Dean’s statements seem strange, coming from a 25-year-old – but it is clear that his position as a manager is what allows him to self-separate from the twenty-somethings who work under him. This reveals something crucial about generation-as-discourse: specifically, it masks the fact that the

divisions, hierarchies, “rights” and “entitlements” that are so vociferously defended are *fundamentally about power, not age.*

Granted, power (as a function of status in the workplace) and age often go hand-in-hand. When they do not correspond, particularly in the case of younger people who are in senior positions, but also wherever young people appear to have unrealistic or premature expectations, tensions ensue. For example, because of idiosyncrasies in the way her field (art restoration) had developed over the last few decades, 30-year-old Olive was at the same career rank in her organization as people with thirty years’ more experience. Describing how this felt, she said “Here I am, this upstart, and they are like ‘what do you know, little girl?’”. Viewed through the lens of the politics of representation, I argue that the choice of “entitlement” as a topic and word is a “discourse strategy” aimed at defending existing age hierarchies in workplaces and industries, and sustaining a particular alignment of age and power – again, whether participants in this discourse are conscious of it or not.¹⁹⁸

Because we are dealing with a politics of representation, there is another side to the discursive battle to define and depict generational differences around work’s rewards and workers’ contributions. This other side was first introduced in the opening pages and Chapter Three of this dissertation, in 30-year-old Cameron’s musings on the older professors and scientists he worked with. His depiction of “the older generation” as men and women who “forgot to balance their lifestyle and all they have left is work.” Cameron and others suggested that older workers organized their entire lives around work, ostensibly because of the material rewards it provided. This interpretation also came up as Cameron distanced himself from “friends who [...] went for money and aren’t necessarily happy.” Indeed, critiquing materialism and the pursuit of money (particularly

¹⁹⁸ On the “choice of words and topics”, see Mehan, 1997.

with regard to “the older generation” was the most prominent discourse strategy opposing the discourse of entitlement.

This strategy was invoked by 25-year-old Lila, who sympathized with “the baby boomers” desire for “material comforts” but said she tried very hard to resist that desire in her own life. Ferdinand, 35, admitted to “chasing the cheddar” from time to time, but criticized older people who made materialistic choices about how to make a living. While 29-year-old Bettina, a photographer, acknowledged it was important to not “ignore the fact that you have to make money,” she was also adamant that her working life would never be directed at the same goals as her parents, who worked as hard as they did for “a car” and “a house”. “I don’t wanna wake up doing something I really don’t wanna do just so that forty years down the line I’ll have enough money to do whatever I want,” she said, with the implication that her parents had done precisely that. Farouk distanced himself from his parents’ goals and approach to work as well, and the dividing line was drawn along the issue of work’s monetary rewards. Like Bettina, Farouk wanted to carve a space where he could not “ignore” the need to provide for his family, but where he could also be there for his wife and children in other, non-financial ways. It was a space he thought his father never found.

I don’t wanna work 50-60 hours a week. I wanna see my child grow up. I wanna see him [...] Obviously financial support is important but I’m not that one guy that thinks – I mean, I’m meeting [...] parents who, in pre-kindergarten are thinking Harvard and Yale for their kids, you know? And... I just don’t see it, you know? And I’m not even there yet for myself but I’m trying to raise my child in a way that I’m present and maybe that’s because my father was always working so I never saw him that much so I never really knew who he was.

All of these reflections on generational working habits – and there were many similar instances – combine as one “mode of representation” that constructs “the older generation” (generally “baby

boomers” or people in their fifties, sixties and older) as overly devoted to work, ostensibly out of a desire for its material rewards. In a word (and one that came up frequently), these participants were talking about *materialism*.

Just as the discourse strategy of calling out young workers on their “entitlement” was not limited to older participants, the strategy of disparaging older workers’ materialism was not limited to the youngest participants. Jake, the 40-year-old artist, was cited earlier questioning the point of working one’s whole life for material things. “How do you spend your life? What’s it all about? What’s it for?” he asked rhetorically, pointing to friends who “get caught up in” the quest for more money, cars, houses and other material markers of success. Having chosen a line of work characterized by instability and uncertainty, with no benefits and an unpredictable income, he still felt like he had given up “nothing”: “I don’t wish I had a better car, I don’t wish I had a better home,” he maintained. He contrasted his approach to a simple stereotype of the “9-5” worker, who, as far as Jake could fathom, spent “3 hours of [the] day in a car, going to a job [they] don’t like, and faking it”, solely so they could have “their fancy car and their kids”.

Kyle, 51, was also cited in Chapter Three recalling his father’s fraught relationship to work. He said he had learned through witnessing his father’s unhappiness “not to care so much about the money.” Like Jake, however, he admitted he could sometimes get “caught” in the trap of wanting more. For both men, it was a constant negotiation. In Kyle’s words,

A lot of people give in to that; a lot of people lose their lives to that. It can be harmful. You can get a lot done, but it can also waste a lot of time [...] we live in a very affluent society - we don’t need all this stuff [...] as we find when we go through a recession, you know, people stop buying, and we get along fine [...] To a certain extent, you know I’m still living a middle-class life; we have a car, we have a house, but I’m trying to do stuff in a low-tech way. I am living in a neighbourhood where I

can walk most places I wanna go, and you know that's good for me on all kinds of levels and I'm aware of that – so I try to do that.

