'Retirement- ”daunting” or ”wonderful”: Older workers’ and retirees’ discursive representations of retirement perceptions and experiences.’

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This presentation forms part of a larger study into how people over 50 speak about being older in a workplace setting and their perceptions of retirement. Discourse analytic methods are used to investigate how age-identity construction is achieved by older people during conversational interaction and in narratives. In this presentation, I will focus on the discursive strategies used by people over 50 who are still working to represent their prospective expectations and concerns about retirement, and compare these accounts with retrospective experiences of retirement by people who have already retired. Aspects of age-identity construction are evidenced during these accounts, together with thematic representations of ‘busyness’, which is perceived to be a fundamental criterion of successful retirement.

Constructing an age-identity may be achieved by using self-attributed age-related labels (Nikander, 2002). Attributes that relate to ageing and retirement may also form part of an older person’s narrative of age-identity construction: extracts in this presentation will demonstrate how older workers speak about ageing and nearing retirement as connoting being ”past it” and ”being on a downhill slope”. Ekerdt’s (1986) notion of a ’busy ethic’, where keeping busy may be a defence against a progression into decline and senility, also appear to be perceived as fundamental for ’good’ retirement.

Data extracts were extrapolated from two focus group sessions conducted in large retail organisations: a supermarket and a home-improvement store; and from interviews with two retirees, one of whom had recently retired and the other had been retired for several years.

Keywords: ”age-identity”, ”busy-ethic”, ”retirement”. 