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Developmental Paper

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Track: Identity

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**Narratives of ageing and/or retiring and identity work: a conversation across theoretical perspectives on identity**

**Summary (142)**

This paper engages in a conversation across three theoretical perspectives on identity (sensemaking, storied resource, and critical) by exploring identity work research of individuals' experiences of ageing and/or retiring. It achieves this by selecting a contemporary article on ageing and/or retiring, employing narrative analysis, from each perspective, and comparing and contrasting the authors' language in describing the nature of identity work, and the aims and outcomes of their projects. Initial findings are presented in a table. The development paper, if accepted, will be developed by attempting to apply the different theoretically-informed emphases of narrative analysis to the author's current identity research project on pre-retirees. In this way, the paper has the potential to make a theoretical contribution by evaluating the potential for cross-fertilisation between perspectives. The paper's description of the different theoretically-informed ways of engaging narrative analysis might offer a methodological contribution.

Word Count: 1,979 words (excluding table and references)

## **Narratives of ageing and/or retiring and identity work: a conversation across theoretical perspectives on identity**

### **Introduction**

This paper engages in a conversation across three theoretical perspectives on identity (sensemaking, storied resource, and critical) by exploring identity work research of individuals' experiences of ageing and/or retiring. There are three reasons for the paper's focus. First, I have just begun a new identity research project on pre-retirees. In searching for extant literature on retiring and identity, I came across Vough *et al.* (2015) who explore managers' sensemaking of their end of careers. That study prompted the second reason for the paper's focus. Recent British Academy of Management Identity Special Interest Group workshops (such as McInnes *et al.*'s (2013) Professional Development Workshop) aimed at encouraging debate across the different theoretical traditions on identity. Furthermore, a forthcoming identity publication encourages researchers to explore, for instance, how 'discursive perspectives on identity differ from or inform more cognitive or sensemaking perspectives' (Author *et al.*, forthcoming) - reference details omitted to maintain anonymity). Related to that second reason is a third, which is the paper's fit with the conference theme of 'The value of pluralism in advancing management research, education and practice' (BAM 2015).

This developmental paper will attempt to engage in a conversation across three theoretical perspectives on identity. It will achieve this by illustrating how sharing the theoretical resource of identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008) and the methodological resource of narrative analysis, albeit employed differently, provides 'the potential for cross-fertilisation between perspectives' (Author *et al.*, forthcoming). By analyzing a contemporary narrative analysis identity article on ageing and/or retiring from each theoretical perspective, the paper highlights the similarities and differences in the authors' language in describing the nature of identity work, and the aims and outcomes of their projects. The development paper, if accepted, will be developed by attempting to apply the different theoretically-informed emphases of identity work and narrative analysis to the author's current identity research project on pre-retirees. The developed paper's application of the different theoretically-informed ways of engaging narrative analysis to illustrate potential cross-fertilisation might offer methodological and theoretical contributions.

The paper begins with an overview of the different theoretical perspectives on identity and a discussion of identity work and narrative analysis as a means of conversing across these. The paper then discusses, in the context of my current study, the method of selecting and analyzing the chosen research articles. It presents preliminary findings in the form of a table and considers the paper's further development.

### **Different theoretical perspectives on identity: the potential for conversation in research on ageing and/or retiring through identity work and narrative analysis**

The concept of individual-level identity has been developed in several ways, reflecting different theoretical perspectives (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008; Smith and Sparkes, 2008). In organisational studies, Alvesson *et al.* (2008:8) encourage dialogue across

three perspectives – functional, interpretive and critical. They invite identity scholars to make clear how different theoretical perspectives feature in existing identity studies in order to illuminate where ‘productive tensions and alliances reside’ (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008:9). More recently, a forthcoming publication (Author *et al.*, forthcoming) discusses different theoretical traditions (including cognitive and sensemaking studies informed by the American pragmatist tradition, narrative-based identity work, and poststructural/critical theory) and invites consideration of how we might ‘advance our understanding of the productive possibilities (and impossibilities) of working between them?’ (Author *et al.*, forthcoming). With a specific focus on identity as narratively constructed, Smith and Sparkes (2008) extend a similar invitation to dialogue. They present a framework of different processes of identity construction, including psychosocial, storied resource, and performative, as a means of ‘viewing variety, similarities and differences’ (Smith and Sparkes, 2008: 6).