There is something very salient about the themes intertwined in these excerpts from Kyle and Jake: The materialism they resisted and, like the younger participants Bettina, Lila, Cameron, Farouk, Ferdinand and many others, pinned mainly on older workers, was tied discursively to work in a subtle but crucial way. *Specifically, "working too hard" was treated as nearly interchangeable with being "materialistic".* This discursive linking – a discourse strategy – was something these participants used to justify their approach to work: namely, working less, working from home, being self-employed, or working in jobs where the rewards were largely psychological or social. Kyle connected the dots as follows:

I think in general, most of us work too many hours. It squeezes the rest of life into very small corners. It puts a lot of stress on it. If you have to fight the traffic every day when everybody else is doing it, you know that's an added stress in your life [...] and I'm very lucky to be able to go and do my grocery shopping at ten in the morning or something on a Tuesday when it's just the seniors there...

The message Kyle and others communicated by conjoining the theme of materialism with the theme of overwork or workaholism was that, contrary to the message conveyed through the discourse of entitlement, there is nothing particularly virtuous about dedicating one's life to paid employment, and nothing so sacred about the organization of work that cannot be called into question or actively resisted. Viewed as part of a politics of representation, this message – believing in it and spreading it – is a discourse strategy that responds to the charge of entitlement and related accusations aimed at younger workers who display, in the words of several participants, a "lack of a work ethic." Together, the strategies of entitlement and materialism comprise competing

constructions of generational difference, each with widely different implications for the experience and interpretation of working life.

Both depictions are partly self-serving for the people advancing them. As sociologist Hugh Mehan explains, “each formulation or way of representing a group of people does not simply reflect their characteristics. Each mode of representation defines the person making the representation and constitutes the group of people being represented”.¹⁹⁹ Thus when (mostly) older participants represent “the younger generation” as overly entitled, lazy and spoiled, they simultaneously constitute themselves as selfless and more attuned to the proper balance between contribution and reward. On the other hand, when (mostly) younger participants depict “the older generation” as slaves to a materialistic system (who are sometimes worthy of sympathy), they self-constitute as being aware of “what’s really important” and having their priorities straight.

Other battlegrounds

There were other fault lines in the data between opposing or contrasting representations of generation. For instance, divisions are evident when depictions of generation are subjected to the discourse analysis question of “to whom is agency attributed” in discourse strategies.²⁰⁰ The usages of generation-as-discourse cannot be neatly or exactly divided according to who they “blame” or hold responsible for human action – as shown in Chapter Three – but in a general and provisional way, it is possible to pull out two distinct and dominant representations of generations: first, representations of generations as driven by internal, psychological impulses or personality traits (sometimes linked to parents or upbringing), and second, representations of generations as driven

¹⁹⁹ Mehan, 1997:257

²⁰⁰ Wenden, 2005:94

mainly by socio-economic factors outside the individual. The following example illustrates these contrasting representations well.

Many participants, particularly those who self-categorized as “older” and reflected on “the younger generation,” depicted younger people as simply “more attuned” to work-life balance issues. They explained that younger people – their children and younger co-workers – just seemed to “*want* their work to be more than work” and to “go off to their other lives.” Dan said his twenty-something government colleagues didn’t have the “motivation” to move up the career ladder because they *wanted* balanced lives. Lynn, thinking about her daughter – who had worked a series of entry-level jobs by the time she was forty – figured that her “generation expects to have good jobs and all kinds of things”, and are “much more respectful of the balance - of the *need* for balance - than we were [...] and more insistent that their workplace be more than a source of income.” In this and the other characterizations mentioned here, younger people are attributed with the *motive* to work less or to keep work in its place, and the motive in turn spawns different work arrangements. Viewed as part of a politics of representation, these constructions of generation meet their match in constructions that attribute work-life balance issues first to structural conditions or characteristics of the employment relationship.

This opposing representation is visible in an image depicted by Cameron, the 30-year-old research scientist from the introduction. His job offered employees the option of “flextime”: a flexible work schedule, allowing employees to vary their shifts so long as they completed a certain number of hours per week. He noted that he and his younger colleagues took advantage of flextime, while the older ones rarely did. While Cameron hinted at employee desires and preferences, he also pointed to structural and contextual reasons why this “generational” difference existed: “the older people tend to be quite high up in upper level management and they don’t really have the flexibility,” he explained. Similarly, the *very* junior people or “younger kids”, in Cameron’s

experience, came in and worked very long hours when they first got hired. But by the time they reached Cameron's level of experience – after only a year or two – they came to realize that the government “is not like a private company where if you work your butt off you'll probably be rewarded with a bonus and stuff.” Without any promise of a correspondence between extra work and extra reward, employees would “generally” opt for flexible schedules. Thus, the generational divide around flextime is was constructed as not so much about preferences or a greater desire for work-life balance on the part of young workers, but as a response to the logic of remuneration. In other words, “agency is attributed” in the first case to individuals, and in the second case to structural or environmental factors largely beyond their control.

A similar split emerged between representations of generations that attributed differences to the level of family context in two divergent ways. On the one hand, many participants, thinking about generational differences, pointed to parenting *practices* and family affluence as a source of young people's “entitlement” or “selfishness.” Penny, cited earlier, said that her younger colleagues “don't [...] see much beyond themselves, what they are experiencing and how it affects them. They have no sense of what happened in Africa with the drought, or in Haiti [...] or even with their neighbour who is battling cancer.” She said this was primarily a function of “more affluence” in their early, family lives. Others, like Nicole, Lynn and Don, remarked that younger people today have a sense that if they fail or, worse, slack off, their parents will swoop in and support them.

Parents were largely to blame in this, as 40-year-old Danielle explained. The “complacency” and “lack of motivation” she saw among the younger estheticians she worked with was because “their parents still paid for everything.” She felt like young people today did not *fear* their parents' judgment the same way she did growing up – and this was evident in “the way they talk to” their parents. “People my age who've had kids and stuff, it's almost like they're trying to be more friends

with them," she said. "So their kids feel like 'well my parents just gave me whatever.'" But an alternative representation of generation challenged this interpretation.