This paper takes up these authors’ invitations but focuses on the more specific theory of identity work and studies of ageing and/or retiring employing narrative analysis. The focus on the theory of identity work is prompted by my use of it in previous research projects and Brown’s (2015:34) conclusion that, as ‘the shared territory between fields’, it may act as a bridging concept for cross-disciplinary, or in this case cross-perspectives, research. The focus on narrative analysis fits well with my current research project on ageing because of broader sociological research’s recognition of narrative gerontology as a discipline in itself (Phoenix, Smith and Sparkes, 2010).

Phoenix *et al.* (2010: 2) discuss how narratives serve multiple purposes, for instance: in organizing and giving meaning to experiences; in constructing our lives and those of others; in performing a social action, for instance in providing counter-narratives to dominant ones (such as the narrative of decline). Accepting that a single research project might explore multiple purposes of narratives, Phoenix *et al.*’s (2010:2) view of narrative as a ‘psycho-social-cultural resource’ may align, respectively, with different emphases given by researchers working from within a particular perspective (sensemaking, storied resource, critical): for instance, with emphasis, from a critical perspective, on narrative as a culture (and normative) resource regulating identity.

In presenting a typology of methods of narrative analysis within studies of ageing, Phoenix *et al.* (2010) discuss how story analysts explore two narrative properties: the ‘whats’ and the ‘hows’. For instance, a researcher, conducting structural analysis to explore the ‘whats’, may focus attention on the overarching type of ‘storyline’ (Riessman, 2008) or the cultural repertoire an individual draws upon. Phoenix *et al.* (2010) suggest that explicit use of structural analysis has rarely been used in studies of ageing, which is surprising given that:

the formal aspects of structure ‘express’ the identities, moral dilemmas, perceptions, and values of the storyteller. ... [and] illuminate ... what wider socio-cultural narrative types individuals or groups are connected to, and draw on to shape their personal stories. In doing this, there is then the possibility of revealing the types of narratives that can constrain and/or empower people in relation to their aging process (Phoenix *et al.*, 2010: 5)

The ‘hows’ of a particular narrative are explored by conducting performative analysis, which considers how things are storied (Phoenix *et al.*, 2010). This ‘doing’ of

narrative (Riessman, 2008) questions, for instance, how the individual positions self in relation to others? how preferred identity claims are strategically made? (Riessman, 2008). Phoenix *et al.* (2010) suggest that performative analysis within ageing research has received little attention, which again is surprising given that it can draw attention to:

the performative, interactive work of accomplishing age, the emotional work associated with ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ an age and the strategies that people build and draw upon as they create and present themselves as being a particular age (Laz, 1998, cited by Phoenix *et al.*, 2010:6)

Accepting the ‘multitude of different ways in which researchers can engage with the narrative properties of their data’ (Elliott, 2005:37), it is expected that identity work researchers will undertake both structural and performative narrative analysis, although different emphases may be placed by those working from within a particular theoretical perspective. Such a proposition will be explored by a preliminary analysis of three empirical identity work journal articles.

## **Research Design and Methods**

The development of this paper has been an iterative process. Having started a new research project, I have conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with individuals, aged between 52 and 66, who are in the process of, or thinking about, leaving full-time employment. As I re-engaged with the literature as part of the iterative analysis of my data, I came across Vough *et al.*’s (2015) study which, taking a sensemaking perspective, conducts narrative analysis to identify six types of end-of-career narratives. Given my current curiosity about conversing across theoretical traditions informing identity, I considered engaging in conversation with Vough *et al.* from my perspective of (as I call it here) ‘storied resource’. Beyond a dialogue with one other tradition, my thoughts turned to exploring the possibilities of engaging simultaneously with three traditions. Therefore, as the focus for this paper developed, after selecting the first article opportunistically, I employed a purposive sampling strategy to select two others to represent different theoretical traditions, which I labelled ‘sensemaking’, ‘storied resource’ (following Smith and Sparkes, 2008) and ‘critical’. I searched for journal articles with the terms ‘older’ or ‘age’ or ‘retirement’, and ‘identity work’ and ‘narrative’ appearing in the Abstract. The two other articles selected (Tomlinson and Colgan, 2014, and Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009) fitted the criteria and, although unplanned, the selected works come from North America, the UK, and Australia.

I developed a framework for reviewing the articles based on how the authors: discussed processes of identity work (noting references they cited); expressed their project’s aims; analyzed their data; and stated their theoretical contributions. Although presented as a table, the boundaries across the theoretical traditions are “blurred and fuzzy” (Smith and Sparkes, 2008:7). Like Smith and Sparkes (2008), therefore, the framework is presented as a continuum, indicated by the bi-directional arrow above the three traditions.

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Insert Table 1 here

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Having selected the articles and developed the framework, I selected a sample from my current study on Exiting Elder. I decided to focus on seven transcripts (from a total of 14) because the participants were all in the same occupational role (academics and/or academic senior managers), and employed in the same institution. The interviews were conducted over the period August 2014 to July 2015, and six took advantage of a voluntary severance scheme, although one was not aware of the opportunity at the time of the interview and a second had applied but the outcome had not been confirmed. The participants (two female and five male, of between 55-66 years old) were in various academic roles including senior lecturer (x 3), principal lecturer/middle manager (x 1), Faculty senior manager and/or professor (x 2), University senior manager (x 1) and all had worked in the University for a minimum of ten years, although one had rejoined having worked for other universities in between. In striving to maintain anonymity, participant names have not been associated with academic roles. The interviews lasted between 40-65 minutes and generated between 6,190 and 9,140 words. The interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed.

I selected data extracts where participants discussed their, often-multiple, reasons for leaving. I read each extract three times. In the first reading, followed Vough et al.'s (2015) aim of understanding 'the subjective meanings people attach to the factors that trigger the retirement decisions' (p. 3) and, more specifically, to the 'the subjective perceptions of retirement factors – the extracted cues – that individuals use to understand what occurred ... and meanings they associate with those cues' (p. 4). I followed Vough et al.'s way of presenting the 'types' of end-of-career narratives. In the second reading, like Tomlinson and Colgan (2014), I had an interest in 'the negotiation of identity in relation to the passage of time' (p. 1660) and I explored how individuals made 'use of chronology in their narrative identity work – how they interweave the passing of time into their accounts' (p. 1672) of the reasons for their retiring and, where relevant, of the presentation of 'the self in the past, present and future' (p. 1675). My analysis differed slightly as I interpreted the use of grammatical tenses in the accounts to identify the extent to which, and how, the participants talked about the present, the past and the future. I also considered participants' use of time words (such as 'when', 'before', 'after', 'now', 'then', 'until', 'year', 'day', 'point', 'time') ([learnenglish.britishcouncil.org](http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org)) and used verbs (such as 'to be going to', 'like', 'plan', 'want', 'hope', and 'expect') and modals (such as 'may', 'might', and 'could') when talking about the future ([learnenglish.britishcouncil.org](http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org)) or change of state verbs (such as 'change', 'become') and directional adverbs (such as 'back', 'forward'). In the third reading, I deviated somewhat from Ainsworth and Hardy's (2009) project aim of seeing how two particular discourses – of age associated with physical decline, and 'psychotherapeutic discourses which individualize and psychologize social problems' – and focussed attention on 'micro and meso-level' discourse analysis (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000: 1133, citing Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In other words, my approach, and focus on 'the study of social text (talk ... in its social action contexts)' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000: 1126) can be interpreted as a less critical approach compared with Ainsworth and Hardy's interest, as I interpret it using Alvesson and Kärreman's distinction between discourse and Discourse, in 'the

determination of social reality through historically situated discursive moves' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000: 1126).

I wrote up the preliminary findings, and noted difficulties in engaging with each of the readings, before returning to the selected articles to compare and contrast findings and potential new insights from my study (Table 2).

### **End-of-career narrative types**

Vough et al. (2015) identified six types of career-end narratives, including: 1) following scripts, where the cue/trigger was reaching a predetermined age or duration of work tenure; 2) cashing out, where retirees were offered a package or left, optimizing their financial gain, during a process of organizational change; 3) identifying windows, where leaving was triggered by completion of a project; 4) being discarded, where leaving was triggered by organizational change, redundancy or offer of a package but, in contrast to 2 which was seen as an opportunity which the individual was choosing to take, the individual left because of no longer being wanted or valued in the organization; 5) becoming disillusioned, because of organizational change; and 6) having an epiphany in which major life events, including death/sickness in the family or personal health issues, caused the individual to place less importance on work. As Vough et al. (2015) found, individuals gave multiple reasons for leaving but each of the six types featured in the current study's participants' accounts. The most frequently occurring reason, given by five of the research participants related to 'becoming disillusioned' by a lack of alignment of University and personal views, vision, and values.

Four other end-of-career/retirement narratives featured in the participants' accounts. I have described these as: a) recognizing 'it's time'; b) realizing that the 'bad things' and the pressures exceeded the 'good things' and the benefits in doing the job; c) not having the energy, and d) giving up the 'fight'. Recognizing 'it's time' was triggered by an assessment of reaching a point in one's life or career but which differed from Vough et al.'s 'following scripts' narrative as the point did not seem to be predetermined. The narrative conveyed a strong sense of personal choice in leaving, as Stephen explained: "I think the time for exit was right. So it was my choice, I think, to leave. I wasn't pushed into leaving. It was my choice to leave."