The "blame" was still with parents, to a certain degree, but the root cause was depicted as differing values about how work should fit into life, *not* parents "spoiling" their kids, failing to discipline them, or failing to instill in them a solid work ethic. As Alice implied in Chapter Three, parents and societies were more subtly *guiding* their youngest toward a more conscious, deliberate and reflexive relationship to work, imploring them to "go to school" and "figure out who [they] are." Jake, the 41-year-old artist, supported this view when he said that he would advise a young artist starting out today to "take time" and "figure out what's inside." Similarly, Don said he told his teenage daughter not to "rush into a career that could potentially keep you miserable and chained in for years and years and years." He advised her: "Take your time, just enjoy life, live day to day..."

The difference between these two representations is subtle, but it has important consequences. When generational differences are attributed to parents' indulgence of their children's every desires or their efforts to shield their children from struggle, the representation of younger generations as "selfish" or "entitled" is easy, and fitting. But where such differences are seen as part of a cultural or intergenerational shift toward more holistic concerns with balanced lives, work one can be passionate about, and the elevation of a match between a person's talents and interests and the work they do for a living, the image of generation that emerges is more sympathetic to and even laudatory of young people's expectations and desires around work. There are, moreover, socio-political implications – what Purvis and Hunt call the "social effects or consequences" of discourse (and ideology) – that each of the representational battles noted here share in common.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Purvis & Hunt, 1993:478.

GENERATIONAL STAKES

The point in exploring the functions and ramifications of generation-as-discourse through the lens of the politics of representation is not to determine which “side” gets generation “right.” As Purvis and Hunt explain, describing Foucault’s treatment of discourse: “Discourses are not representations of a more or less distorted reality. Rather discourses should be understood as ‘economies’ (with their own intrinsic technology, tactics, effects of power, which in turn they transmit).” I would clarify that discourses are *political* economies, in which different interests and ideologies are represented in a discursive battle for the power to define reality. There is obvious overlap between discourse, ideology (recall the distinction between them from Chapter One) and the politics of representation. Clearly, discourse is salient to the politics of representation (insofar as discourse strategies comprise its core), and as Wenden notes, “Ideology will [...] influence the manner in which groups represent matters of import and relevance to the body politic”.²⁰² Purvis and Hunt add the important point that the reverse is also true. Their “sociological variant of ideology theory” holds that ideologies are constructed with, by and through discourses whose combination and alignment becomes ideological when it takes on the most salient characteristic of ideology: *directionality*. In plain, directionality refers to the fact that “ideology always works to favour some and to disadvantage others.”²⁰³

This is the point I wish to convey about the various uses of generation-as-discourse, and which has been pulled from the data by the analytical framework of the politics of representation: there are *stakes* involved in the battle between different representations of generations and generational differences. The stakes revolve around the preservation of a way of making a living that “works to favour” some people – *or appears to them as favourable* – and either does not work, or works “to disadvantage” others. So what, exactly, is this “way of making a living?”

²⁰² Wenden, 2005:90

²⁰³ Purvis & Hunt, 1993:478.

Industriousness Post-Industry

Historian James Livingston asked recently, in a blog response to a review of his latest book assessing American life at the end of the 20th Century, a provocative question:

In view of 'deindustrialization,' why hasn't the Left, however construed, said: "All right then, good-paying jobs are going elsewhere, but instead of demanding the repatriation of those jobs so that we can return to back-breaking but well-paying industrial labor, our position is, enough already with productivity—our position is, FUCK WORK"? Why hasn't the Left said: "Our task is to figure out how to detach the receipt of income from the creation of value, in keeping with the old socialist criterion of need, 'from each according' and all that"? Why hasn't the Left kept faith with its historic mission, which is not to put us back to work but to liberate us from alienated labor?²⁰⁴

Certainly, the phrase "alienated labour" never came up in any of the interviews (although two participants came very close).²⁰⁵ But the rift between different representations of generation arguably separates two competing visions of what the point of work, and the role of individual working people as workers, vis-à-vis a "bigger picture." On one side are the (mostly negative) representations of young people as overly entitled, psychologically attuned to work-life balance as a priority, and spoiled by their parents and the affluence around them, and the dichotomous depictions of older workers (un-entitled, devoted to work and having risen from humble beginnings) with which they correspond.

²⁰⁴ Intellectual History Blog. Accessed 16/2/2011 at: <http://us-intellectual-history.blogspot.com/2010/11/livingston-response-to-hartman-review.html>

²⁰⁵ Andriy, a 40-year-old Lutheran monk, actually returned to Marxist theory several times in his interview. He had spent part of his life in a communist country and was literally sickened by the aspects of capitalism he experienced as a woodworker in Canada. Ferdinand, the 35-year-old self-employed producer, also reflected on contradictions in capitalism and mentioned Marx and Marxism.

These representations, consciously or intentionally or not, work to challenge any legitimate bases for re-thinking work in the context of a decline in the standard employment relationship or SER (see Chapter Five). Moreover, they appear to appeal to older workers who believe that it is *people* who have changed their attitudes toward work, not work (employment relationships, the wage structure, labour market composition) that has changed. These representations of generation frame “the problem” as one that can be addressed if only young people will, as Lynn said, “get over” their “issues” with work and settle into a full-time, permanent job. They perpetuate a notion that people in general have gotten more wealthy (and comfortable) in Canada since the 1950s and 1960s, drawing attention away from rising inequality, the present historic highs in youth unemployment, and the fact that the youngest workers in today’s labour force are statistically overrepresented in temporary, contract, part-time and other precarious employment relationships.²⁰⁶

In a sense, these representations reflect what Weber called “the ghost of beliefs” from a previous time, when both statistics and cultural discourses would lead a reasonable person to believe that he or she could find a job for life with an employer that would take care of him or her until retirement. Charges of “entitlement” in particular are rooted to a moral link between productivity and virtue, and a material link between productivity and income, as Livingston notes, and this link was also evident in the faithful and ambivalent narratives explored in Chapters Four and Five. The negative representations of “the young generation” jive with a way of looking at work and employment that serves the interests of people who benefit, or believe they benefit, from the neo-liberal economic policies and norms that have been shown elsewhere to emphasize the individual’s responsibility for his or her own well-being through paid employment.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Youth unemployment hits 30-year high: study. (2009). *CBC News Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2009/10/06/youth-unemployment.html>

²⁰⁷ Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Powers of Freedom*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, p. 174.