I summarized the subjective meaning relating to b) as 'I reached a point where the bad things outweighed the good things', which was triggered by an assessment of the individual's current situation prompted by a review of recent work pressures, in the case of Patrick and Stephen, and a re-assessment of the importance of work benefits, such as salary, and status. The two other narratives, c) and d), are connected by a discourse of 'energy' but were triggered by different cues. 'Not having the energy' related generally to doing one's job (well) and was triggered by assessing one's capabilities and limitations. Capabilities were not necessarily presented as in decline. For instance, Bryn explained: 'And I think back on some of those things now and I wonder how I did it because I don't know how I'd do it now. And that's not because I haven't got the talent, I've still got that talent – cos I've done it once, I can do it again, in fact I could do it better now because of all that experience – but somehow I don't have the energy or the inclination or the excitement. Something's missing.' The 'giving up the 'fight'' narrative involved an assessment of personal energy and

contribution, but more specifically in the face of organizational politics or resistance to change, and conveyed a meaning of ‘I no longer had the energy for the ‘fighting’ or ‘battling’, as given respectively by Stephen and Fay.

### The narratives and time

By exploring ‘how individuals make use of chronology in their narrative identity work’ (p. 1672), Tomlinson and Colgan (2014) identified four distinctive themes: narratives of continuity, validation, change and agency, and illustrated how individuals drew on multiple narratives ‘as they sought to construct a coherent and convincing account’ (Tomlinson and Colgan, 2014: 1663-4).

In the ‘following scripts’ narrative participants tended to employ time words (such as ‘year’, ‘time’, ‘when’) and made references to specific ages or periods of working to indicate intentions to retire at a predetermined date. They also used verbs (such as ‘want’ and ‘going to’) to give an indication of the types of future activities they intended to do, instead of working, now that point had been reached. Lawrence’s use of the present perfect (‘I have had’) and reference to ‘the last few years’ indicates that his ‘script’ of retiring at a predetermined date has been enduring: ‘I’ve probably had this idea in my head that I was going to retire once I’d done 40 years for some time now. ... I think it’s the last few years, and maybe it’s because I’ve had this view in my own mind about what I wanted, when I was planning to retire ...’. In contrast, the ‘recognizing ‘it’s time’’ narratives seemed to convey a sense of having reached an unplanned point which felt ‘right’. For instance, Stephen states ‘I think the time for exit was right’ and Fay says ‘There was a time in my life when I just thought ‘That’s it. I’ve had enough’.

A strong storying feature in the ‘cashing out’ and ‘identifying windows’ narratives was the use of questions of/to, and definitive answers of no given by, the self. For instance, when talking about the opportunity of the voluntary severance, as part of the ‘cashing out’ narrative, Wilma asks herself “Do I really want to commit to a few years?” and responds “No, I don’t. I’m gonna, you know, do it now.” Use of the verb ‘want’ and ‘going to’ gives these two narrative types a future focus, which is expected as the participants are considering, or perhaps ‘experimenting with’ (e.g. Ibarra, 1999), potential future selves. For some the potential future selves are compared with past selves and discarded: ‘do I want to work with another [position]?, do I want to work with another set of colleagues? I’m always going to be comparing to how we did it before.’ (Bryn)

The one example of ‘being discarded’ employed the present and the past which I have interpreted as conveying the effects in the present of something that happened in the past ([learnenglish.britishcouncil.org](http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org)). ‘people such as myself ... aren’t as highly valued now as other individuals who focus on different aspects, such as research in particular, and that’s had a bit of a negative impact on me’ (Lawrence).

The structuring of the narrative of ‘realizing that the ‘bad things’ exceeded the ‘good things’ conveys the weighing up of disadvantages (in the present) compared with the advantages, in the future (in Stephen’s account), or in the past (in Fay’s account). Patrick’s account suggests a tipping point had been reached where ‘the pressures were now exceeding the benefits’.

The three accounts in the ‘becoming disillusioned’ narrative type begin with the use of the past tense, indicating past thoughts held a particular point or on an ongoing basis. This past context is then compared with the present and this narrative structuring has the effect of reinforcing the previously held thoughts. For instance Bryn’s account, illustrative of the ‘becoming disillusioned’ narrative, begins with ‘And I could tell that things were not going to change in the big organisation or local organisation and so, yeah, the doubts started to set in not long after that really’ and ends with the statement ‘There’s an institutional thing about the way, the direction of travel and the way it’s being managed, which I, I think, is going to get worse and I’m powerless to do anything about it.’ The linking of the past and the present also suggests that the participants are talking about the effects in the present of something that happened in the past.

The ‘not having the energy’, ‘giving up the ‘fight’’ and ‘having an epiphany’ narratives are constructed by comparing past selves with present selves, conveyed by time words (such as ‘now’, ‘when’) and modal verbs (such as ‘change’ and ‘become’) and adverbs (such as ‘back’), or comparing past circumstances with current ones which place more onus on the individual (see Thomas’ account). For instance, Fay says: ‘And then I just think, ‘You know what? Let somebody else do it.’ And I wouldn’t have thought that two years ago because I still thought I could make a difference. ... it’s time, I can’t carry on battling. I can’t be bothered’ (Fay). This indicates a change in self. The epiphany narrative suggests a more extreme change, as illustrated by Fay’s account where she uses the term ‘never’ indicating that at no time in the past had she held her current views. Maintenance of the radical change is conveyed by the adverb ‘still’, and which emphasizes that, in her case, her ‘mindset change’ is the case even up to the point of the interview.

When giving the reasons for their retiring as part of the storying of their lives (Sims, 2003), the participants talked about the present, in the context of the past and the future. Bryn’s account, categorized as a ‘recognizing it’s time’ narrative, illustrates this:

it just feels like the right thing to do and it feels absolutely the right time as well. ... And then that realisation that yeah, you’ve achieved a lot, you’ve reached a point where it feels right and to do anything else would be cheating the organisation and I desperately would not want to become one of these miserable, miserable, moaning, whinge old farts, for want of a better word. You know, I’ve seen those, I don’t want to become one of those. I really don’t. (Bryn)

### **The narratives and discourse**

Ainsworth and Hardy (2009:1206-7) undertook three stages of analysis, including focussing on how references to two particular discourses ‘functioned in accounts and explanations used to construct particular versions of reality and categories of identity’ and how individuals engaged in identity work through examining, particularly, ‘incidences of resistance, as well as responses to that resistance’. They showed how discourse ‘regulates identity work through three key mechanisms’ (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009: 1200-1).

*Still work in progress but key discourses seem to relate to: Enjoyment; the right thing/the right time - agency; certainty after questioning self - agency; value; calculating the personal (and, in Byn's case, organisational) benefit; disengagement from organisation's vision; energy; being bothered; mindset change*

## **Discussion**

Reading the accounts from the different perspectives seems to give richer interpretations. There is a close alignment between sensemaking and storied resource, and storied resource and critical, but less connect between sensemaking and critical. Reading for the chronology within the accounts helps to identify the nature of the identity work, e.g. continuing/maintaining, changing. However, focussing on time elements can cause the context and/or place/structure to be placed in the background. This seems to come to the fore through the critical reading.

Conducting narrative analysis by undertaking readings from each of the three perspectives on identity and narrative analysis has shown the potential for achieving 'cross-fertilization' (Author *et al*, forthcoming). However, time constraints and researcher familiarity and/or skills have limited analysis from the critical perspective and this reading and consideration of the potential theoretical and/or methodological contributions needs to be developed.

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**Table 1 Features of identity work research on ageing and/or retiring, employing narrative analysis, across three different theoretical traditions**<sup>1</sup>Smith and Sparkes (2008) (Secondary citations included in the table are not included in the paper's reference list)

Dimensions	Theoretical Tradition		
	<b>Sensemaking</b>	<b>Storied resource<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Critical</b>
<b>Illustrative Paper</b>	<b>Vough et al. (2015 )</b>	<b>Tomlinson and Colgan (2014)</b>	<b>Ainsworth and Hardy (2009)</b>
<b>Scholars work cited</b>	<b>Sensemaking</b> Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005 <b>Identity work</b> Snow and Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003 <b>Identity opportunity/threat</b> Jackson and Dutton, 1988; Petriglieri, 2011 <b>Narrative and narrative analysis</b> Linde, 1993	<b>Identity work</b> Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010 <b>Narrative and identity</b> Gabriel, Gray, & Goregaokar, 2010; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010 <b>Narrative</b> Cobley, 2001; Chase, 2008	<b>Identity work and regulation</b> Alvesson & Willmott, 2002 Musson & Duberley, 2007 Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000 <b>Narrative</b> Gergen, 1994
<b>Language used in discussing processes of identity work in studies of retiring/ageing</b>	‘As retiring represents a severing of both professional and organizational identities, managers, in particular, <b>may be prone to identity work</b> as they transition out of highly visible <b>positions in their organizations that have come to define them</b> (Stryker, 1987; Stryker and Serpe, 1982). (p.4)  Identity work is linked to narratives in that	‘narrative identity work; <b>how research participants applied narratives in their engagement with the tension between</b> optimistic <b>discourses</b> of enterprise and discourses of age as decline’(p.1656)  ‘The primary medium through which we engage with continuity and change in relation to the self is narration – showing or telling events in storied form (Cobley, 2001).	‘Despite <b>moments of resistance</b> in the identity work of older workers, these individuals were <b>subjected to ... regulatory effects</b> through three key processes’ (p.1199)  ‘Discourse thus provides the space within which individual actors engage in identity work – interpretive activity related to the reproduction and transformation of self-