On the other hand are those more positive or sympathetic representations of younger generations as anti-materialistic, *forced* by factors beyond their control into flexible working arrangements, and implored by society and parents to treat employment as an arena for self-exploration. These are accompanied, of course, by mirror depictions of older generations as materialistic, rigidly nine-to-five, and relatively uninfluenced by the sort of “cult of the self” discourses that direct attention to the psychological or spiritual rewards of work. Such representations fit better with the disaffected narrative type (and relationship to work) than the ambivalent or faithful, as they bind on to the same sorts of discourses that ask what Studs Terkel called the “sacrilegious question” about the worth of a work ethic. Questioning the point of paid employment is not new – but it is particularly relevant in a post-industrial context where the connection between the work we do (production) and the things we ostensibly need (products) has arguably become more intangible through de-localized production processes, “the knowledge economy” and automation.²⁰⁸ In other words, the point of “being productive” is more difficult to grasp if one cannot put one’s hands on a finished product.

It is here, in thinking about the changing place of work in the life of the individual and the life of a society, that the two strands of argument in this dissertation – generation-as-discourse and generational discourses – come together. As argued in Chapters Four and Five, underlying perceived generational differences are three largely distinct ways of relating to work: ambivalence, faith and disaffection, each of which appears to find purchase with a different segment of participants. Narratives of *faith* came from participants who most plainly reaped the benefits of the SER, and who largely continued to benefit even as the SER began to lose ground. They were employers who saw their costs decrease (personally or through observation of others in their class

²⁰⁸ See, for example, Bertrand Russell’s 1932 “In Praise of Idleness”, published in Richards, Victor (ed.). 1997. *WHY Work?: Arguments for the Leisure Society*. London, UK: Freedom Press. Weber’s *Protestant Work Ethic* is also, at its heart, a questioning of the point of working beyond the furnishing of basic needs.

bracket) as employment regulations bent and flexed and the labour force became increasingly usable on an *ad hoc* basis. They were the businesspeople who neared the age of retirement and began to work as high-paid consultants to firms that wanted to take advantage of this new labour market flexibility too. They were the career public servants who worked full, continuous careers and retired with full pensions.²⁰⁹ There was variation, of course – the 40-year-old Baptist minister whose faith in work *was* a faith in God, and the carpenter who planned to work until he was ninety, both of whom declared their paid work to be their “calling” – but the commonalities dominate.

Ambivalent narratives, meanwhile, came from those who seemed to want to believe in the goodness of employers and the strength and uniformity of the SER, but saw the cracks in that veneer in their own lives. They were the public servants whose jobs were irreparably damaged or lost as a result of restructuring; they were the manual labourers who watched their industries gutted, their unions either weakened or corrupted, and had their dignity and societal role challenged by the rise of the Knowledge Economy; they were the women who were promised “it all” but were in reality forced to choose between being *accepted* as good mothers *or* successful career-women. Still, the ambivalent defended the virtue of hard work and dedication to employers, a belief ingrained and supported by the cultural discourses about upward mobility and productivity that prevailed even at the height of economic restructuring.²¹⁰ Together, the participants telling faithful and ambivalent narratives about their working lives comprised the bulk of the group who characterized younger people as entitled and selfish, and questioned their work ethic. Together, they characterized disaffection as a young person’s prerogative, and constructed it as a misguided and illegitimate generational matter.

²⁰⁹ In the Canadian public service, a full career is thirty years; public servants who retire at or after thirty years collect full and generous pensions.

²¹⁰ One need look no further than the appeal of Reagan and Thatcher for evidence of this prevailing wisdom in the 1980s.

The participants telling disaffected narratives *did* come mainly from participants in their twenties and thirties, but age was only one of the common denominators among this group. They were also similarly positioned as wage-workers, contract employees, and precariously self-employed; most struggled with student debt and the challenges of maintaining a dual-earner romantic relationship; unlike the faithful and ambivalent, most were not homeowners. They too drew on generation-as-discourse to defend their relationship to work, delegitimizing the relationships of the other two groups by equating a dedication to paid employment with the wanton pursuit of material wealth. Thus, the “rift” I pointed to a several pages ago, between two different representations of generational differences, falls roughly along the same chasm between, on the one side, disaffection, and on the other, ambivalence and faith. The overlap between these two strands of argument, and the connection they both have to material and political-economic context, are laid out in the table below.

Generational Discourse (Narrative Type)	Position vis-à-vis economic restructuring and associated changes	Use of <u>Generation-as-Discourse</u>
Faithful	Generally benefitted financially, tend to “give back” <i>through</i> work and see provision as contribution to family.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Younger generation” as entitled; • Work-life balance as a nice idea, but irresponsible; • Older generation has a work ethic, younger generation does not.
Ambivalent	Limited financial benefits, significant familial sacrifices, but still defend restructuring.	
Disaffected	Did not benefit financially, but willing to see flexibility and mobility as benefits that allow for familial and community contributions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older generation as materialistic; • Work-life balance as important and complementary to work ethic; • Younger generation as more cognizant of familial and community obligations.