	<p>through the act of storytelling, <b>individuals have the opportunity</b> to construct and reconstruct their identities (Gabriel, Gray, and Goregaokar, 2010; Sims, 2003). In sum, a sensemaking perspective points us toward understanding the narratives that individuals tell about the ending of their careers as personal constructions that serve identity needs (pp. 5-6)</p>	<p>Because ‘in telling the story of my life, I make sense of past events and create a person living in the present as a continuation of that story’ (Gabriel, Gray, &amp; Goregaokar, 2010, pp. 1692–3), self-narratives are understood as ‘both expressive of and constitutive of identity’ (Ibarra &amp; Barbulescu, 2010, p. 135). (p.1660)</p>	<p>identity – at the same time as it regulates it (Alvesson &amp; Willmott, 2002).... <b>some discourses are particularly ‘muscular’ and constraining in their effects on identity work</b> (Alvesson &amp; Kärreman, 2000), making resistance more difficult.’ (p.1201)</p>
<b>Language used regarding the project’s aims and identity in studies of retiring/ageing</b>	<p>‘the <b>subjective meanings</b> people attach to the factors that trigger the retirement decision’ (p. 3)</p> <p>‘the subjective meanings of events and <b>the identity needs that meanings serve</b>’ (p. 3)</p> <p>‘subjective meanings and identity considerations in the process of ending one’s career’ (p.1)</p> <p>‘the subjective perceptions of retirement factors - the extracted cues - that individuals use to understand what occurred ... and meanings they associate with those cues (p.4)</p>	<p>‘the study of age moving beyond the preoccupation with decline, exploring instead <b>the negotiation of identity in relation to the passage of time.</b>’ (p.1660)</p> <p>‘understanding age not as a set of characteristics, but as a process. This understanding invites further exploration of how individuals make use of chronology in their narrative identity work – how they interweave the passing of time into their accounts of the self in the past, present and future.’ (p.1672)</p>	<p>We examine how ... discourse serves to regulate – to set limits on – the identity work of individual older workers (p. 1200)</p> <p>the older unemployed worker appears to face two particularly muscular discourses in conducting identity work: age is associated with physical decline ...; while psychotherapeutic discourses tend to individualize and psychologize social problems .... We are interested in seeing whether and <b>how these two discourses regulate the older unemployed worker, and how their intersection impacts on individual identity work.</b> (p.1203)</p>
<b>Data collection and analysis methods (employed in studies on retirement/</b>	<p>1:1 semi-structured interviews with 48 retired ... Case-centred thematic narrative analysis, citing Reismann (2002)</p>	<p>1:1 semi structured interviews, focussed analysis of 36 interview</p> <p>attention to <i>form</i> – the ordering of events and experiences, and <i>content</i> – the events around which the story was constructed,</p>	<p>Naturally occurring texts (media releases, written submissions, transcripts of the public hearings (including transcripts of testimonies of older workers), final report) of an Australian public parliamentary inquiry.</p>