While, as others writing about discourse have emphasized repeatedly, participants in discourse rarely see their actions and utterances as political or strategic, the use of generation-as-

discourse alongside and within generational discourses about relating to work is plainly a politics of representation. At stake in these discursive battles is the power to claim legitimacy for particular modes of relating to and thinking about paid employment, some of which transpose easily onto the regulatory and cultural frameworks that shape employment relations, economic production and social reproduction, and others of which shed light on the contradictions therein and raise the possibility of different frameworks. The fulcrum is around a now age-old question of *why* we, in the West as elsewhere, seem to prefer a system of what Bertrand Russell called “overwork for some and starvation for others” instead of being open to a system that treats productive activity itself as a resource to which we all might be entitled a fair share rather than obligated to as much as we can handle or none at all.²¹¹ Although the people in this dissertation may not be cognizant of it, their differences speak to a disagreement about how, in Livingston’s terms, the “creation of value” should correspond to the “receipt of income”.

Importantly, these questions, possibilities and political ramifications are among the things obscured by the conventional treatment of “generational differences” by management consultants, some media, and even certain social scientific studies. The next and final chapter of this dissertation asks what (if anything) the project of “managing” an intergenerational workforce can take away from the preceding study’s treatment of generation as a matter of political discourse.

²¹¹ Russell, 1932. Accessed 14/10/2011 at <http://www.zpub.com/notes/idle.html>

CONCLUSION: GENERATION AND WORK AS WE KNOW IT

The tips about dealing with intergenerational differences offered by management and human resources experts, journalists and even social psychologists are many: “turn the seniors into resources, not roadblocks”²¹²; “the best way to keep young workers is to make them part of a team”²¹³; “Offer Gen X employees clear statements of goals, but allow them reasonable latitude on how to achieve those goals”²¹⁴; to engage Gen Y, “Send data directly through your intranet, using YouTube-style videos, blogs and open forums”.²¹⁵ But the findings gleaned from analyzing generation as discourse suggest that there is much more to intergenerational differences than the sort of surface relationships to technology, stereotypical behaviours, attitudes toward authority and receptiveness to change that are the focus of management consultants. The divisions also run deeper than the often-vented feelings of frustration, from parents and coworkers of “entitled” young adults, and the children and coworkers of “workaholic boomers”, some of which were heard here.

²¹² “5 ways to bridge the generation gap at work”. *Economic Times (India)*. November 5th, 2010. Accessed February 3rd, 2011 at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/quickiearticleshow/6874735.cms>

²¹³ Krischer Goodman, Cindy. “Gen Y gets real: Hard times shatter young employees’ sense of entitlement”. *Miami Herald*, September 22nd, 2010. Accessed February 5th, 2011 at <http://www.dallasnews.com/business/headlines/20100922-Gen-Y-gets-real-Hard-7440.ece>.

²¹⁴ Javitch, David. 2010. “How to Get the Most out of Gen Y-ers.” *The Globe and Mail Online: Report on Business*, November 29th. Accessed December 1st, 2010 at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/your-business/business-categories/human-resources/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-gen-y-ers/article1813777/>

²¹⁵ Cooper, Cord. “Open up to Generation Y”. *Investors.com*, January 5th, 2011. Accessed February 5th, 2011 at <http://www.investors.com/NewsAndAnalysis/Article/558852/201101051746/Open-Up-To-Generation-Y.aspx>

Indeed, the divisions run so much deeper than simplistic categorical differences or interpersonal schisms that they are hard to recognize as generational without the theoretical framework and contextual elaboration provided in this dissertation. The latter are crucial for understanding what happens when successive “waves” of workers, laden with the baggage of different lifetime experiences and provisioned with different amounts and kinds of lifetime resources, join one another in the workplace (or workforce writ large) and go about the individual and social task of making a living. Inattention to political economic context, and only limited reflection on what, exactly, a generation *is*, characterize much of the human resources strategy aimed at achieving stable and harmonious working relationships between employees of different ages.

For example, a Canadian company called *n-Gen* specializes in helping businesses respond to and manage “the four generations” as customers and, more importantly for the present argument, employees. Their service is built around an assumption the company shares with public discourse, certain psychology scholars and others who study and develop management practices: that generation is a matter of *identity*. This is the very equation Susan McDaniel’s work, discussed in Chapter One, calls into question – and for good reason.²¹⁶ The view of generations as identities, which emphasizes personal choice, personality traits and individual agency in the selection and direction of careers and jobs, and as a result it glosses over the factors I foreground here: the important socio-political foundations and implications of generational difference. Yet the former view is what underpins the existence and strategies of *n-Gen*, Claire Raines and the companies and writers that accept or promote their style of service.

n-Gen’s founders, in fact, authored a manual outlining their approach, and the tagline they chose for it is telling: “Loyalty is dead... or is it?” Their assumption, as was also made clear in a

²¹⁶ McDaniel, 2001:197.

presentation in Toronto in October 2011, is that “Gen Y” *does not want* the linear, stable careers that ostensibly characterized the lives of their parents and grandparents; rather, they are *choosing* a “spiral” shaped career, with “multiple entry points.” Companies, the *n-Gen* spokesperson told the audience, had to accept that personnel and staffing were going to become “revolving doors” as a result of the career strategies and preferences of this youngest generation.