<b>ageing)</b>		<p>their location in time and space, the key actors involved and their part in events. We made understanding the purpose of these narratives the main focus of our analysis (Coffey &amp; Atkinson, 1996); applying aspects of the schema suggested by Beech and Sims (2007) – identifying the causal connections established between events; the attribution of agency, emotion and responsibility to self and other; the construction of separations and oppositions – in order to locate meaning within our participants' stories. (p.1661)</p>	<p>... an analysis of lexical register in these texts ... (Fowler, 1991) and a discourse-historical method ... (Wetherell &amp; Potter, 1992)' (p.1206)</p> <p>Examination of the testimony of 26 witnesses (who self-identified as older workers and who told 'life stories' to the Committee) 'for incidences of resistance, as well as responses to that resistance, by ascertaining the following: a) whether and how the narratives engaged with physical and psychotherapeutic discourses; b) the structure and form of the narratives told; c) the way in which Committee members interjected and asked questions in relation to these narratives; d) what happened to the narratives after they were told.' (pp. 1206-7)</p>
<b>Theoretical aim/contribution</b>	<p>'insight into <i>why</i> specific types of factors influence the ending of the career' (p.4)            'to shed light on the contextual limitations and constraints that individuals believe shaped how and when their careers ended' (p.4)  <b>'the degree of individual agency'</b> (p. 4)</p> <p>Identification of types of end-of-career narratives            Forms of identity work            Model of identity work</p>	<p>'the implications of contrasting narratives of a provisional identity for its subsequent enactment' (p.1656)</p> <p>'the role of age in identity construction, drawing on an understanding of age as a process rather than as an arbitrary and contested marker of difference'(p. 1656)</p>	<p>We show <b>how discourse regulates identity work through three key mechanisms</b> (p.1200-1)</p>

**Table 2: Reading narratives of retiring across three perspectives: sensemaking storied resource, and critical**

Data Extract	Vough et al (2015)	Tomlinson and Colgan (2014)	Ainsworth and Hardy (2009)
why I'm retiring as I am is that I've worked for 40 <b>years</b> and I've reached an age where I really <b>want</b> to spend more <b>time</b> , more <b>time</b> on doing things that I particularly <b>enjoy</b> doing. ... <b>when</b> I was in my sort of late forties, you know, I had an idea that I didn't really <b>want</b> to work much beyond 60. So I have had a sort of relatively fixed idea in my head that about 40 years was enough ... and 40 <b>years</b> to be in full-time employment ... 40 <b>years</b> in full-time employment, coupled with the sort of financial freedom that I've got, I think it's, I've probably had this idea in my head that I was <b>going to</b> retire once I'd done 40 <b>years</b> for some <b>time now</b> . ... I think it's the last few <b>years</b> , and maybe it's because I've had this view in my own mind about <b>what I wanted</b> , <b>when</b> I was <b>planning</b> to retire. I think this sort of, this age of 60 as well, that's, you know, it's a fairly significant milestone in terms of <b>birthdays</b> . (Lawrence)	'the <b>subjective meanings</b> people attach to the factors that trigger the retirement decision' (p. 3)	'how individuals make use of chronology in their narrative identity work – how they interweave the passing of time into their accounts of the self in the past, present and future.' (p.1672)	' <b>how ... discourse serves to regulate</b> – to set limits on – the identity work of individual' (p.1200) of pre-retirees

<p>I thought, “Wow, 27 <b>years</b> and four months, and you’re just <b>going to</b> walk away from it like that?” Yeah. Yeah. Because it’s, it just feels like <b>the right thing</b> to do and it feels absolutely <b>the right time</b> as well. ... And then that realisation that yeah, you’ve achieved a lot, you’ve reached a <b>point</b> where <b>it feels right</b> and to do anything else would be cheating the organisation and I desperately would not <b>want to become</b> one of these miserable, miserable, moaning, whingey old farts, for want of a better word. You know, I’ve seen those, I don’t <b>want to become</b> one of those. I really don’t. (Bryn)</p>	<p>a) <b>Recognizing it's time</b></p> <p>Cue/Trigger - Time in life/ career</p> <p>Meaning - I decided that the time was right to leave</p> <p>‘I’ve reached a point where it feels right’ – to arrive or come to a particular place (unlike following scripts, the date was not predetermined)</p>	<p>Employing ‘time’ words (year, time, when) and time verbs (want, going to, become)</p>	<p>The right thing/the right time - agency</p>
<p>I ... had to have the conversation with [NAME] and ... he wanted to know why. And I just said, “Well, the opportunity’s come up,” and I said, “It may not...” “Oh, but it might come up in a few <b>years’ time</b>.” And I’m thinking, “Do <b>I really want</b> to commit to a few <b>years</b>? ” You know, this possibility, the ifs, buts and maybes and I thought, “<b>No, I don’t.</b> I’m gonna, you know, do it <b>now</b>.” (Wilma)</p>	<p>2. <b>Cashing out</b></p> <p>Cue/Trigger – Offer of a package</p> <p>Organizational change</p> <p>Meaning - I had an opportunity that may not have arisen again to optimize my financial gain via retiring (Vough et al., 2015)</p>	<p>Use of questions of/to, and answers given by, the self</p>	<p>Certainty after questioning self - agency</p>
<p>I just thought, “<b>Do I really want</b> to start?” – again it’s this thing about the energy – “Do I really <b>want</b> to start with the [specialist area] side of the [upgraded] role?,” which is fine of course, but also with [new area of specialism], “Do I really <b>want</b> to start all that?” And I thought, “<b>No, I don’t.</b>” (Stephen)</p>	<p>3. <b>Identifying windows</b></p> <p>Cue/Trigger - Completion of a project</p> <p>As I looked forward, I saw that the time was right to end my career before another large project <i>and/or change of job</i> came up. (Vough et al., 2015)</p>	<p>Use of questions of/to, and answers given by, the self</p>	<p>Certainty after questioning self - agency</p>