But as argued in Chapters Five and Six especially, preferences are only part of the picture, and they are certainly not *the* driver of today’s “revolving door” model of business and employment. Rather, the generational differences that present themselves to employers, surface in working life stories and are splashed across newspaper and magazine headlines are inextricable from their political, social and economic contexts (and documented shifts therein). Particularly influential are the four broad shifts identified in Chapter Five: the decline of the standard employment relationship (SER); the rise of women’s labour force participation; the growing imperative of post-secondary education; and the increasing polarization of wealth in Canada and the world over. These shifts influence the way people narrate and think about their lives, and how they relate to and actually accomplish the task of making a living. Any “choice” that Gen-Y (or anyone, for that matter) has is therefore relative. In Archer’s language, generational differences are, at best, about different “emergent” interactions of objective conditions, subjective concerns and the projects people construct between them.²¹⁷

And just what are these “generational differences”? In Chapter Four, using exemplary narratives from the fifty-two people interviewed for this project, I argued that there are three distinct ways of relating to work evident in three different types of narratives about the lifelong task of making a living: namely, narratives of faith, ambivalence and disaffection. These three relationships were shown to underpin the workplace and familial clashes and divides that

²¹⁷ Archer, 2009.

participants identified as “generational.” They also loosely correspond to the intersections of biography/life course with the historical moments created by the four shifts identified above. In redefining so-called generation conflicts and differences as rooted in discourses (that are shaped by context), the argument here has not removed “generation” from the picture, but it has recast it as something more complex and dynamic than a psychic divide between people of different ages. Specifically, I have argued for understanding generation *as* and *in* discourse.

As Discourse

In Chapter One, I proposed that generation be treated *as a* discourse (*generation-as-discourse*) – that is, as a vehicle for thought and action, or a mental structure that provides people with, and limits them to, specific way(s) of understanding, speaking about, and acting in the world around them. In Chapter Three, I applied this method to the accounts shared with me in interviews with 52 participants, and it revealed that “generation” does indeed get drawn on as a discourse by subjects in the process of narrating their working lives.

This happens primarily in two ways: first, it is used as code for a specific, age-related “axis of difference”, which helps people articulate the differences between themselves and others in generational terms; second, it is used to point to perceived social change, especially technological change, shifting gender roles, and the rise of the knowledge economy. However, even where it was connected to an understanding of society, generation-as-discourse was a means of pinning social change on *individual* choice and behavior – *concerns* in Margaret Archer’s terminology – instead of on wider social and cultural forces and dynamics. On this basis, I have argued that while generation-as-discourse has the essential capacity to capture the intersections of individual and society, biography and history, concerns and contexts, it is malleable enough that it can sometimes be used to foreground only one side of these analytic binaries, and it is usually the individual/biographical/concerns side.

Generation-as-discourse also furnished older participants with a way of positioning themselves as “strangers” in the present, and young people, in contrast, as being always on the vanguard of social change or renewal. The effect is that being “of a certain age” – over fifty, usually – is discursively tied to the slowdown or end of individual adaptation. Another effect is the elucidation of generational norms or cultures: ways of being in and moving through the world that align with particular intersections of biography and history.

In Chapter Six, I extended the concept of generation-as-discourse further, asking first what can explain its existence and apparent appeal to people narrating and understanding their lives, and second what the consequences or effects of generation-as-discourse are for the organization of labour as a collective project and making a living as an individual project. I argued there that generation-as-discourse can be understood as a *politics of representation*, wherein the battle to define generation as a singular phenomenon *and* to define distinct generations as groups of people has political antecedents and consequences. First, the dominant discourse strategy of depicting “the younger generation” as “entitled” or “spoiled” works to delegitimize any attempts at rethinking the way working and earning – and production and income – are attached in our contemporary “total organization of labour”.²¹⁸

This strategy benefits from the still-strong moral association of hard work with virtue, despite the obvious fact that, in contemporary Canada at least, we are well beyond the point where forty hours of productive labour from every person each week is necessary to furnish everyone with the necessities of survival *and* the artistic, aesthetic, therapeutic, communitarian and expressive perks that make surviving worthwhile.²¹⁹ Second, the contrasting discourse strategy of

²¹⁸ See Glucksmann, 2006.

²¹⁹ See Russell, 1932 for an early argument in this vein; see van Parijs, 1991 for a more recent version. Van Parijs, Philippe. 1991. ‘Why Surfers Should be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income.’ *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 20 (2):101-131.

framing “the older generation’s” relationship to work as a function of materialistic desires ironically constructs work as something that is done mainly or solely for its material rewards, leaving the anti-materialistic individual few choices but to resist or remain irreverent about *work* if his or her goal is resisting materialism.

Generational Discourses

Generation-as-discourse connects to the second approach to combining generation and discourse explored in this dissertation: generational discourses. As proposed in Chapter One, the concept of generational discourses assumes that generation is the intersection of biography and history, and generational discourses are posited as the outcome of generation’s influence on *other* discourses. In Chapter Four, I argued on this basis that three types of narrative (constructed from multiple discourses) dominate where ordinary people put together a story about their working lives: narratives of faith, ambivalence and disaffection. These narratives tell of particular relationships to work, and they line up *roughly* with age, but not necessarily with the conventional generational divisions people, the media, management consultants and popular literature tend to assert on the basis of age (e.g., the Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y). However, as shown in Chapter Five, these different narrative types actually correspond more with the timing of people’s lives vis-à-vis those four earlier-mentioned political economic transformations, which were identified as having taken place in participants’ lifetimes.