	<b>4. Being discarded</b>  Cue/Trigger Layoff Organizational change Offer of package  Meaning – (I decided that the time was right to leave because) I was no longer wanted or valued in the organization (Vough et al., 2015)	The present and the past	Value
I have the perception within the [INSTITUTION] that people such as myself who make a fairly significant contribution to the [INSTITUTION] aren't as highly valued now as other individuals who focus on different aspects, such as research in particular, and that's had a bit of a negative impact on me. So I think it's a good time to leave in terms of, you know, getting out of full-time employment. (Lawrence)	<b>b) Realizing that the ‘bad things’ exceeded the ‘good things’ in doing the job</b>  Cue/Trigger – assessment of current situation Meaning - I reached a point where the bad things outweighed the good things	Employing ‘time’ words (year, time, when, point, now) and time verbs (want, going to, become)	Tipping point: calculating the benefit
But it also reached a point when the, shall we say the bad things and the pressures were now exceeding the benefits, the good things in doing the job (Patrick)	<b>5. Becoming disillusioned</b>  Cue/trigger Organizational change (or organizational vision)  Meaning - I no longer wanted to be associated with an organization that did not share my values (or sense of direction)	The past and the present	Disengaged from organisation’s vision  powerless

<p>So I can look <b>back</b> and I know what I've achieved and with the teams that I've worked with or led, I know what we've achieved and we've achieved great things. And I think <b>back</b> on some of those things <b>now</b> and I wonder how I did it because I don't know how I'd do it <b>now</b>. And that's not because I haven't got the talent, I've still got that talent – cos I've done it once, I can do it again, in fact I <b>could</b> do it better <b>now</b> because of all that experience – but somehow I <b>don't have the energy</b> or the inclination or the excitement. Something's missing. That, that kind of buzz that I had <b>when</b> we were doing those things ... <b>when</b> we were doing those things, early doors, it was really exciting. <b>Now</b> I don't, I don't share that excitement. (Bryn)</p>	<p><b>c) Not having the energy</b></p> <p>Cue/trigger- Assessing one's capabilities and limitations</p> <p>Meaning – I no longer had the energy to do job (well)</p>	<p>Comparing past and present selves and/or past and present circumstances through use of time words (now, when) and verbs (change, become) and adverbs (back)</p>	<p>Energy</p>
<p>And then I just think, 'You know what? Let somebody else do it.' And I wouldn't have thought that two <b>years</b> ago because I still thought I <b>could</b> make a difference. ... it's <b>time</b>, I can't carry on battling. <b>I can't be bothered</b> (Fay)</p>	<p><b>d) Giving up the 'fight'</b></p> <p>Cue/trigger - Assessments of personal energy and contribution in the face of organizational politics or resistance to change</p> <p><b>Meaning</b> - I no longer had the energy for the 'fighting' or 'battling'</p>	<p>Comparing past and present selves and/or past and present circumstances through use of time words (now, when) and verbs (change, become) and adverbs (back)</p>	<p>Being bothered</p>
<p>even <b>when</b> I had my [...] injury, <b>when</b> I was off work for six months, it didn't bother me, I was <b>going to</b> be okay. ... I <b>never</b> had any other view than I was <b>gonna be</b> okay. And the [illness] thing, was, like, shit! And that was horrible. And that still makes me very nervous. And I think that's a complete <b>mindset change</b>. (Fay)</p>	<p><b>6. Having an epiphany</b></p> <p>Cue/Trigger - Death/sickness in family</p> <p>Health issues</p> <p>Major life event</p> <p>Meaning - I no longer saw my work as having the same importance as it once did.</p>	<p>Comparing past and present selves and/or past and present circumstances through use of time words (now, when) and verbs (change, become) and adverbs (back)</p>	<p>Mindset change</p>