In Chapter Six, the three narrative types were connected to generation-as-discourse, as participants’ use of generation-as-discourse was shown to correspond with the narrative type their working life story most closely aligned with. The faithful and ambivalent narratives went hand-in-hand with negative representations of young people’s entitlement, while disaffected narratives often revolved around the equation of commitment to paid work with materialism, and the association of both of these qualities with “the older generation.” The methodological implication of

this overlap between generation-as-discourse and generational discourses is that generation, even framed as a matter of discourse, is not going to be found on a single discursive plane, nor should it be. Its ambiguity, polysemy and plurality are sources of what Susan McDaniel called (roughly) 'useful creative tensions' that reveal previously mysterious or intangible aspects of individual and social life.²²⁰

In this vein, I proposed that the distribution of the three narrative types – and with them, three distinct ways of actually relating to work – opens up a novel way of viewing human agency and social change. Specifically, *if* we take the dominance of disaffection among the youngest participants as an indicator that disaffection is *increasing* in contemporary society, as Andre Gorz argued it was, there is good reason to explore further the role of *discursive* shifts in relation to material changes in the organization of paid employment and unpaid work; moreover, there is reason to incorporate generation as an analytical principle in the elaboration of how – through what mechanisms and in what forms – discursive shifts take place, and are therefore identifiable. In plain, I propose that *shifts in dominant discourses follow the movement of successive generations – the moving intersections of biography and history – propelled by and bringing in their wake cultural and structural changes in (for example) institutions, regulations, norms and ideals*. This hypothesis is not fully explored in this dissertation – the data to test it would need to be longitudinal and better specified to isolate a smaller arena of social change and discourse – but the theoretical seed for such an empirical investigation is planted.

Contributions

Beyond the scholarly possibilities implied in the proposed connection between generation, discourse and social change, this dissertation has also engaged with and therefore owes a

²²⁰ McDaniel, 2001:197, paraphrased.

constructive response to the literature and industry concerned with mitigating or understanding intergenerational differences in workplaces and the labour force. The argument in this dissertation, and its epistemological orientation toward discourse (and ideology, and the politics of representation), does not lend itself immediately to management strategy, human resources or conflict resolution. But it asks that the claims and services of generations-management consultants, like the picture of intergenerational strife depicted in popular media, be received with a healthy degree of skepticism. It suggests, moreover, that the strategies put forward in management literature and practice amount to band-aids on the bullet-wound of deep-seated and contextually-shaped intergenerational differences. Certainly, the socio-economic gaps, regulatory frameworks, gender norms and the cultural imperative of higher (and higher) education are beyond the scope of the individual manager's job – but they, like business owners, policymakers and ordinary people are to a certain degree complicit in the way society understand and responds to generational change.

The temptation to view intergenerational differences as a “management” problem – that is, a problem to be managed within extant parameters – extends to employment and social policy; the argument here is an argument against this temptation. The possibly growing antipathy between people who benefit from and/or defend a model of production and social reproduction premised on “overwork for some and starvation for others” (to put it somewhat hyperbolically), and people who do not, is not going to be solved by workplace initiatives or policies that zero in on the “generation gap” as the primary source of strife. The findings here support the development of a more inclusive economy, where the extant possibility of rewarding (or at the very least, stable and guaranteed) work for all is pursued and achieved through, for example, shorter workdays, job-sharing, benefits for the growing legions of the self-employed, and a tighter correspondence between employment regulations and the jobs and employment relationships we actually have. The aim is a huge one:

creating the conditions in which people for whom faith in work is difficult and ambivalence intolerable can and will opt for liberation *in* work, rather than be pressured by economic and cultural factors to choose *between* alienating labour and liberation from it.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS BY AGE AND GENDER

Gender	Age									
	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-60	61-70	71-86	Total
Female	2	5	6	4	0	1	7	4	1	28
Male	1	3	2	2	4	2	5	0	3	23
Total	3	8	8	6	4	3	12	4	4	52

APPENDIX I

TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	Occupation	Gender	Age	Married?	Children?	Ethnicity/Nationality	Education
Alexander	Pastor	m	45	y	7	Caucasian Canadian	MA (Divinity)
Alice	Illustrator	f	29	y		Caucasian Canadian	Art school
Andriy	Monk	m	40	Div	1	Polish Canadian	Woodworking apprenticeship
Angela	Office assistant	f	57	y	2	Caucasian Canadian	High School + training
Beth	Secretary	f	46	n		Caucasian Canadian	BA
Bettina	Freelance journalist	f	31	n	n	Chinese-Canadian	PSE
Bev	Church Administrator	f	56	y	2	Caucasian Canadian	High School
Bob	Carpenter	m	53	y	4	Caucasian Canadian	Bible school
Brad	Carpenter/Stay-at-home-Dad	f	35	y	1	Canadian	University(outdoor rec)
Bryan	Semi-retired accountant /CEO	m	71	y	2	Caucasian Canadian	Law School
Cameron	Research Scientist	m	30	n		Caucasian Canadian	PhD (Chemistry)
Caroline	Personal Care Worker	f	27	n		Caucasian Canadian	BSc Nursing
Christine	Hospital fundraiser	f	31	n		Canadian	BA
Corbin	Retired businessman	m	86	y	3	Polish	Business
Dan	Public Servant (Director-level)	m	45	Y	2	Caucasian Canadian	MBA
Danielle	Esthetician	f	40	y		Caucasian Canadian	Community College
Dean	Restaurant Manager / Student	m	25	n	n	Swiss-Italian-Canadian	Part of a BA
Don	Accupuncturist	m	51	y	3	Caucasian Canadian	MA
Donald	Mechanic	m	50	y	2	Chinese-Canadian	High school
Elspeth	Restaurant manager	f	29	cl		Caucasian Canadian	BA Fine Arts
Emmett	Musician/music store owner	m	30	n	n	Canadian	Some university
Esame	Art gallery marketer	f	31	n	n	French Canadian	BA (Business)
Farouk	Stay-at-home Dad	m	35			Lebanese	BA
Ferdinand	Music and TV audio producer	m	35	y	2	Canadian	Part of a BA
Ginger	Office manager	f	34	n	n	Caucasian Canadian	BA (Comparative Religion)

Helen	Realtor / B&B Owner	f	69	Div	2	Caucasian Canadian	High school
Irma	Closed captioner	f	38	n		Canadian	Some PSE
Jake	Artist	m	41	y	1	Caucasian Canadian	College
Jamal	Administrative Assistant	m	39	n	n	Moroccan	MBA (from Morocco)
Jody	Social worker/new mom	f	30	y	1	Canadian	University (nursing)
Kathy	Retired social researcher	f	64	Div	1	Caucasian Canadian	MA
Olive	Art restorer	f	30	y	n	Caucasian Canadian	MA
Ken	Retired military; engineer	m	58	y	2	Caucasian Canadian	High School + training
Kyle	Writer	m	51	y	3	Caucasian Canadian	MA (English?)
Lila	contract worker / student	f	25	n		Caucasian Canadian	BSc
Liz	Public Servant	f	31	n	n	Caucasian Canadian	MA (Anth)
Lynn	Retired Human Resources	f	65	y	2	Caucasian Canadian	BA
Maia	Bookstore owner	f	37	n		Lebanese	University (psych)
Marcus	Hotel receptionist	m	28	n		Black Canadian	BA
Marsha	Business Owner - Consultant	f	55	y	2	Caucasian Canadian	MBA
Mary	Charity Donations organizer	f	36	y	n	Caucasian Canadian	BA in Anthropology
Melanie	Public servant	f	25	n		Caucasian Canadian	BA J, part of BA Lib
Michelle	Retired teacher	f	67	y		Caucasian Canadian	BA
Nicole	Former librarian	f	58	y	2	Caucasian Canadian	PhD (Education - not finished)
Peggy	Retired Bank Teller	f	82	y		Caucasian Canadian	Grade 11
Penny	Executive Assistant	f	51	y	4	Caucasian Canadian	Cerificate in HR
Phoebe	Retired military	f	56	y	2	Caucasian Canadian	Undergraduate
Raymond	Lawyer	m	42	y		Canadian	Law school
Roy	Electrician	m	50	n		Caucasian Canadian	Grade 9
Stacey	Public Servant (manager-level)	f	54	y	1	Caucasian Canadian	High school
Victor	Retired power plant worker	m	82	y		Caucasian Canadian	Grade 11
William	Retired Public Servant	m	60	y		French Canadian	BA

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide**1. First job**

Listen for... likes, dislikes, reasons for getting one

2. Childhood

Listen for family background, interests; ask about priorities and Pastimes.

- *What did you think you wanted to 'be' or do for a living?*
- *Parents: What do you remember about your parents' working lives, back when you were growing up?*

3. Current/last job

Listen for... dependence on income; Hours worked; likes and dislikes.

- *Why do you do it?*
- *First thought when alarm goes off?*
- *Do others understand / value? (How would you convince a stranger on the street that your job is important)*

4. Life outside work

Family and caregiving; Hobbies/leisure/consumption and fun; Community involvement and volunteering; Education/training; Health and medical

5. Changes

As a person; In your job; In the 'world of work' (expectations of employers/ees, working conditions, work-life balance)

6. Ask those whose lifeline shows a relatively stable, lifelong career: What would you say has kept you in the same career/job all this time?

7. Ask those who've held several different jobs over their lifeline: What are some of the reasons why you've moved from job to job over your lifetime? *Stressful? Exciting? Welcomed?*

8. How do you think most people approach work nowadays?

- *Are they committed to their jobs?*
- *Do they have a good 'work ethic'? What do you think is a good 'work ethic'?*
- *Has anything changed since you started working?*

9. Ideal world.

*If you could organize your working life/make a living any way you wanted, what would change?
What would stay the same?*

10. Regrets

11. If you could go back to that XX-year old person and give him/her advice about what to do for a living, what would you say? What about to a young person today?

12. Do you think the way we organize work is fair? *For everyone?*

13. Generations

- *Listen for use of term*
- *Ask about older/younger co-workers*

APPENDIX III

RECRUITMENT POSTER

WORK.

Love it or hate it, we all do it.

Work—how people make a living—is constantly changing. But in certain ways, it hasn't changed much at all over the past century. Sometimes work is paid. Sometimes work is unpaid, and done out of necessity or charity. Sometimes we enjoy working, and other times it is boring, or even painful. Some people work at the same job their whole lives, while others move from job to job in search of the 'right one', or simply out of a need for change.

Carleton University PhD student Karen Foster is interested in talking to YOU about how you make a living, what you think and feel about work, how you balance the need to make a living with the other things you value in life, and what has changed or stayed the same since you first started working. The purpose of this project is to see how well-documented changes—such as the widespread shift away from lifelong, stable, single careers toward multiple careers in a single lifetime—actually affect the way people think about and live their lives.

What is required?

- Approximately one hour of your time for an interview at a time and location of your choice.
- The interview will focus mainly on the role(s) work has played in your life, from the work your parents did, to your first paid job, to where you are now and what you envision for yourself in the future.
- I would like the views of people from a wide range of backgrounds, including people who starting working before 1985, people who started working after 1984, people with or without spouses or children, people who've lived in Canada their whole lives, people who moved to Canada recently, people who are still working, people who've retired, etc. What is key to the study is that you *are involved in making a living* for you and/or your family, and that you are **aged 18 or older**.

Why should you do it?

- Most people find the process of reflecting on their life situation illuminating and satisfying.

- The more we know about work—why people do it, what they like about it, what they hope it will do for them—the more possibilities we can imagine for making work better for more people. We can also begin to empathize with one another's struggles and triumphs as working people today, as co-workers, neighbours, family members and strangers.
- Please note that all of your identifying information will be changed.

If you wish to be part of this important study, please contact Karen at kmacalpi@connect.carleton.ca. This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance by the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee, who can be reached at (613) 520-2517 or ethics@carleton.ca